



Helping Your Child With Anxiety

Information pack
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What Is Anxiety?

Anxiety

NOUN - A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease about something with an uncertain outcome.

Anxiety is a feeling that children may experience which can cause worry or fear. This can be a combination of physical sensations, thoughts and feelings.

All children can feel worried, and this is a normal part of growing up. At certain points, such as starting a new school or staying somewhere new, children may become more worried, but will normally be able to calm down quite quickly with or without support.

Anxiety can become more of an issue when a child feels over-whelmed or distressed by their feelings and find their thoughts unmanageable. If this continues over a long period of time, they may begin to feel sad, depressed, exhausted or isolated, and this may affect their day-to-day routines.

If your child is struggling with anxiety, there are many actions you can take to help them which are listed throughout this document.

What Can Cause a Child to Become Anxious?

A child may feel anxious for several different reasons. If you notice that your child is becoming withdrawn or overly angry or fearful, this could be sign that they need help or support.

Here are some examples of some situation's that may cause a child to feel anxious:

-  **Struggling at school. This could be with particular subject/SATs exam, not having many friends or they may struggle with a peer group**
-  **Spending a lot of time with someone else who suffers with anxiety, such as a friend or parent/carer**
-  **Experiencing family stress/arguments, parents separating and/or worries about money and debt.**
-  **Experiencing lots of change such as moving to a new house or school/class**
-  **Having responsibilities that are beyond their age and development, such as caring for a family member (young carer)**
-  **Experiencing or witnessing a distressing or traumatic situation, such as grief, being bullied, abused or being involved in an accident**

How to Help Your Child When They Are Feeling Anxious

During the time your child is feeling anxious, they may feel frightened, agitated or worried. The first step is to help them calm down and feel safe. Here are some ideas on how to help.

Offer verbal and physical reassurance: Sitting close to your child may help them to feel calmer, you may want to give them a cuddle or hold their hand and reassure them that the feeling will pass.

Breathing: Try to breathe along with your child and encourage slow deep breathes from the diaphragm. Ask your child to place their hand on their belly and breathe to the point they can feel their breath under their hand. Slowly count to five, you may need to start with a count of two or three but try to increase if possible. This will help your child to relax and feel calmer.

A safe or happy place: Ask your child to think or imagine a place or person that makes them feel happy and safe. This may be at the park or at a grandparent's house. This will help them to distract from the anxious feeling, whilst they calm down.

Using the five senses together: Try to encourage your child to connect with what they see, touch, hear, smell and taste. This can help them to feel more present and reduce their anxiety. For example; scan the room, what can they see, what can they hear etc.

Encourage them do an activity they enjoy: Such as going for a walk, reading a favourite book, watching a funny film, listening to music, painting, drawing or colouring-in or something else they enjoy.

Supporting Videos:

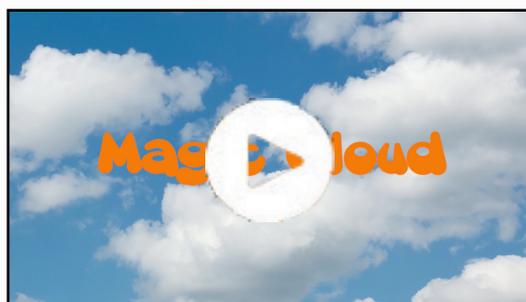
Suitable for children aged 3 -8: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCyiiHI2SjU>

Suitable for children aged 8 + https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfSbWc3O_5M

Suitable for older children and adults: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KYC5SsJjx8>

Suitable for adults: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6NTaljDJeU>

Here is a link to a 5-minute mindfulness video that can be used to help your child, this can be used at any point of the day and would benefit children before bed or when they are suffering from anxiety:



Magic Cloud video Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNebFdm6LU4>

Anxiety Symptoms

Anxiety can affect a child's body, thoughts and feelings. When feeling anxious children may also behave differently, using certain coping behaviours such over-eating, becoming aggressive or chewing their fingernails to try to avoid or manage the way they feel. Children may experience one or more of the following:

Physical symptoms:

Tummy butterflies that do not feel like excitement

Panic attacks, which can feel like a racing heart, breathing very quickly, sweating or shaking

Shallow or quick breathing or feeling unable to breath

Feeling sick and/or dry mouth

Sweating more than usual and or getting very hot and flustered

Tense muscles and/or shaky legs

Loose stools or needing to pass urine more than usual

Thoughts and Feelings:

Upsetting, scary or negative thoughts

Heightened senses to noise or smells

Worrying so much that it is difficult to concentrate and/or sleep

Out of control or overwhelmed

Feeling like something bad is going to happen, even thoughts about death or someone dying.

Worrying about an event or future situations that have not happened yet.

Feeling nervous, on edge, panicky or frightened

Coping behaviours:

Withdrawing or isolating themselves – for example, not wanting to go to school, be in social or group situations, be away from parents/carers or try new things

Eating more or less than usual

Repeating certain behaviours or actions (OCD - often called 'obsessive compulsive behaviours')

Self-harming

Every child is different

What works for one child may be different for another, therefore you may need to try different approaches to help in the best way.

When the anxiety has passed it may be of benefit to discuss how your child thinks you can help them if it happens again. Depending on your child's age, you may be able to discuss what thoughts, feelings or actions happened before the anxiety began.

It is important to react and help a child when they are struggling with the feeling of anxiety, but it is also helpful to try and explore strategies to prevent or reduce the impact of anxiety in the future.

Here are 5 top tips to help your child:

1 Try to encourage your child to verbalise how the anxiety/worry makes them feel. It may make them feel sick, or shaky for example. If they can identify with these signs, they will hopefully recognise the signs if it happens again and ask for help. It can be easy to dismiss their worries as silly, but these worries may feel very real for them.

2 Ask them if they can name anything that may make them feel anxious, for example, a relationship with a friend or family member or something at school. Please note, they may not be aware of the trigger. If a child tells you something, they are worrying about which is out of their control, try to work with them to remind them whose job it is to worry about this problem, such as it is the parent/carers job to worry about paying bills.

3 Create a worry box or identify a worry time. If your child spends a lot of their day worrying, try to encourage them to write their worries down and place them in a worry box you can visit these during an allocated time in the day such as before school or after teatime. If they are too young to write or draw this can be through conversation.

4 Have activities to hand which can be used when or if your child feels anxious again. This could be a book, a game, a fidget toy, a list of positive quotes for example.

5 Try activities such as mindfulness or yoga. You can use this example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNebFdm6LU4> or download an app like Headspace on the App store or Google Play.

Other tips to reduce anxiety:

- **Cut out excessive sugar or caffeine from your child's diet**
- **Encourage more exercise to increase feel good endorphins**
- **Spend quality time together**

IMPORTANT NOTE!

If these self-help strategies are not helping your child, please seek professional help. The first step to receiving professional help is to contact your GP. Speaking to your GP is usually the first step to accessing mental health services.

You can speak to your GP with or without your child. Together you can discuss whether a referral to CAMHS, an assessment by a mental health specialist or referral for another kind of support is needed.