



ANXIETY

ANXIETY GUIDE FOR PARENTS

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK 2023

15-22 May 2023

1. Introduction

Welcome to an 'Anxiety Guide for Parents'.

Within this guide, we explore an introduction to what anxiety is, along with some of the signs and symptoms of anxiety. We also look at some of the things that a parent can do to try and help their child who may be experiencing signs of anxiety. In addition, the importance of parental self-care and looking after ourselves as parents is also explored within this guide along with some other useful resources.

The NHS defines Anxiety as a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, which can be mild or severe. It can be normal to experience feelings of anxiety when responding to a stressful or threatening situation such as an exam, interview or medical appointment. Anxiety also can sometimes motivate us to stay alert, be aware of risks and help with problem solving. However, when anxiety is resulting in people having the inability to live their lives, then this can be problematic and negatively impact on our mental health.

Just like adults, children and young people feel worried and anxious at times. Children can often feel anxious about different things at different stages of their lives. For example, some children may be afraid of the dark or starting a new school. Many of these worries are a normal part of growing up. However, if your child's anxiety is starting to affect their wellbeing, they may need some help.



2. Signs & Symptoms of Anxiety in children

When young children feel anxious, they cannot always understand or express what they are feeling. You may notice that they display some of the following signs and symptoms:

Emotional:

- Irritable, tearful or clingy
- Nightmares
- Increased sensitivity
- Fear of making mistakes
- A lot of negative thoughts, or keep thinking that bad things are going to happen
- Difficulty with concentrating

Physical:

- Difficulties with sleep
- Wetting the bed
- Changes in eating patterns
- Restless
- Headaches/stomach-aches

Social:

- Avoiding everyday activities, such as seeing friends, going out in public or going to school
- Lack confidence to try new things or seem unable to face simple, everyday challenges
- Angry outbursts
- Seeking approval

*It is important to remember, these signs and symptoms of anxiety are just examples. Every child is different. If you notice a change from your child's baseline behaviour and this change is a cause for concern, please contact a health professional for advice and guidance, such as your GP.



3. What to do if Your Child is Experiencing Anxiety

If your child has expressed that they are feeling anxious or worried, or they are displaying some signs and symptoms of anxiety, there are some steps you can take at home to help and support them.

IN AN ANXIOUS MOMENT

If your child is experiencing an anxious moment, there are some techniques you can try to help your child find their calm.

1) The Five Senses Grounding Technique

Work together with and encourage your child to identify and talk about 5 things they can see, 4 things they can touch or feel, 3 things they can hear, 2 things they can smell and 1 thing they can taste. Encouraging this connection with their senses can help to keep your child grounded and serves as a distraction from their anxious moment.

2) Encourage deep, calming breaths

This is something you can practice with your child. A good starting point is to breathe in for 3 seconds, and then breathe out for 3 seconds. This time can be adjusted depending on what suits your child best. Deep breaths can help calm the nervous system and lower the heart rate.

3) Remain Calm

It is important to remain calm when your child is experiencing anxiety. Providing a calming presence to your child can encourage them to reflect and mirror your behaviour.

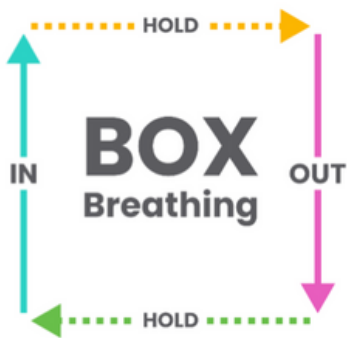
4) Lastly, remind your child that this feeling will pass

Anxiety can be incredibly scary and overwhelming for your child. Simply reassuring them that these feelings will pass and they won't feel this way forever can be helpful.



Breathing Techniques

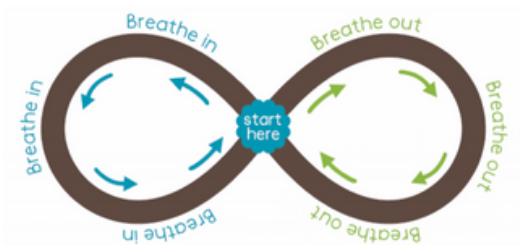
Teaching your child breathing techniques can be a great way to help calm their mind and body during an anxious moment. Some examples of these techniques can be seen below.



- 4 Close your mouth, inhale through your nose to a mental count of FOUR.
- 7 Hold your breath for a count of SEVEN.
- 8 Exhale completely through your mouth to a count of EIGHT.



AFTER AN ANXIOUS MOMENT



Even just discussing your child's anxieties, can be difficult to navigate. The following tips can be helpful when it comes to exploring your child's anxiety.

1) Talk

This first tip sounds obvious, but it is so important to talk with your child in a safe, comfortable environment about their anxieties. Some topics to discuss could be;

- o How long your child has been feeling like this
- o How often they feel anxious
- o How exactly does it make the feel (is it affecting them physically?)
- o Is there anyone else they feel comfortable talking to about their worries (this may help identify additional support such as friends or teachers)

2) Try to identify triggers

It can be really useful to identify what exactly is causing your child's anxiety. Some triggers may be avoidable, but this isn't always the case. Either way, knowing your child's triggers can help you manage their anxiety in the future.

3) Validate feelings

It is important to remember that your child's fears, worries and anxieties are real to them. It is important that you validate their feelings and experiences, so they feel listened to and understood. Phrases such as "I can see this is really hard for you" communicate to your child that you are listening and empathising with them.

4) Create a Tool Kit

Coping toolkits use the senses to reduce anxiety and promote positive emotions. Use a box to hold items your child selects for their toolkit, and involve your child in selecting what they want to add to their toolkit. You may want to add a kaleidoscope, photos of family, a rainstick, a reminder to listen to their favourite song, fidget toys, stress ball, scratch and sniff stickers, a journal, a colouring book or puzzles. Anything that your child loves that can help them to feel calm in a moment of anxiety. Practice using this toolkit with your child so they know they can access it when they are feeling anxious.



What to Avoid

When supporting your child with their anxiety, there are some things you may want to avoid doing.

1) Appearing anxious yourself/Reinforcing their anxiety

Although it may be difficult at times to avoid this, appearing overly anxious or worried when interacting with your child in an anxious moment may only reinforce their anxiety. Seeing their parent anxious may make them feel that they should be anxious or worried, rather than alleviating their symptoms.

2) Belittling or minimizing their feelings

It can be easy to brush off or minimize your child's worries or anxieties, but this can leave them feeling unsupported and belittled. Phrases to avoid may include "don't worry" or "there's nothing to be afraid of". Instead, validate their feelings to help them move past their anxiety.

3) Avoiding your child's worries altogether

Encourage your child to face their fears and anxieties if it's possible. It's important not to avoid things because they make your child anxious. Instead, empower them to be able to face what it is that's worrying them.

4) Setting unrealistic goals and expectations

Not all anxieties or worries your child may have will be unreasonable or irrational. For example, being worried about doing well in a big school test or joining a new club can be completely understandable. So, it's important to avoid setting unrealistic goals with your child e.g. "you'll get full marks in your test". Instead, reinforce the idea that even if their worries come true, they can manage it and move through it.



1. What is self-care?

Self-care means taking time to do things that help you live well and improve your physical and mental wellbeing. When it comes to your mental health, self-care can help you manage stress, lower risk of illness and increase your energy.

(National institute of health)

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines self care as the ability of individuals, families and communities to promote health, prevent disease, cope with an illness or disability with or without a health care worker.

Why is self-care important?

Engaging in a self-care routine has been clinically proven to reduce or eliminate anxiety and depression, reduce stress, improve concentration, minimise frustration and anger, increase happiness, improve energy and boost self esteem.

“the first step towards change is awareness, the second step is acceptance.”

(Nathaniel Brandon)

To enable self-care we need to:

- Become informed
- Ask for help
- Accept help
- Know your role and limits
- Look after your mental health and wellbeing



Examples of self-care:

- Breathing techniques
- Challenging thoughts
- Behaviour changes
- Soaking in a hot bath
- Watching a movie, listening to music or reading a book
- Going for dinner with family or friends
- Spending quality time with loved ones
- Yoga, relaxation, mindfulness, positive affirmations and practicing gratitude
- Having a routine
- Balanced diet, decrease caffeine
- Healthy sleep hygiene
- Having small goals
- Exercise
- Connecting with people

5 steps to Wellbeing:

1. Connect with people: visit a friend or family member, become a volunteer
2. Be active: go for a nice walk
3. Learn new skills: learn to cook a new dish
4. Give to others: say thank you, show gratitude
5. Pay attention to the moment: mindfulness



Who are your coping resources?

- Family/friends
- Colleagues
- Professionals
- Neighbours
- Sports clubs
- Church groups

Support organisations:

- Action Mental Health
- Action for Children
- Mens Action Network
- Childline
- Lifeline
- Womans Aid
- Parenting NI
- Samaritans
- Nexus
- Zest
- Addiction NI

Self care is a priority not a luxury!!!



1. ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

There is plenty of support available for you and your child dealing with anxiety.

Anxiety UK

A UK based charity with over 50 years experience of providing much needed support and resources to those experiencing anxiety. Anxiety UK have a great range of resources, books and free downloads, all aimed at helping you to support your child.

Link: <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/resources/>

GP

If you feel your child's anxiety is starting to impact their everyday life, is severe and/or persisting, it may be a good idea to have a visit with their GP.

Link: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/anxiety-in-children/>

Young Minds

Young Minds are another great charity advocating for the mental health of children and young people in the UK. Their website has a great section aimed at parents, with guides on how to talk to and support your child and their mental health. They also have a parental helpline.

Young Minds Parent Helpline is available on 0808 802 5544, Monday - Friday 9:30am - 4:00pm.

Link: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/>

CAMHS Resources

The following is useful website that has pooled together a variety of different resources including books, websites, apps and downloads, all aimed at children and parents and helping them deal with mental health struggles.

Link: <https://www.camhs-resources.co.uk/>



6. Resources

www.getselfhelp.co.uk

www.moodjuice.co.uk

www.mind.org.uk

www.rcpsych.au.uk

www.nhs.uk/anxiety

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resorces/anxiety

www.selfcareforum.org

www.who.org

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/anxiety>

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/anxiety#symptoms>

<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/anxiety-disorders-in-children/>

Overcoming anxiety, stress and panic: a 5 areas approach (Chris Williams, 2009)

