

Learning Space

Some tips

What can parents do to help their children?

There are lots of ways parents and carers can help their children with anxiety.

Techniques for when the child is anxious:

Help them to recognise anxious feelings so they can tell when they are becoming anxious and can ask for help.

Tell the child it will be ok, and that the anxiety will pass. It can be helpful to describe the anxiety as a wave and help them to 'ride' or 'surf' the wave and see how it gets smaller after it peaks.

Get the child to breathe deeply and slowly, in through their nose for three counts and out through their mouth for three counts.

Distract them by focusing on something else

Give them a cuddle or hold their hand if they will let you, as touch can be soothing.

It can help to talk to the child or young person about finding a 'safe place' in their mind i.e. somewhere that they feel relaxed and happy. It may be a grandparent or friend's house or a holiday beside the sea etc. which they can picture when the wrong thoughts come into their head or they are feeling anxious.

Sometimes holding a memento like a seashell or pebble can help.

If the child or young person is feeling the need to check things or repeat certain actions, counting up to 10 before doing the checking action can be helpful too it delays the reward.

Longer term suggestions for managing anxiety

Talk to the child about their worries but don't leave it there - help them to find solutions

Encourage the child to notice what things make them anxious. Talking it through can help but the child can also keep a diary or a 'worry book' if they are old enough to do this. Again help them to find strategies to cope and tolerate.

Use a 'worry box' where the child can write the worry down and post it into a tissue box so it is contained. (Some children will enjoy decorating the box, too). They can post their worries every day if it helps, or leave the worries in there and take them out after a week to see if they were worth worrying about (if not they can be torn up).

Alternatively, designate a specific 'Worry time' for around 10 or 20 minutes in the evening (but not when the child is in bed), so worries can be saved up for that time. This will give the message that the worries are not dangerous and can be contained.

You can try to help your child put their worries into perspective by re-labelling them according to who needs to worry about them. For example worries about finances might be re-labelled as the parents' business.

Help the child to measure how anxious they are on a scale of 1-10 and notice this at different times, to see how it gets better or worse

Notice what things help them relax or feel better and work with your child to find strategies when they are anxious, they will often know best what works for them.

Show them how to think positively. Name their 'worst case scenarios' and think with them how to sort out the situation if it happens - 'I'm worried that we'll miss the bus' 'What do you think we could do if that happens?' 'We could get the next bus'

General tips to help keep calm

Encourage them to do some regular exercise, as it can reduce the levels of stress hormones

Learn relaxation techniques

Encourage good sleeping habits – calm bedtime routines, and not too much screen or computer time in the evening

Try and help your child to have a healthy diet and not eat too much sugar or additives or drink caffeinated drinks

Encourage them to do some art, writing or listen to music regularly

