

Managing Your Child's Anxieties

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is when you feel worried, nervous or uneasy about something where you are not sure of the outcome. Everyone, including children, can feel anxiety at any time about anything. However, anxieties can increase when things happen which are different and out of the ordinary, like the situation we are all in at present. When we are feeling anxious about one thing, e.g. COVID 19, then it can also trigger worries about lots of other things as well.



How do I know my child is struggling with anxiety?

You may notice that they:

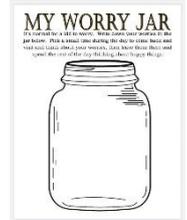
- Become irritable, tearful or clingy
- Have difficulty sleeping
- Start waking up in the night
- Start wetting the bed
- Have bad dreams
- Lack the confidence to try new things
- Find it hard to concentrate on things
- Change eating habits (not eating or over eating)
- Have angry outbursts
- Keep thinking bad things will happen.

What can I do to support my child?

1. Tell your child that they are feeling anxious (feeling worried). It is important to remember that a lot of children don't know what they are feeling when they are anxious, and it can be frightening and overwhelming to have the sensations/feelings inside them and not know what they are. You will probably have to do this regularly until they are able to identify how they are feeling and can tell you. The more you name the feeling for them, the quicker they will be able to identify it for themselves. Every time you recognise they are getting anxious, you just need to say; 'I can see you are not hungry, I think you are feeling anxious', 'I can see you're feeling sick, but I am wondering if you are feeling worried'.
2. Help your child recognise the sensations they get inside them when they are anxious so they learn to identify being anxious and can ask for help.
Activity: Draw round the child on a large piece of paper or draw an outline of a body. Mark on the outline, what and where they feel the sensations in their body when they are anxious, e.g. sick in the stomach, tight chest, dizzy and hot in the head.
3. Tell your child that everyone gets anxious, it is normal and it will pass. Give them lots of reassurance.
4. Give your child opportunities to talk about their anxieties or worries.



Activity: Draw a jar. Inside the jar get your child to draw or write all their worries. Each worry can then be discussed.



5. Explain to your child that it is good to talk about their worries and not keep them inside. It



is important also to not let the anxieties take over either. Activity: Make a 'Worry Box'. Your child can then write down each worry and post it into the box.

Then at specific times, e.g. the end of the day (but not before bed) or at specific times during the week, have 'worry time', to go through each worry and see if it is still a worry, if not it can be torn up, and for others strategies for coping with them can be discussed. A diary or worry book could be another option.

6. Once anxieties/worries have been acknowledged and discussed, it might then be a good idea to put a distraction in place. E.g. playing a game together, making lunch together, going into the garden and identifying all the things they can see, hear and smell.
7. It is important that your child has a routine and that this is stuck to, even if it is tempting to change it. A change in routine can cause anxieties to rise.
8. Give your child as much warning as possible to any changes that might be happening.
9. Keep expectations and boundaries consistent.
10. Spend time with your child completing an activity where you are both engaged e.g. playing a board game, making lunch together, singing a song, cooking tea, colouring, telling jokes, building something out of lego. This list is endless. This then lets your child know that you are there for them and they are not alone, giving them a sense of safety. This is because completing activities together releases feel good chemicals that make your child feel calm, steady and connected.
11. Give your child lots of physical comfort e.g. cuddle, hug, pat on the shoulder. Let them know you are there for them.
12. It may be easier said than done, but try to react calmly and not become over protective. Your stability will help your child and their anxiety.

Are there other activities I can do with my child?

1. Our worries can build up so it is important that children can identify what are worries for them and worries that they can do things about.
Activity: When discussing your child's worries with them sort them into 'Worries that Might Happen' and 'Worries that will probably never happen'. Then sort the remaining worries into 'Worries for Them' and 'Worries that are for someone else'.
2. Explain to your child, that the best thing to do to worries, after you have talked about them, is not give them too much attention.
Activity: Get your child to draw pictures or write of all the things you could be doing rather than thinking about their worries.
3. When your child is feeling anxious or worried get them to think of a safe place in their mind, somewhere they feel relaxed and happy.
Activity: Your child could draw their safe place, e.g. grandparents house, somewhere in their house, favourite place they went on holiday
4. When your child is feeling really anxious get them to breathe deeply and slowly, in through their nose for three counts and out through their mouth for three counts.
5. Work on positive-thinking. Name their worst-case scenarios and think through together how to sort out the situation if it happens, e.g. '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'.

