

Young Children with Anxiety

A guide of resources and tips for people looking after a young child who worries.

Many children experience anxiety, and it is becoming more and more common in younger children.

A good way to help your child understand how they are feeling is by using **reflective questioning**.

For example, if they are struggling with something i.e. a lesson at school, ask them “What went well in maths today?” as opposed to reflecting their less helpful view back to them. Other examples include

“What did you enjoy about your school trip?”

“What did you do well today?”

“What made you happy today?”

“How have you helped someone recently?”

“What makes you proud of yourself?”

This can help your child to think more positively about their experiences, and think more positively in the future.

A very practical idea is to create a **worry box**.

This is a box (like an old tissue box) which your child decorates, and is a specific box for worries. When your child feels worried about something, they write it down and put it in the worry box.

At a designated time each day or week, sit down together and go through all the worries in the worry box. If you can talk it through together and your child feels better about the worry, you can throw it away. If it is still worrying them, put it back in the box and keep talking about it next time you go through the worry box.

Keeping the worries in the box can often help children to forget about them for a while, as they are safe and in the box.

A strategy to help anyone with anxiety is **mindfulness (this is for the older Primary child)**.

The mindfulness app spends 10 minutes helping calm your child down and getting them ready to sleep, which can be very helpful if they are kept awake by their worries.

Researched benefits of mindfulness include:

Significant improvement in emotional and social functioning

Effective method of stress reduction

Significant long-term improvement in anxiety levels amongst patients suffering from anxiety disorders

Reduced levels of depression and anxiety after eight week mindfulness programme

Colouring books can also be used alongside other mindfulness techniques to promote calm and relaxing activity to reduce immediate stress.

Imagery techniques

Imagery is considered to be more effective when we are feeling relaxed, so when using these imagery techniques for self-help, start by:

- **getting comfortable**
- **in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed**
- **focus on your breathing for a few in and out breaths**
- **close your eyes. Think of your favorite place**
- **Become aware of any tension in your body**
- **let that tension go with each out-breath**

All visualisations can be strengthened by ensuring you engage all your senses in building the picture in your mind's eye - it is more than just "seeing"!

- **open your eyes**
- **sit up**
- **look around and notice what you see in the place where you are right now**

At bedtime

When you are putting your child to bed get into a habit of thinking of 3 good things that have

happened that day to combat the negative thinking or 3 things to be thankful for.

Chunk It Up



Try chunking up problems to make them more manageable (small steps to achieve a bigger goal.) This can work well with a phobia. With each step give the child a small reward and don't rush from one step to another until child happy and confident.

For example, for a spider phobia

Step 1 look at book with spider on it

Step 2 Look at u tube clip of spider

Step 3 Go to someones house who owns a spider

Step 4 Go to room where spider is in glass case

Step 4 Let friend pick up spider

Step 5 Pick up spider yourself

If your child has a lot of general worries then it can be a good idea to try to **limit their access** to potentially distressing things. For example, if a news story on the radio or TV is discussing a plane crash, terrorist event, child abduction, or anything that might be inappropriate for your child to see/hear or cause them to worry, then turn it off. Control what sites they can access on the internet, especially websites of a sexual nature as there is a lot of content out there. The NSPCC has a lot of information about online safety which can be found here:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/keeping-children-safe/online-safety/>

Talk to family members, especially older siblings, about what they shouldn't say to the child that

worries. Things can improve when the whole family works together to support the child.

Quick tips for parents:

Avoid talking about '**adult worries**' (money, arguments, work stress etc.) around your child as they might take on the worries themselves.

You can call the **FamilyLives** helpline 0808 800 2222 for advice about any concerns you have, or access their website <http://www.familylives.org.uk> for parenting advice.

Another good resource is the CAMHs website which has a section for parents. Call the Young Minds Parents' Helpline free on **0808 802 5544** (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm) or look up www.youngminds.org.uk/Transitions

If you are extremely concerned about your child, or if it is greatly affecting them take your concerns to the **school nurse** or the **GP** as they might feel it is appropriate to refer your child to a service to help them.

