

# Tips To Help Your Anxious Child

Anxiety is a normal part of life for adults and children. Anxiety can be productive when it serves as a protective mechanism. However, times when we feel anxious when no protective measure is needed can feel scary and confusing. Although eliminating anxiety is an unrealistic goal, we can help teach our children tools to manage it. Here are some tips:



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## 1 Validate and Problem Solve

To help ease children's worries, we may feel helpful by saying, "You're fine" or "It's nothing to worry about." However, this can make children feel like you do not hear or understand them. Consider saying, "You sound worried. What is making you feel that way?" Then, help them work through these feelings. After listening thoughtfully, ask questions to challenge their negative or fearful thoughts. You can ask how likely it is for a scary situation to happen and help them problem solve. Brainstorm ways to handle the situation. Help them break down a big situation/goal into smaller more manageable parts/goals. If they get stuck on

the "what ifs" challenge them by asking them what the reality is. Help them stop future-planning and future-worrying and have them practice mindfulness and being present. Help children grasp an understanding of what can and what cannot be controlled.

## 2 Allow Worry

Allowing children the time and space to worry, within reasonable limits, can be healing. You can set a timer and give children a certain amount of time to stay in their worried thoughts. They can talk about it for the entirety of the time set. Once the alarm goes off, have them begin to utilize the strategies to work through it and move on. You can create a Worry Jar and have children



write or draw about their worries. They can get their feelings out on paper and have a safe place to put them. Once the worry is put in the jar, encourage the children to move on from that worry for the day.

## 3 Face Fears

Our protective instincts may cause a desire to rescue our children. However, avoidance reinforces anxiety and leads to greater anxiety and even more avoidance. The more we face our fears, the better able we become to cope with them. Furthermore, each time they face a fear gives you something to reference the next time they have to face a fear and remind them that they made it through. "I know that you feel a little nervous about giving a presentation tomorrow. Remember that time you had the piano recital in front of a large group? You felt nervous then, too, but you got through it!"

## 4 Offer Strategies

Teach children deep belly breathing. Have children imagine themselves in a relaxing and safe space and have them pay attention to those calm feelings. Teach them to alternately tense and relax muscles. Support children in combating scary

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## 5 Role Model

or negative thoughts with more helpful and productive thoughts.

Be mindful about how you demonstrate your anxiety. Your children are looking to you to know how they should react to situations. Children may pick up on your anxiety and it may resonate with them. When you feel anxious, name and practice strategies you are utilizing to teach your children to do the same. Practice positive self-talk aloud, take deep breaths, or tense and relax your muscles.

While anxiety can serve the function of protecting us against danger, anxiety can be triggered when we falsely believe we are in danger. Our brain can be set off by false alarms coming from the misperception of danger, but utilizing the strategies above can help children combat anxiety when it is not useful and can be detrimental.

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