

# Helping your child with anxiety

A supportive guide for parents of  
anxious children under 13

By Ella Jones



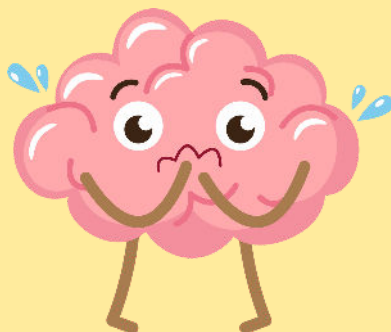
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# Understanding anxiety in children

Anxiety is a normal emotion that we all feel once in a while, even children. But for some children, it can show up more often or more intensively than 'normal'.

It can also look very different in children than it does in adults

This guide is designed to help you support your child with anxiety and recognise when they may need additional help



# Signs your child might be feeling anxious

Children can feel anxious for lots of different reasons, some we can see and some we cannot. These signs could indicate that your child may be anxious:

- Frequent tummy ache or headache without a medical cause
- Struggling to fall or stay asleep
- Avoiding situations or places (e.g school, parties, events)
- Constantly asking for reassurance
- Overthinking or negative thoughts
- Low self-esteem
- Eating problems (too much or too little)
- Clinginess
- Restlessness (being unable to sit still or relax)

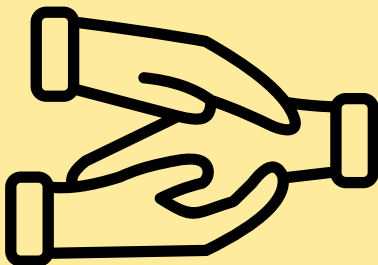


# Reassuring without dismissing them

It's natural that you want to 'fix it' and take their pain away - but sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is to listen, validate and stay calm.

Instead of saying things like "There's nothing to worry about" try these instead:

- "That sounds scary, do you want to tell me more about it"
- "I can see this feels big for you"
- "I am here, and we will figure it out together"



# Feelings come and feelings go...

Try to avoid rushing to solve the problem. The goal is to teach them that feelings come and go and they are safe to feel them, not making the feelings disappear immediately

You are the calm to their storm right now and you remaining calm and having a steady presence when they are struggling teaches them that the big feelings are survivable



# A different mindset

When your child is anxious, it's easy to feel helpless, frustrated, and worried yourself, but your mindset about anxiety (the way you think about it) will have a huge impact on how you respond and how your child will learn to cope.

- Try shifting your mindset and think 'my child isn't giving me a hard time, they are having a hard time'
- Keeping calm - if you panic, your child will likely feel more scared
- Don't get caught up in blame - try to stay curious. Ask yourself, what does my child need from me right now?

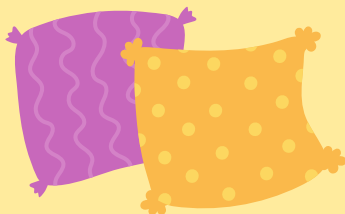
By changing your mindset, it will help you respond to them with empathy, even on those really tough days

# A calm and safe environment

Children with anxiety need both emotional safety and predictability. You cannot control everything, but you can create a home environment that helps reduce some anxiety provoking triggers

## **Some simple ways to build a safe home environment:**

- Keeping routines as consistent as possible
- Offering gentle warnings before transitions or changes (e.g “one last book, then it’s bedtime”)
- Try to get some one-to-one time every day, even if it’s just 10 minutes
- Keeping a calm voice, even when your child is having a hard time with big feelings
- Create a ‘calm corner’ that includes fidget toys, cushions, books (or anything that helps them stay calm)



# Practical tools to support them

Children often benefit from simple, consistent tools they can learn and use when their anxiety shows up. Here are some useful tools that can help

## **Breathing exercises:**

- Bubble breathing - pretend to blow bubbles, slow breath in, slow breath out
- Smell the flower - pretend to smell flowers - big breath in, slow breath out
- Blow out the candle - a fun way to practice calm breathing

## **Creative expressions:**

- Draw their worries or what their 'worry monster' looks like
- Make a worry box or jar they can put their 'worries' in
- Use puppets or teddies to help the, talk about it indirectly.





# The right way to communicate

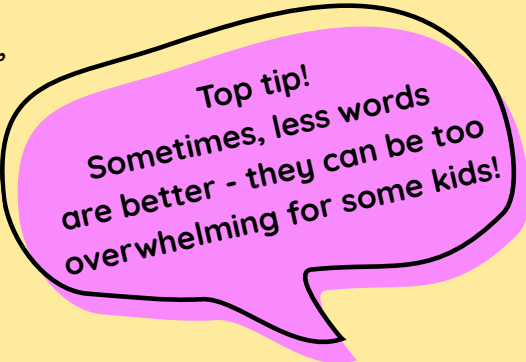
Words matter. Especially when your child feels dysregulated. It's not about having the perfect answers but your tone, body language and patience can go a long way. Keep the focus on being with them

## Some helpful things to say:

- "I am here, you are not alone"
- "We can handle this together"
- "Even if you feel scared, you are safe right now"
- "Let's name this feeling together, what does it feel like in your body"

## Try to avoid saying these:

- "Stop being silly"
- "There is nothing to be scared of"
- "You're fine"
- "You're overreacting"



**Top tip!**  
Sometimes, less words  
are better - they can be too  
overwhelming for some kids!

# Modelling emotional regulation

Children are learning how to deal with these big, scary feelings, and they do this by watching the adults around them. When you model healthy and calm ways to manage your stress, you are teaching your child to regulate their emotions

## **You feel stressed:**

“I am feeling overwhelmed right now, so I am going to take some deep breaths before I speak”  
-This shows that it is okay to pause and reset

## **You feel anxious:**

“I’m feeling nervous, I’m going to take a walk outside to help calm my body”  
-This normalises healthy coping tools

## **Why is this important?**

- Children mirror what they see - you yell, they will learn to yell.
- You are building on their emotional awareness and trust that feelings can be felt without being feared

# When to seek extra support

Anxiety becomes a bigger concern when it starts to impact and interfere with your child's daily life like their sleep, eating habits, friendships, learning or emotional well-being

You might consider speaking to a professional if your child:

- Avoids school or social activities regularly
- They experience sleep problems regularly
- They create negative eating habits because of their worry (e.g over eating due to worry)
- Their anxiety feels too intense and hard to soothe
- You as the parent feels stuck, frustrated or overwhelmed



# You are not alone

You don't need to get it all right all the time. Your presence, patience and willingness to keep trying to support your child means more than you know

If you do need extra support, you're not alone.  
I'm here, let's talk

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