

Supporting your child to manage their Anxiety.

Anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear that is experienced as a combination of physical sensations, thoughts and feelings.

All children, young people and adults feel worried sometimes, and this is a normal part of growing up and life. At certain points, such as on their first day of school or before an exam, young people may become more worried, but will soon be able to calm down and feel better.

Anxiety can become a problem when a young person feels stuck in it, or when it feels like an overwhelming, distressing or unmanageable experience. If this kind of worrying goes on for a long time, it can leave a young person feeling exhausted and isolated, and limit the things they feel able to do.

If your child is struggling with anxiety, there are things you can do to help them - including providing emotional support, working on practical strategies together and finding the right professional help if they need it.

How to help

The goal isn't to eliminate anxiety, but to help a child manage it.

The best way to help a child overcome anxiety isn't to try to remove stressors that trigger it. It's to help them learn to tolerate their anxiety and function as well as they can, even when they're anxious. Then, the anxiety will decrease or fall away over time. By doing this your child will then be able to manage their own anxiety when they are older.

Don't avoid things just because they make a child anxious.

Helping children avoid the things they are afraid of will make them feel better in the short term, but it reinforces the anxiety over the long run. If a child in an uncomfortable situation gets upset, starts to cry—not to be manipulative, but just because that's how she feels—and her parents whisk her out of there, or remove the thing she's afraid of, she's learned that coping mechanism, and that cycle has the potential to repeat itself.

Express positive—but realistic—expectations.

You can't promise a child that his fears are unrealistic—that he won't fail a test, that he'll have fun ice skating, or that another child won't laugh at him during show & tell. But you can express confidence that he's going to be okay, he will be able to manage it, and that, as he faces his fears, the anxiety level will drop over time. This gives him confidence that your expectations are realistic, and that you're not going to ask him to do something he can't handle.

Respect her feelings, but don't empower the worry.

Encourage your child to talk about his feelings, but try not to ask leading questions— "Are you anxious about the big test? To avoid feeding the cycle of anxiety, just ask open-ended questions: "How are you feeling about the competition?"It's important to understand that validation doesn't always mean agreement. So if a child is terrified about going to the doctor because she's due for an injection. It is important to acknowledge her emotions and listen to her concerns. The message you want to send is, "I know you're scared, and that's okay, and I'm here, and I'm going to help you get through this."

Practical activities to do with your child.

Talk with your child about strategies that help them to express and manage their anxiety. This could be spending time with particular friends, listening to music, reading, playing sport, drawing, cooking or watching a favourite film.

Plan a regular morning routine that can be followed each day - from getting up to having breakfast, getting dressed, leaving the house and arriving at school. This will help to create a sense of security.

Consider using a worry journal if your child feels particularly anxious while they're at school. They can carry this with them and write down a worry when it comes into their head, helping to keep anxious thoughts from becoming overwhelming.

Younger children might find it helpful to make a 'worry box'. Decorate any kind of box such as a cereal or shoe box together, and designate a 'worry time' when your child will write down what they're anxious about. Then post it into the box, close the lid and agree not to give it anymore worry time that day. If your child would find it helpful, you can also choose a time to talk through worries together.

Older children might find it helpful to make their own self soothe box, which they can fill with all the things that help them when they're feeling worried. You can find a young person's guide to making one here, <https://youngminds.org.uk/blog/how-to-make-a-self-soothe-box/>

For Further advice check out:

<https://youngminds.org.uk>

<https://www.nhs.uk>

<https://fis.peterborough.gov.uk/kb5/peterborough/directory/localoffer.page?familychannel=8-4&loboolean=1>

Organisations that can help:

[The emotional health and wellbeing service](#) works with professionals including schools to help to improve the general emotional health and well being of young people

[Keep Your Head](#). This site brings together good reliable up to date information on mental health and wellbeing for children and young people, parents/carers and professionals

[Kooth](#) is an online counselling and emotional wellbeing support service for children and young people available free at the point of use.

[CHUMS](#) Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing Service for Children and Young People provides therapeutic support in a variety of ways