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# Coping with Anxiety: Parent Strategies for Elementary School Children

— Kim Kassay and Amanda Kennedy —  
CES Psychologists

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# Mindfulness Exercise



[3-Minute Breathing Space Practice](#)

# Connection Between Parent and Child Mental Health

- It is normal for everyone, including parents, to experience difficult emotions, especially in the uncertain and challenging times we in which we are living
- Emotions can affect our attention, decision-making, relationships, health, and performance
- Parents' behavior and mental health ↔ children's behavior and mental health
- Children often sense their parents' stress and anxiety
  - Parents' emotions can affect their behavior and how they interact with their children
  - Children can pick up on verbal and nonverbal cues
- Children look to their parents as models of how to respond to a situation and manage difficult emotions
- Parents can model and teach their children healthy coping strategies and resilience in challenging times

# Strategies to Manage Your Own Anxiety

- [5 Coping Strategies with Dr. Laurie Santos](#)
  - Exercise, Gratitude, Sleep, Get Social, Be with Your Emotions
    - RAIN - Recognize, Allow, Investigate, Nurture your emotions
- Validate your own experience and have self-compassion
- Acceptance
- Dialectical thinking - more than one opposing truths can be true at the same time
  - Moving away from black and white thinking
  - AND instead of BUT
- Limit news and social media
- Free yourself from mental multitasking
- Seek professional help if needed

# Signs of Anxiety in Children

Some degree of stress, anxiety or worry in children is developmentally typical, and anxiety is a normal and expected reaction to a stressful situation.

Children may not recognize their own anxiety and may be unable to explain their real or imagined fears. This may manifest as:

- Behavioral changes - increased moodiness, irritability, aggression, clinginess, or sensitivity
- Somatic complaints such as headaches or stomach aches
- Appearing restless or fidgety
- Difficulty concentrating
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares and/or fatigue

# Signs of Anxiety in Children

More significant levels of anxiety may be present if your child demonstrates:

- Avoidance of specific activities, situations or people
- A tendency to worry about what can go wrong in any scenario
- Worries or fears that interfere with normal daily activities
- Persistent distress despite an adult's reassurances
- Trouble sleeping at night or insisting on sleeping with parents
- Frequent physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomach pain, that do not stem from other medical conditions
- Repeated episodes of sudden, unexpected or intense fear that comes with symptoms like heart pounding, trouble breathing, or feeling shaky, sweaty or dizzy

# Resilience in Children

*The ability to adapt well and bounce back from stress, adversity, anxiety, failure, challenges or trauma*

Resilience helps children manage stress, cope with feelings of anxiety or uncertainty, and work through challenges. It is a skill that can be developed and strengthened over time.

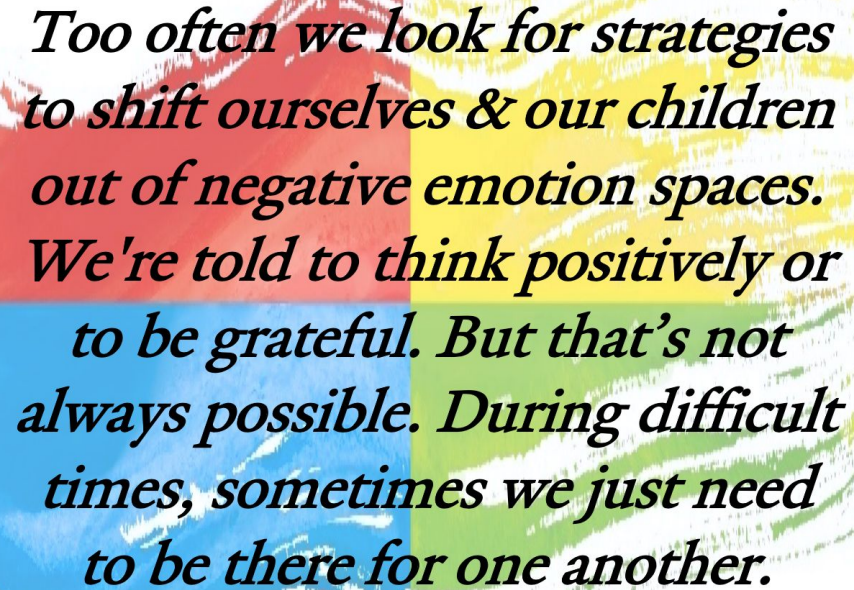


*Positive Mindset*

*Growth Mindset*

*Perseverance*

## PERMISSION TO FEEL



*Too often we look for strategies to shift ourselves & our children out of negative emotion spaces. We're told to think positively or to be grateful. But that's not always possible. During difficult times, sometimes we just need to be there for one another.*

Marc Brackett



# Expressing and Validating Feelings

One of the most important and powerful ways we can support our children is to validate their feelings and allow them the space to express them

- Ask, “how are you feeling?” and take time to listen when they choose to share their feelings
- You can validate your child’s emotions even if you don’t agree with their behavior
- Model appropriate emotional expression
- Help them to recognize and understand their emotions
  - “I notice ... Are you feeling ... when ...?”
- Use Mood Meter at home to identify and label emotions
- Practice expressing emotions in the family - discuss ways that work for your child to share their emotions (e.g. verbally, signal, visually, drawing/writing)

*Anything that's human is mentionable and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.*

**-Fred Rogers**

# How to Help Your Child At Home

- Create a relaxed home atmosphere
- Maintain a daily routine
- Plan for family time, such as cooking together, game nights, or family walks
- Limit exposure to news or other media
- Respond to worries in a direct and reassuring manner
- “Kid’s choice” opportunities
- Teach your child about self-care
- Maintain social connections with family and peers
- Model emotional awareness and positive coping
- Look for opportunities to help others
- Build a “coping toolbox”

# Coping Toolbox Ideas

- Take deep breaths
- Squeeze and relax your muscles
- Practice mindfulness
- Move your body - take a walk, stretch, jump, dance, practice a sport
- Play with a pet
- Take a warm bath
- Write about how you are feeling
- Draw, paint, or color
- Listen to calming music
- Read a book
- Talk to a family member or friend
- Use a calming jar

# Resources

[3-Minute Breathing Space Practice](#)

[Self-Compassion Mindfulness Practice](#)

[How Mindfulness Can Help During COVID](#)

[5 Coping Strategies with Dr. Laurie Santos](#)

[Back-to-School Anxiety During COVID](#)

[COVID Fatigue: Why You Might Be Feeling](#)

[Down as We Approach Fall](#)

[12 Ways to Cope](#)

[Self-Care in the Time of COVID](#)

[Feeling Anxious? RAIN Strategy](#)

[How to Worry More Mindfully](#)

## **Apps:**

Mood Meter by RULER

Calm (Kids Section)

Stop, Breathe, and Think Kids

Smiling Mind

# Upcoming Presentations

*“Coping with Anxiety: Parent Strategies for Middle and High School Students”* with Melissa Rotante, MSW, Teen Talk Counselor, Staples HS

November 17th 9:30am

# Questions?

