

Wellness Wednesday



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Is Your Kid Experiencing Anxiety? Here Are 7 Things You Can Do To Help

If your child is experiencing persistent anxiety, here are some things that experts suggest you keep in mind.

We tend to speak fairly openly about our own anxieties as parents, how juggling so many responsibilities and expectations can leave us wide awake with worry in the middle of the night. Childhood, however, is supposed to be a time of carefree fun, and it can be hard to know how to react when your kid is the one whose worries seem to be spiraling.

Kids' anxiety can manifest in any number of ways, but there are a few main types: **Separation anxiety** is when your child doesn't want you to leave them at day care, school, with a babysitter or in a similar situation. **Social anxiety**, in which a child is nervous about being around others, might show itself in a reluctance to go to school. A deep fear of a specific thing, such as dogs or doctors, is called a **phobia**, and those tend to be easy to identify — maybe your child runs and tries to hide whenever they see a dog or when they realize you're heading to the doctor's office. Children with **general anxiety** may or may not be able to articulate their fears, which could be about bad things happening or the future.



As with adults, anxiety often shows up in kids as physical symptoms, such as an upset stomach, headache, fatigue or trouble sleeping. When kids are struggling with anxiety, we want to offer comfort and support, and at the same time we want them to know that we believe they can face their fears. It can be tricky to find a way to balance these two approaches.

If your child is experiencing persistent anxiety, here are some things that experts suggest you keep in mind.

Acknowledge that your child's anxiety is real.

In generations past, a child struggling with anxiety was likely told to "get over it" or "buck up" by a parent, who may have genuinely believed they were imparting an essential life lesson. Culturally, things have changed. We know now that trauma doesn't go away if you don't talk about it and that ignoring strong emotions probably isn't the best way to deal with them.

Psychologist Cara Goodwin, who goes by the Parenting Translator on Instagram, said, "First, it is important that parents validate and empathize with the anxiety. Rather than brushing off your child's fear or explaining why it is irrational, acknowledge that their anxiety is 'real' and that it must be hard to feel that way."

Talking to your child like this about their anxiety is not going to make them more anxious. Ask them to tell you what they are worried about, and listen attentively to their response before jumping in with suggestions to solve the problem.

Let them know you believe they can handle whatever situation is making them anxious.

After acknowledging what they're feeling, instead of helping them get away from the situation (i.e., letting them stay home from school if they are feeling anxious about going), tell them that you believe they have the ability to manage this and get through a tough situation.

Goodwin suggests that you say something like, "I can see that this really makes you feel nervous, but I know that you can handle it."

Recognize the difference between normal fears and problematic anxiety.

The rush of fear that we feel when we perceive a threat and the adrenaline that gives us a burst of energy to run from it evolved in humans to keep us alive. But sometimes this system kicks into gear even when it's confronted with something benign, like a neighbor's dog or a party full of children.

"Our nervous system is wired to act and help us to remain safe from harm. This often assists us in doing productive things to help meet goals and aspirations but sometimes causes anxiety," said Anne Marie Albano, a psychologist and clinical director of the Center for Youth Mental Health at New York-Presbyterian.

Some separation anxiety is normal, and it's also common for kids to be afraid of things like loud noises and the dark. In most cases, "within a week or two, children should be able to adapt and settle into a new routine and activity without the same fear or anxiousness," said Albano.

To figure out if your child's worries have gone beyond what's expected, you can ask the following questions:

- **Is the anxiety reasonable given the situation, or is it excessive?**
- **Are their fears calmed by your reassurance and support?**
- **Does the anxiety become uncontrollable?**
- **Are they able to manage the ups and downs of everyday challenges?**

If the anxiety is too much for your child to manage, even with your support, and is interfering in their life, it's time to seek out the support of a mental health professional.

Engage them in problem-solving.

Albano recommends asking your child, "What do you want to do to manage this situation?" Again, let them communicate their ideas and don't jump right in with your own. If you encourage them to keep talking, perhaps by weighing the pros and cons of different possibilities, they may be able to come up with a solid plan without much input from you. You can offer support by expressing approval of the plan they've chosen.

"Remind your child of similar situations that they've handled in the past," suggested Albano.

Allowing your child to face uncertainty is a necessary part of their growth. "Many situations... while uncomfortable for a bit, are not harmful. Most of these situations result in your child learning and developing coping and problem-solving skills that will serve them for a lifetime," Albano said.

She suggested seeing yourself as your child's adviser rather than someone who clears the path of all obstacles for them.

Help them take one step at a time.

Of course, you will have to meet your child where they are at and help them move one step at a time from point A to point B. If your child is afraid of water, you wouldn't just toss them in the pool and watch them figure out how to swim. You'd climb in with them at first and help them learn the necessary skills.

"Parents should work with their children to take 'baby steps' toward the goal of facing their fears. Parents should then pay a lot of attention to and praise any of the child's 'brave behavior,'" Goodwin said.

Be sure to offer this praise regardless of the result.

"Focus on your child's efforts to manage a situation that is scary to them and not on the outcome," Albano said. Even if they fell, highlight the fact that they got back on the bike.

Don't help your child avoid their triggers — this can make their anxiety worse.

If your child is going to learn to cope with their anxiety, you can't always step in and handle it for them.

"We know that avoiding anxiety-provoking events only makes anxiety worse and keeps the child reliant on their parents coping with the situation so they don't learn skills for coping with their anxiety independently," Goodwin said. Parents may, for example, speak on behalf of a shy child, answer repetitive questions from a worried child or avoid situations that they think will trigger a child's anxiety.

When you help your children avoid a situation that is making them anxious, it "reinforces the idea that the situation is something they should be afraid of (since even their parents seem worried) and communicates to children that they are not capable of handling it on their own," Goodwin said.



Don't hesitate to reach out for professional help.

As parents, we can provide a lot of the emotional support our kids need by asking the right questions and acting as a sounding board when they are trying to figure things out. But we're not equipped to handle everything they bring to us on our own.

"Parents can certainly help their children to cope with anxiety," Goodwin said, but they "should seek professional help when their child's anxiety seems to be interfering with important functions such as sleep, eating, school or activities that they used to enjoy, when their child's anxiety seems to be getting worse, or when they have been exposed to a traumatic situation that causes anxiety."

"Therapy and medication are very effective for treating childhood anxiety," Goodwin continued. "In particular, a type of therapy called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helps most children with anxiety to show significant improvement in symptoms."



GROUND CHICKEN SUMMER ROLLS



299 Calories | Prep: 10 mins | Cook: 30 mins | Total: 40 mins
YIELD: 8 servings | Course: Appetizer, Dinner, Lunch | Cuisine: Asian

INGREDIENTS

- olive oil spray
- 1 small shallot, chopped
- 1 pound 93% lean ground chicken
- 3 tablespoons soy sauce or gluten-free Tamari
- 3 tablespoons fresh lime juice
- 1 tablespoon Sambal Oelek, chili paste, (optional, but a good addition if you like heat)
- 1/4 cup minced fresh mint leaves
- 2 cups cabbage and carrot slaw mix, use purple and white cabbage for more color
- 8 8-inch round rice paper sheets
- 16 fresh basil leaves
- 1/4 cup Hoisin sauce, mixed with 1/4 cup cold water

I love these fresh, Vietnamese-inspired Chicken Rice Paper Rolls made with ground chicken, fresh basil and mint leaves, fresh lime, and raw crunchy cabbage and carrots. It's all wrapped in a soft rice paper wrapper and served with a simple Hoisin dipping sauce. Perfect as a light meal, appetizer, or as part of a larger spread for gatherings or parties.

How healthy are they?

These summer rolls are loaded with lean protein and fresh veggies. Usually, they contain noodles, but I omitted them to make the rolls even healthier and lower carb. Two chicken summer rolls with Hoisin sauce have under 300 calories, 30 grams of carbs, and 23 grams of protein.

Nutrition Information

Serving: 2 rolls and 2 tablespoons dipping sauce), Calories: 299 kcal, Carbohydrates: 30 g, Protein: 23 g, Fat: 16 g, Saturated Fat: 4.5 g, Cholesterol: 98 mg, Sodium: 899.5 mg, Fiber: 2 g, Sugar: 6 g



INSTRUCTIONS



1. Heat a large skillet over high heat. When hot, spray with oil then add the ground chicken, and cook, breaking it up with a spatula 5 to 6 minutes until cooked through and no longer pink.
2. Add the shallots and cook 2 to 3 more minutes, to soften.
3. Add the soy sauce sauce, lime juice and Sambal Oelek and cook 1 minute.
4. Remove from heat and stir in the mint.
5. Add hot water to a large, shallow dish to a depth of 1 inch.
6. Place 1 rice paper sheet in dish; let stand 30 seconds or just until soft. Place sheet on a flat surface.
7. Arrange 2 basil leaves on top third of sheet. Arrange 1/3 cup chicken mixture on bottom third of sheet topped with 1/4 cup slaw.
8. Folding sides of sheet over filling and starting with filled side, roll up jelly-roll style. Gently press seam to seal. Place roll, seam side down, on a serving platter (cover to keep from drying). Repeat procedure with remaining sheets, basil, cabbage and chicken mixture.
9. Combine water and Hoisin together in a small bowl. Serve rolls with Hoisin dipping sauce.

FEATURED EXERCISE

<https://www.self.com/gallery/full-body-bodyweight-workout-20-minutes>Featured Exercise ► **Bicycle Crunch**

» **Do it:** *To make this core move easier, try a hollow-body hold. Lie on your back and engage your abs, pulling your belly button toward the floor. Slowly raise your shoulders and legs from the ground. Your arms and head should be raised along with your shoulders, keeping your lower back in contact with the floor. Hold for 15 seconds, rest for 10 seconds, and hold again for 15 seconds. If the hollow hold is still too challenging, you can bend your knees or keep your arms forward instead of overhead.*

- Lie faceup with your legs in tabletop position (knees bent 90 degrees and stacked over your hips). Place your hands behind your head, elbows bent and pointing out to the sides. Use your abs to curl your shoulders off the floor. This is the starting position.
- Twist to bring your right elbow to your left knee, while simultaneously straightening your right leg.
- Then twist to bring your left elbow to your right knee, simultaneously straightening your left leg.
- Continue alternating sides for 40 seconds. Start at a slow and steady pace so that you can really feel your abs working.

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Regular exercise can help you control your weight, reduce your risk of heart disease, and strengthen your bones and muscles. But if it's been awhile since you've exercised and you have health issues or concerns, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.



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