

How can I help my child cope with anxiety?

Anxiety is normal, but it becomes a problem if it disrupts their daily functioning.

What you can do at home

Encourage them to face their fears.

-If it is safe, take them to the place that causes them anxiety for 10-20 minutes, and give them a special toy/treat as a reward. This way, you are associating their bravery with something they enjoy.

If they are afraid of the doctor, praise their bravery throughout the appointment and offer an incentive.

-Children mimic the adults around them. If they see you using positive self-talk (“I can do this”) and facing your fears, they are more likely to show bravery when facing their own anxiety.

Explore the “what if” scenarios with them.

-Often, the unknown is the true cause of their anxiety. Give them tools to manage their “what if” situation.

If they are afraid of being separated at the store, explain the PA system and show them how to find an employee for help.

Allow your child to be imperfect. Allow them to play.

-Encourage the effort, not the outcome. Don’t show disappointment if they bring home a “B”, miss the winning goal, or stutter through their theater performance.

Tell them about a time when you were less-than-perfect, and what you did to calm yourself down.

-Children need to play in the grass, imagine shapes in the clouds, design new Lego structures, and have tea parties. If their only method of play involves a scoreboard, they will associate “play” with the risk of losing.

Validate their feelings without encouraging the anxiety.

-If your child tells you they are worried about something, ask them why they feel worried. Get to the root of the problem so you can address it. Do not dismiss their feelings by telling them that they will be fine.

Maintain a normal routine.

-Knowledge is power, and you are giving them power over their fears by letting them know what to expect from the day/week (big activities, appointments, time to wake up and go to bed, etc.)

-Don’t repeatedly talk about the thing causing them anxiety; it will only make them fixate on the problem.

Warning signs of an Anxiety Disorder

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| * Repetitive behaviors | * Avoiding school or friends | * Afraid of making mistakes |
| * Constantly seeking approval
<i>from parents, teachers, peers</i> | * Head or stomach aches
<i>without illness</i> | * Has phobias or big fears
<i>generally of illness or death</i> |
| * Restlessness or fatigue | * Nail biting, pulling at lip skin | * Fixating on the FAR future
<i>turning 50</i> |
| * Trouble concentrating | * Difficulty breathing
<i>hyperventilating</i> | * Constantly seeking approval |
| * Muscle fatigue
<i>from tensing up</i> | * Diarrhea or constipation | * Trouble sleeping |

If you believe that your child’s anxiety is not normal

Take them to a pediatrician

-**Thyroid** problems can cause anxiety, insomnia, memory problems, depression, or fatigue.

-Exposure to **strep** (PANDAS) or other **infections** (PANS) could possibly cause symptoms of anxiety, stress, OCD, tics, sensory overstimulation, or personality changes.

Take them to a psychologist

-There are multiple types of **Anxiety Disorders**, and a psychologist can help to determine the best treatment.