



# SUPPORTING AN ANXIOUS CHILD

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*Raising children is hard. Raising an anxious child is even harder. Here are some helpful tips and information from the Child Mind Institute to help parents better manage their children's anxiety.*

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## How to Help Kids Who Are Too Hard on Themselves

**Katherine Martinelli,  
Child Mind Institute**

While self-talk, or our "inner voice", can be very helpful, it can also sometimes be detrimental when self-talk is negative in nature. Negative self-talk may be caused by a variety of factors, such as negative thinking patterns, perfectionism, social protection/issues, attention-seeking, or lack of resilience. Negative self-talk can become problematic when it becomes pervasive and persistent, and impacts daily functioning.

### What You Can do to Help

Listen and validate your children's negative emotions.

Rather than trying to combat negative thoughts with "overly positive" self-talk, offer a realistic approach to a problem and model it for your children.

Offer alternative information that contradicts their negative self-talk.

Help them to identify what made them make such a critical self-statement.

Reach out to the school to see if teachers are also noticing similar behavior.

Seek professional help if the behavior is persistent and negatively impacting your child's life.

## When to Worry About an Anxious Child

**Rachel Ehmke,  
Child Mind Institute**

EXPERIENCING ANXIETY IS A NORMAL AND HEALTHY HUMAN EXPERIENCE. HOW DO YOU KNOW, THOUGH, WHEN ANXIETY BECOMES UNHEALTHY? THE FOLLOWING ARE GUIDELINES TO HELP YOU DETERMINE IF YOUR CHILD'S ANXIETY IS BECOMING A PROBLEM.

### Severe anxiety:

- is unrealistic.
- is out of proportion.
- can present as someone being overly self-conscious.
- is often unwanted and uncontrollable.
- does not go away.
- leads to avoidance.

If you have concerns, please reach out the Guidance Department to speak with a counselor.

# How to Change Negative Thinking Patterns

Juliann Garey,  
Child Mind Institute

Negative thinking patterns are often unrealistic and they can have major impacts on the way that our children interpret the world around them. It can be helpful to assist your child in identifying when they may be falling into a negative thinking pattern. The following are just a few examples of negative thinking patterns you may encounter:

*All-or-Nothing Thinking:* seeing things in only two categories, black or white, with no shades of grey.

*Overgeneralization:* you see a single negative detail or event as indicative of a universal truth about your whole life.

*Fortune-telling:* anticipating and believing that things will turn out badly before they have even happened.

*Mind reading:* assuming you know what another person is thinking, and typically assuming it is something bad about you.

*Catastrophizing:* taking a problem and blowing it out of proportion.

*Mental filter:* focusing in on only the negative instead of any positive or neutral aspects of an event.

## How to Help?

It is important to first practice identifying your own negative thinking patterns so that you can better help your child to identify theirs. It is important to model for your children that it is okay to make thinking errors. Sometimes, helping your children understand their thoughts may involve seeking out the assistance of a professional.

## How to Avoid Passing Anxiety on to Your Kids

Brigit Katz,  
Child Mind Institute

It can be difficult to know how to help your child, when you are struggling with managing your own anxiety. Research suggests that children of anxious parents are more likely to exhibit anxiety themselves. While genetic factors may play a role, observed and learned behavior may also be a contributing factor. Here are some ways to better manage your own anxiety, in an effort to assist children in managing their own.

### Practicing Mindfulness

One way to better manage your own stress is to practice mindfulness. Mindfulness allows you to focus on the present moment and less on the anxiety-provoking "what ifs" of life.

### Modeling Stress Tolerance

When you learn strategies for better managing your own anxiety, you can share and model these strategies for your child.

### Make a Plan

Make a plan for managing your anxiety. This can be as simple as allowing yourself a break or incorporating stress relieving activities into your schedule.

Allowing your child the opportunity to see you create a plan can send the message that anxiety is manageable. Sometimes, this may involve seeking additional support.

### Learning Your Triggers

Gaining a better understanding of what triggers your anxiety may allow you to set boundaries and better manage stress.

### Explain Your Anxiety

Discussing your stress with your children, when appropriate, can help children learn that it is okay to discuss tough topics and that it is okay to have these feelings.

If you have concerns, please reach out the Guidance Department to speak with a counselor.