



Coronavirus

How to help your child manage feelings of worry and anxiety

This leaflet is aimed at parents and carers of children at primary school

It is understandable and normal that your child might be feeling worried or anxious during this uncertain time. They will have experienced disruptions and big changes in their daily lives. It is a normal reaction to feel the need for safety, control and certainty. However, for some children, these anxious feelings are persistent and stop them from engaging in their daily routines. This leaflet contains information about anxiety and how to support your child to feel better.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is when we feel worried or scared, often about things that we think could happen in the future. Anxiety is our body's natural response to danger and it is designed to protect us from harm. However, it becomes a problem when it is triggered without any obvious danger. It can cause fear and worry, and changes in your child's behaviour. Anxiety can be experienced through thoughts, feelings and physical feelings in the body.



Talk to your child about their feelings

Give your child frequent opportunities to express how they are feeling. Some children might need help doing this. You can help them by noticing and commenting on how they might be feeling based on their body language. Some children will find it easier to express their feelings by writing about them or drawing them. Listen to your child carefully and acknowledge their feelings.



Create a 'worry jar'. Ask your child to write or draw their feelings and put them in a jar. You can schedule regular time slots to read the worries, talk through them and problem solve them together. Move on to a 'happy jar' filled with their happy thoughts.

Use relaxation strategies

Relaxation and breathing techniques will help to calm down your child's body when they are feeling anxious. It can be helpful for you to model these techniques to your child and try them out together.



Practice breathing exercises to help your child to relax. Try 'finger breathing' by slowly breathing in and out as you trace up and down each of your fingers.



Model calmness

Children are often good at picking up on the feelings of the adults around them. It is understandable that you might also be feeling anxious at this difficult time. It is important that you are looking after your own mental health and wellbeing. Try to stay calm when talking to your child about the things that make them feel anxious.



Help your child to create a safe space in their mind. Ask them to think about a place that they feel happy and relaxed. Ask them to describe what they can see, smell, touch and hear when they are there.

Monitor the media your child has access to

Children can often become worried about what they see or hear from the news, media or friends. Try to monitor what your child has access to as they may become worried if news is not appropriate for their age. They may also hear helpful or unhelpful stories from their friends. Create regular opportunities to talk to your child about any worries that they might have about what they have read or heard. Answer their questions in clear and simple terms that are appropriate to their age and level of understanding. Acknowledge their feelings and try to focus on the positive things that they might be seeing, for example, the doctors and nurses helping people to get better.



Use distraction techniques

Help your child to focus on something else to distract them from their feelings of anxiety. Do something fun and enjoyable together, whether that is drawing, dancing, doing creative activities, playing games or baking.



Ask your child to notice one thing they can see, one thing they can smell, one thing they can hear and one thing they can touch around them to distract them when they are feeling anxious.

Establish a routine

Keeping a routine that includes some balance is really important: A bit of what they like, a bit of what their school wants them to do and a bit of helping with chores and daily family life to encourage independence. It will be much harder to get back in to normal routines if you have not established a routine at home. Establishing a 'new' routine and having a plan for the day can also help alleviate anxiety around uncertainty and change.



Create a visual routine with your child. Be creative and let your child decide how they want it to look. They could draw it out as a comic strip.



Stay healthy

Try to make sure that your child is eating well, getting enough sleep and exercising. Their physical wellbeing can affect their mood. Make sure that they are also taking time to relax as this is important for staying healthy and happy. Ensure that they have a good bedtime routine. Support them to avoid any screen time for at least an hour before bedtime as it can disrupt their sleep. It could be replaced with more calming activities, such as reading a book.



Try out some online yoga or exercise classes together (see 'useful resources').

When should I seek professional support?

If your child's anxiety is severe, persists or interferes with their daily life, it is a good idea to get professional help. Talk to your GP. You can also contact your child's school's SENCO or Educational Psychologist for advice and support;

Further Information

edpsychology@octavopartnership.org

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/anxiety-in-children/>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/>



Useful Websites

Emotions wheel

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/emotion-wheel>

Sentence starters for conversations about feelings

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/sentence-starters>

Emotional 'check ins'

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/resources/emotional-check-in>

Calming activities

<https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/>
<https://childhood101.com/fun-breathing-exercises-for-kids/>

Self-care activities

<https://www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/self-care/>

Children's yoga videos

<https://www.youtube.com/user/CosmicKidsYoga>

Child friendly explanation of anxiety

<https://www.priorygroup.com/media/594863/understanding-childhood-anxiety-v1.jpg>

Coronavirus mental health and wellbeing resources

<https://www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/media/1960/coronavirus-mental-health-and-wellbeing-resources.pdf>

Croydon Music Service

<https://www.cma-online.co.uk/>

Books

Judith Woodburn (2016) *A Smart Girls' Guide: Worry: How to feel less stressed and have more fun* (Girls - Year 6 and above)

Anthony Browne (2007) *Silly Billy*

Virginia Ironside (2011) *The Huge Bag of Worries*

Jill Seene (2007) *Morris and the Bundle of Worries*

Margot Sunderland's children's picture books.

