



Baildon Church of England Primary School And Nursery

Helping Your Child with Anxiety

- Advice from <https://youngminds.org.uk>

If your child is struggling with anxiety, here are some ways you can support them and places you can get help.

How can I help my child?

All children and young people get anxious at times, and this is a normal part of their development as they grow up and develop their 'survival skills', so they can face challenges in the wider world. We all have different levels of stress we can cope with - some people are just naturally more anxious than others, and are quicker to get stressed or worried. There are many ways you can help your child to manage their anxiety.

If you feel your child's anxiety is not getting any better or is getting worse, and your efforts have not worked, contact your GP to get professional support.

These are things that can really make a difference:

1. Talk to your child about anxiety, what is happening in their body and why it happens. Many children and young people don't know what they are feeling when they are anxious, and it can be very frightening and overwhelming. They might even think they are very ill or that they are having a heart attack.
2. Help them to recognise anxious feelings so they can tell when they are becoming anxious and can ask for help.
3. Tell your child it will be okay, and the anxiety will pass. It can be helpful to describe the anxiety as a wave to ride or surf that gets smaller after it peaks.
4. Get your child to [breathe deeply and slowly](https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/preventing-falls/fear-and-anxiety-about-falling/relaxation-techniques), in through their nose for three counts and out through their mouth for three counts.- see this website-
<https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/preventing-falls/fear-and-anxiety-about-falling/relaxation-techniques>
5. Distract them by focusing on something else.
6. Give them a cuddle or hold their hand if they will let you - touch can be soothing.
7. It can help to talk to your child about finding a safe place in their mind - somewhere that they feel relaxed and happy. It may be a grandparent's or friend's house or a holiday beside the sea which they can picture when 'wrong thoughts' come into their head or they are feeling anxious. Sometimes holding a memento, like a seashell or pebble, can help.

8. If your child is feeling the need to check things or repeat certain actions, suggest they count up to 10 before they start checking as a delaying tactic. [This website-
http://www.handsonscotland.co.uk/relaxation/](http://www.handsonscotland.co.uk/relaxation/) has some good ideas.
9. Encourage your child to notice what makes them anxious. Talking it through can help but your child could also try keeping a diary or a 'worry book'.
10. Make a 'worry box'. Your child can write each worry down and post it in the box out of sight. Small children will enjoy decorating the box too. They can leave the worries in there for, say, a week to see if they were worth worrying about (if not they can be torn up). Alternatively, you could designate a specific 'worry time' for around 10 or 20 minutes, (but not too close to bedtime, or when the child is in bed), so worries can be saved up for that time. This gives the message that we are in control of their worries and not vice versa.
11. Work on positive-thinking. Name their worst case scenarios and think through together how to sort out the situation if it happens, e.g. 'I'm worried that we'll miss the bus.' 'What do you think we could do if that happens?' 'We could get the next bus'.
12. Help them maintain a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise to reduce the levels of stress hormones, good sleeping habits, calm bedtime routines, limited screen or computer time in the evening, and a healthy diet.

Where can I get help?

[Young Minds Parents Helpline](#)

- **Call us for free 0808 802 5544 (Mon-Fri 9:30 - 16:00).**
- **Available in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.**

[No Panic](#)

- **Support for people struggling with panic attacks, OCD, phobias, and other related anxiety disorders.**
- **Also provides support for carers of sufferers.**
- **Helpline: 0844 967 4848 (Daily 10:00–22:00). Charges apply.**
- **Youth Helpline for 13-20 year olds: 0330 606 1174 (Mon-Fri 15:00–18:00). Charges apply.**
- **Having a panic attack? Crisis Number with recording of a breathing technique: 01952 680835 (24 hours)**

[OCD Action](#)

- **The national charity that provides support and information to anybody affected by OCD.**
- **Helpline: 0845 390 6232 (Mon - Fri 09:30-17:00)**
- **Email: support@ocdaction.org.uk**

[Triumph over Phobia](#) (TOP UK)

- **The OCD and Phobia Charity runs a network of self-help therapy groups.**



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[Anxiety UK](#)

- **Anxiety UK is a national charity with local services all over the UK. The website includes [resources for parents](#) concerned about their child's anxiety.**

[Royal College of Psychiatrists](#)

- **Anxiety Factsheet: [Worries and Anxieties, Helping Children to Cope: Information for Parents](#)**

What to Do (and Not Do) When Children Are Anxious

Advice from <https://childmind.org>

How to respect feelings without empowering fears

When children are chronically anxious, even the most well-meaning parents can fall into a negative cycle and, not wanting a child to suffer, actually exacerbate the youngster's anxiety. It happens when parents, anticipating a child's fears, try to protect her from them. Here are pointers for helping children escape the cycle of anxiety.

1. The goal isn't to eliminate anxiety, but to help a child manage it.

None of us wants to see a child unhappy, but the best way to help Children overcome anxiety isn't to try to remove stressors that trigger it. It's to help them learn to tolerate their anxiety and function as well as they can, even when they're anxious. And as a by-product of that, the anxiety will decrease or fall away over time.

2. Don't avoid things just because they make a child anxious.

Helping children avoid the things they are afraid of will make them feel better in the short term, but it reinforces the anxiety over the long run. If a child in an uncomfortable situation gets upset, starts to cry—not to be manipulative, but just because that's how she feels—and her parents whisk her out of there, or remove the thing she's afraid of, she's learned that coping mechanism, and that cycle has the potential to repeat itself.

3. Express positive—but realistic—expectations.

You can't promise a child that his fears are unrealistic—that he won't fail a test, that he'll have fun ice skating, or that another child won't laugh at him during show & tell. But you can express confidence that he's going to be okay, he will be able to manage it, and that, as he faces his fears, the anxiety level will drop over time. This gives him confidence that your expectations are realistic, and that you're not going to ask him to do something he can't handle.

4. Respect her feelings, but don't empower them.

It's important to understand that validation doesn't always mean agreement. So if a child is terrified about going to the doctor (see website <https://childmind.org/article/help-Children-scared-of-going-to-the-doctor/>) because she's due for a shot, you don't want to belittle her fears, but you also don't want to amplify them. You want to listen and be empathetic, help her understand what she's anxious about, and encourage her to feel that she can face her fears. The message you want to send is, "I know you're scared, and that's okay, and I'm here, and I'm going to help you get through this."

5. Don't ask leading questions.

Encourage your child to talk about his feelings, but try not to ask leading questions— “Are you anxious about the big test? Are you worried about the science fair?” To avoid feeding the cycle of anxiety, just ask open-ended questions: “How are you feeling about the science fair?”

6. Don't reinforce the child's fears.

What you don't want to do is be saying, with your tone of voice or body language: “Maybe *this is* something that you should be afraid of.” Let's say a child has had a negative experience with a dog. Next time she's around a dog, you might be anxious about how she will respond, and you might unintentionally send a message that she *should*, indeed, be worried (see website <https://childmind.org/article/how-to-avoid-passing-anxiety-on-to-your-Children/>).

7. Encourage the child to tolerate her anxiety.

Let your child know that you appreciate the work it takes to tolerate anxiety in order to do what he wants or needs to do. It's really encouraging him to engage in life and to let the anxiety take its natural curve. We call it the “habituation curve”—it will drop over time as he continues to have contact with the stressor. It might not drop to zero, it might not drop as quickly as you would like, but that's how we get over our fears.

8. Try to keep the anticipatory period short.

When we're afraid of something, the hardest time is really *before* we do it. So another rule of thumb for parents is to really try to eliminate or reduce the anticipatory period. If a child is nervous about going to a doctor's appointment, you don't want to launch into a discussion about it two hours before you go; that's likely to get your child more keyed up. So just try to shorten that period to a minimum.

9. Think things through with the child.

Sometimes it helps to talk through what would happen if a child's fear came true—how would she handle it? A child who's anxious about separating from her parents (see website <https://childmind.org/article/what-is-separation-anxiety/>) might worry about what would happen if they didn't come to pick her up. So we talk about that. If your mom doesn't come at the end of soccer practice, what would you do? “Well I would tell the coach my mom's not here.” And what do you think the coach would do? “Well he would call my mom. Or he would wait with me.” A child who's afraid that a stranger might be sent to pick her up can have a code word from her parents that anyone they sent would know. For some Children, having a plan can reduce the uncertainty in a healthy, effective way (see website <https://childmind.org/article/behavioral-treatment-Children-anxiety/>).

10. Try to model healthy ways of handling anxiety.

There are multiple ways you can help Children handle anxiety by letting them see how you cope with anxiety yourself (see website <https://childmind.org/article/how-to-avoid-passing-anxiety-on-to-your-Children/>). Children are perceptive, and they're going to take it in if you keep complaining on the phone to a friend that you can't handle the stress or the anxiety. I'm not saying to pretend that you don't have stress and anxiety, but let Children hear or see you managing it calmly, tolerating it, feeling good about getting through it.