

Strategies to help children with Anxiety:



1. Parents please talk to your child about anxiety, what is happening in their body and why it happens. Many children 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 your child 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. Use breathing techniques, in through their nose for three counts and out through their mouth for three counts.
5. Distract them by focusing on something else.
6. Parental affection such as a hug or holding their hand if they will let you - touch can be soothing.
7. It can also 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 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 at any time 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.
9. Encourage your child to notice what makes them anxious. Talking it through can help but you as the parent can ask your child to keep 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. He/she 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 your 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.

About relaxation exercises

Relaxation exercises can help your child /children feel calm and improve their emotional wellbeing. In situations where a child or young person is experiencing difficult emotions, such as anger or anxiety, relaxation exercises can help manage the physical and emotional responses to these feelings. The exercises may help distract them from worrying thoughts and reduce tension in their body. Relaxation can also help your child/children deal with stressful situations, e.g. exams, or cope with a significant change, loss or bereavement.

Some things to think about when trying relaxation exercises with children and young people:

- It's important to think about your individual child/children and find exercises that you think will work well for them, as not all exercises will suit everyone.
- Remember they may also have their own preferences, e.g. a male or female voice in guided relaxation exercises.
- Try to find a quiet, comfortable space where they won't be disturbed.
- Be aware of the time and place at home as this may affect how well a relaxation exercise works.
- If your child/children becomes distressed for any reason, just stop the exercise, and comfort and reassure them.



Some relaxation exercises to try

Calm breathing

This is one of the simplest types of relaxation exercise, and is sometimes known as deep breathing or belly breathing.

- Anxiety Canada, how to do calm breathing:
www.youth.anxietycanada.com/how-do-it
- GoZen, breathing exercise:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxbdX-SeOOo

Guided relaxation

This focuses on the mind rather than the body by using stories describing relaxing places that encourage feelings of calm.

- Cosmic Kids, guided relaxation videos:
www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8snGkhBF7njO0QvtE97AJFL3xZYQSGh5

Mindfulness

Being mindful is about being fully aware of living in the present moment and can help calm the mind.

- Cosmic Kids Zen Den, mindfulness videos:
www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL8snGkhBF7ngDp1oJtx5Vcjwatzn8xLK

Progressive muscle relaxation

This is used to help notice the difference between tension and relaxation in different parts of the body. At first it may feel uncomfortable or strange for the child or young person to be focusing on their body, but this will become easier and can become enjoyable over time.

- GoZen, progressive muscle relaxation exercise:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDKyRpW-Yuc