



Advice for Parents & Carers

About anxiety, stress, and worry ...

Anxiety is a normal emotion that can be useful and improve performance, but it is understandable to be concerned about your child if they seem more stressed or worried than usual. We all experience anxiety at times – it is often an appropriate response to events happening in our lives e.g. school transitions, exam times. However, it can become a problem when it is severe, prolonged or happening so often that it interferes with a child's everyday life, eg. stops them from attending school.

Often children and young people who exhibit high levels of anxiety (which sometimes is shown in angry outbursts and aggressive behaviour) have learnt this response from other family members. Who else is anxious in the family and is this something that they can talk about with the young person? How does their anxiety present itself, who notices it and how is it managed, including what strategies and skills do they use to feel better? A child's anxiety can also impact parents/carers and family life in general – you may have to do things a certain way or make adjustments for them.

Problematic anxiety occurs when we **overestimate** how likely or dangerous a worrying situation is and **underestimate** our ability to cope with it.

These are some of the observable signs of anxiety:

- complaints of tummy aches/feeling sick or headaches (particularly in younger children)
- other physiological symptoms associated with panic e.g. heart racing, tight chest, shortness of breath, feeling hot, sweaty palms and/or feeling lightheaded
- becoming quieter or withdrawn
- spending more time by themselves or becoming very clingy and 'needy'
- loss of confidence
- avoiding situations or activities
- disturbed sleep, including wanting an adult close by while falling asleep or wanting to sleep in a parents'/carer's bed

What can I do to help with - Anxiety, stress, and worry ...?

Having an anxious child can be a stressful experience that can leave you lacking in confidence and deskilled as a parent/carer. It is important to remember that your expertise puts you in the best position to make positive changes for your child. Here are some tips and resources if you would like some advice on how to do this.

- Talk to your child about anxiety and what some of the symptoms are. This can be particularly useful for young people experiencing uncomfortable physical sensations caused by the Fight, Flight, Freeze Response, as these can be scary and add to panic.
- Gently encourage them to face their fears in a graded, safe way. Breaking things down into small steps and adopting a 'give it a go' attitude will help them learn that feelings of anxiety will pass and nothing bad will happen.
- Model calm confidence in your child. Young people quickly pick up on any signs we are worried for them and use this as evidence that their anxiety or worry is justified.
- Seize upon any opportunities to promote independence which can build confidence and reduce anxiety
- Try to cut down on giving reassurance which can work to keep anxiety going rather than address the underlying cause of the worry. Instead ask open questions about their worry. What do they think will happen? What evidence do they have this will happen? What could they do in the unlikely event this did happen?
- Practice deep breathing techniques with them to help reduce physical symptoms of anxiety

Helpful resources ...

Helping Your Child With Fears and Worries 2nd Edition: A self-help guide for parents by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willets

A practical, step-by-step guide to help parents/carers of children 5-12 years old understand what is causing children's worries and how to overcome them. This guide is frequently used by wellbeing practitioners in Guided Self-Help interventions with parents/carers.

[NHS Website: Anxiety in children](#)

[Young Minds: Helping Your Child With Anxiety](#)

[MindShift App](#)

App with information, relaxation tools and guidance on how to address anxiety by facing fears in a step-by-step way

[MindEd](#)

Advice for families