

Pastoral Spotlight - Anxiety in Young People

Everybody experiences anxiety at some point in life. Anxiety is a natural response, useful in helping us to avoid dangerous situations and motivating us to solve everyday issues. All children and young people feel worried sometimes, and this is a normal part of growing up. At certain points, such as on their first day of school or before an exam, young people may become more worried, but will soon be able to calm down and feel better.

Anxiety can become a problem when a young person feels stuck in it, or when it feels like an overwhelming, distressing or unmanageable experience. If this kind of worrying goes on for a long time, it can leave a young person feeling exhausted and isolated, and limit the things they feel able to do.

If your child is struggling with anxiety, there are things we can do to help them – including providing emotional support, working on practical strategies together and finding the right professional help if they need it. Your child's Tutor, their Head of House, Mr Critchley, the Health Centre team and Amy the school listener, all work together to support the wellbeing of pupils at school. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any concerns about your child feeling anxious.

How to help an anxious child

If a child is experiencing anxiety, there are things that parents and carers can do to help. First and foremost, it is important to talk to your child about their anxiety or worries. Reassure them and show them you understand how they feel. If your child is old enough, it may help to explain what anxiety is and the physical effects it has on our bodies. It may be helpful to describe anxiety as being like a wave that builds up and then ebbs away again.

As well as talking to your child about their worries and anxiety, it is important to help them find solutions. For example, if your child is worried about going to a sleepover, it is natural to want to tell them not to go. However, this could mean your child feels that their anxiety will stop them from doing things. It is better to recognise their anxiety and suggest solutions to help them, so they can go to the sleepover with a plan in place.

Other ways to ease anxiety in children

- Help your child to recognise signs of anxiety in themselves. Anxiety might make them feel sick or make their heart race. Getting to know these signs can make them less frightening and overwhelming when they happen. It can also empower them to know when to ask for help or to do something to help themselves.
- Encourage your child to manage their anxiety and ask for help when they need it. Ask them what it feels like in their mind and body, and what things make them feel that way. It can be tempting to dismiss their worries because you want to reassure them, but it is important to empathise with their experience and validate their feelings.

- Children of all ages find routines reassuring, so try to stick to regular daily routines where possible. Help them do the daily things we know are important for our mental health; these are physical exercise, sleeping well, eating healthily, drinking water and spending quality time with loved ones. Regular exercise is particularly important for anxiety because it can help to reduce the symptoms in the body. It doesn't have to be strenuous – walking or gentle yoga can help.
- If you know a change, such as a house move, is coming up, prepare your child by talking to them about what is going to happen and why. If your child is worrying about things that are outside of their control, it might help to name together who is responsible for managing the problem – for example, you might say, “worrying about money is the parents’ job”.
- Practice simple relaxation techniques with your child, such as taking 3 deep, slow breaths, breathing in for a count of 3 and out for 3. You'll find more guidance for helping children with anxiety on the [Young Minds website](#)
- It might help your child to write down their worries and put them in a worry box, giving them a physical place where their worries can be 'held'. Get your child to write about or draw their worries and "post" them into the box. Then you can sort through the box together at the end of the day or week. [How to make a worry box: a guide for parents](#)

This animation '[The Stress Bucket](#)' illustrates how coping strategies can help to reduce stress levels.

When should we get professional help?

If your child's anxiety is severe, persists, and interferes with their everyday life, it is a good idea to get some help. A visit to a GP is a good place to start. The following websites have valuable information for supporting young people: [Young Minds](#), [Place2Be](#), [NHS](#), [Anxiety UK](#)

Parents and carers can get help and advice about children's mental health from Young Minds' free parent helpline on [0808 802 5544](tel:08088025544), from Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm.

Resources

Mind Shift <http://anxietybc.com/resources/mindshift-app> Mindshift is an app designed to help teens and young people cope with anxiety by teaching them how to relax, develop more helpful ways of thinking and identify active steps to help take charge of anxiety.

Positive Penguins <http://positivepenguins.com/> Aimed at 8-12 year olds, this app helps children understand their feelings and challenge negative thinking. Four positive penguins take children on a journey to help them better understand the relationship between what they think and what they feel.

SAM <http://sam-app.org.uk/> This is a self-help app for anxiety which includes a personal toolbox, negative thought buster, colouring exercise and information. Developed by

researchers at University of West England and winner of Best Anxiety App 2016 in the Healthline Awards.

Books Don't Worry Be Happy is a child's guide to dealing with feeling anxious. I Choose To Calm My Anxiety is a picture book of strategies for anxious children and is also available as a Kindle edition.

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