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**Anxiety**

**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.

**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.
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 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 your child could also try keeping a diary or a ‘worry book’. 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 our worries and not vice versa.
10. 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’.
11. 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.

**Books and resources that may be helpful:**

***What to do when you worry too much* - By Dawn Huebner**

*Is an interactive self-help book to designed to guide 6 -12 year olds and their parents through the cognitive behavioural techniques most often used in the treatment of generalised anxiety*

***The Huge Bag of Worries - by Virginia Ironside***

*3-6 years. This is a book exploring worries and anxiety to be used as a springboard into important conversations with children*

***Starving the Anxiety Gremlin* - by Kate Collins-Donnelly**

*This engaging workbook helps young people aged 10+ understand and manage anxiety*. Based on cognitive behavioural therapy principles, the activities will help young people to understand why they get anxious and how to use simple, practical techniques to manage and control their anxiety. Suitable to work through alone or with a parent

***The Kids Guide to staying awesome and in control* - by Lauren Brukner**

Packed with simple ideas to regulate emotions and senses, this book will help children aged 7-14 tackle difficult feelings head-on and feel awesome and in control

***Cards Against Anxiety - By Dr Pooky Knightsmith***

Includes a card pack and a book of tips and techniques

***Relaxation and mindful techniques and stories***

Continue to liaise with your child’s school and seek support and advice as necessary

