

Helping your child with anxiety

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear through a combination of physical sensations, thoughts and feelings. All children and young people feel worried sometimes, and that is a normal part of growing up. Anxiety can become a problem when a young person feels stuck in it, overwhelmed or distressed.



If your child is struggling with anxiety, there are things you can do to help:

Spotting the signs of anxiety

Physical symptoms:

- panic attacks, which can include a racing heart, breathing very quickly or shaking
- feeling sick
- sweating more than usual
- tense muscles or wobbly legs

Thoughts and feelings:

- nervous, on edge, panicky or frightened
- overwhelmed or out of control
- full of dread or an impending sense of doom
- worrying so much that it is difficult to concentrate and or sleep

Coping behaviours:

- withdrawing or isolating themselves
- repeating certain behaviours, actions or rituals
- eating more or less than usual
- self-harming



How to help your child in an anxious moment

Remember that everyone is different, but these strategies are a good place to start:

- **Breathe slowly and deeply together.** Count to five as you breathe in, and then five as you breathe out. If this is too much, try starting with shorter counts. If it's working, encourage them to breathe out longer.
- **Reassure them that the anxiety will pass and that they will be okay.** It can be helpful to describe it as a wave that they can ride or surf until it peaks, breaks and gets smaller.
- **Ask them to think of a safe and relaxing place or person.** It could be their bedroom, a grandparent's house, and a place in nature, or a favourite holiday.
- **Encourage them to do something that helps them to feel calmer.** This could be running, walking, listening to music, drawing, writing things down, watching a favourite film or reading a favourite book.



How to help your child manage their anxiety

Outside of moments when your child is feeling anxious, there are things you can do to help them manage their anxiety and feel better:

- **Talk with your child about their anxiety.** It can be tempting to dismiss their worries because you want to reassure them, but it's important to empathise with their experience and validate their feelings.
- **Find our tips on starting a conversation with your child.**
- **Make a worry box or self-soothe box.** 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'. Or they might prefer a self-soothe box, which they can fill with things that help them when they feel anxious.
- **Find out how to make a worry box here or a self-soothe box here**

Finding support

If self-help strategies are not making the situation better, it's a good idea to seek further support and information:

Anxiety UK

Provides information and advice for anyone struggling with anxiety. Live chat service available.

Phone: 03444 775 774

Text: 07537 416 905

Email: support@anxietyuk.org.uk

Opening times: 9.30am-5.30pm, Monday-Friday

No Panic

Supports people struggling with panic attacks, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), phobias and other anxiety-related issues.

Phone: 0300 7729844 or for Youth helpline: 0330 606 1174

Email: sarah@nopanic.org.uk

Opening times: 10am - 10pm, 365 days a year

The Mix

Offers support to anyone under 25 about anything that's troubling them. Email support available via their online contact form. Free 1-2-1 webchat service available. Free short-term counselling service available.

Phone: 0808 808 4994

Opening times: 4pm - 11pm, seven days a week

