



Anxiety: Ways to Support Your Child at Home

Has your child or teen been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder? There are ways to help them manage. Beyond any treatment they receive, below are tips to help you better understand your child's behaviors and support them at home.

Around 1 in 4 children have a diagnosed **Anxiety Disorder**. This means they experience stress or fear about everyday things in a way that interferes with their ability to function in daily life. Learn more about different anxiety disorders here: <https://mghclaycenter.org/topic/anxiety>

- Create a Coping Toolbox.** These are tools to help your child calm their feelings of anxiety. Preparing strategies in advance, when your child is *not* feeling anxious, can help to empower them. The toolbox includes steps they can take to make things better when anxiety occurs. Some ideas:
 - **Pictures of Loved Ones:** For separation anxiety, place photos of family by their bed, around the house, or in their backpack.
 - **Distracting Activities:** A walk outside, music or a podcast, a game, a video, deep breaths. These are examples of activities to help shift a child's focus to something else.
 - **Exercise:** Many kids and teens benefit from physical activities like a short run, a bike ride, lifting weights.
 - **Mindfulness:** Meditation or yoga can help lessen anxiety and stress. In addition to a routine, there are videos and apps that can be used on the spot.
- Talk About the Anxiety.** Have open conversations about anxiety with your child and family. Explain anxiety in a way that makes sense based on your child's developmental age. Ask them to share what worries them through open-ended questions like, "Can you tell me about your fears of going to the party?" Try not to assume what your child is worried about – let them tell you. Once you know, you can talk about which feelings are typical, which may be related to the disorder, and ways to use their Coping Toolbox to help manage.
- Validate Their Feelings.** While it is important for your child to know that everyone feels anxious sometimes, it is just as important to help them understand that very high levels of anxiety may be a sign they could use some help. Find this balance through empathy. Acknowledge their feelings, tell them you understand that their feelings are real, and that you'll work together to manage them.
- Reframe Negative Thoughts.** All anxiety disorders have one thing in common – the thought that "something bad might happen." But thoughts are not facts. Help your child turn negative thoughts into hopeful ones by talking about their fears, identifying what they are afraid of, and finding control they over the situation. For example, instead of thinking, "I know I'm going to fail," help your child to ask, "How do I know I'm going to fail?" or "What can I do so that I don't fail?"
- Reassure Them.** Many children with anxiety worry about failure or feel afraid and vulnerable. Remind your child that you believe in them and in their abilities. Remind them of times they succeeded, even when they thought they would fail. Finally, assure them that you will be there to support them no matter what happens.
- Help Prevent Avoidance.** The more a child avoids a situation that causes anxiety, the greater their fear can become and the more likely they will keep avoiding the situation. Help your child face their fears, while remembering to validate their feelings. One way to do this is by using tools from their Coping Toolbox.
- Model Ways That You Cope with Anxiety.** Children learn from watching adults. If there are times you feel anxious, your child will notice how you respond to it. Be open about your anxiety and let them see the ways you cope. It can be reassuring for them to see that others experience anxiety and have ways to manage.

Thanks for all you do to support a young person in your life. It really makes a difference.

For more resources on suicide and other topics, visit us online: mghclaycenter.org

