

Anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear that children and young people experience as a mixture of...

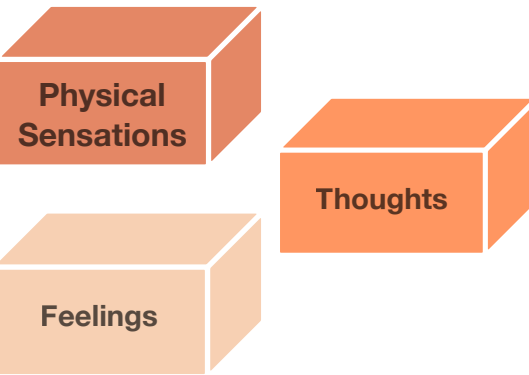
## Signs of Anxiety

Many parents are unsure whether their child's behaviour and worries are typical for their age. All children experience powerful emotions. To a young child, the world can be a scary and uncertain place.

Some children can become very worried about many situations and they may not understand these feelings. Younger children often show physical signs of anxiety rather than telling someone that they feel worried.

## UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY & WORRY IN CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

*A guide for parents and carers*



### Signs of anxiety can include:



All children and young people feel worried sometimes. It is a normal part of growing up.

- Sleeping over a friend's house
- Going to hospital
- Speaking out in class
- Taking an exam
- Going to a new school
- Having a new sibling



At times like these, their worries may increase. Most times, these feelings will pass and they will soon feel calm again.



### Did You Know?

As cavemen, we faced dangers, like dinosaurs and sabre-tooth tigers. Our brain (wanting to protect us from danger) designed a special alarm inside us that was set to go off when we're in danger. This alarm helped us fight danger, escape or hide. We call this the fight-flight-freeze response. However, dinosaurs or sabre tooth tigers don't exist anymore.

These days, our fight-flight-freeze response can activate from things like going to school, public speaking or taking an exam. Our brain acts like we are in danger (better safe than sorry!) when we might be perfectly safe. Our brains need reminding of this sometimes!

We can't turn it off, and some people's alarm system gets stuck in 'on' mode, which causes them to always feel ready for danger.<sup>1</sup>



### Handy Hint!

Scan the relevant QR code to watch a video that explains a little more about this!



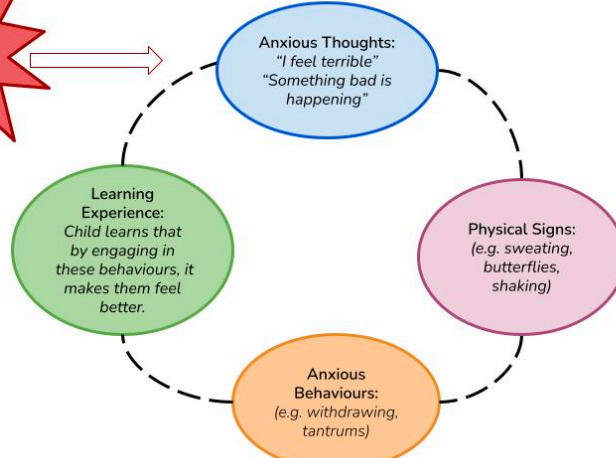
Children



Young People



Feared Situation  
(e.g. being asked to go to school)



### What Can Keep Anxiety Going?

Anxiety can feel more difficult when a young person feels stuck in a vicious cycle. This can make young people feel tired and alone, especially if it goes on for a long time.<sup>2</sup>

## TALK ABOUT IT

Being open and available to talk is one of the small things you can do every day to help your child.

### Top Tips....

- Choose times when they are calm
- Don't force them to share or make them feel pressured
- Create a safe and relaxed space where they will feel comfortable to open up about their fears and worries, so you can talk through them together
- Children and young people often find it easier to talk when doing another activity
- Spend quality time together having fun
- Talk about other things too to take their mind off their worries and help them relax
- Life can be busy so make the most of the small moments.

### Finding Time to Talk

- Go for a walk together (Don't forget the dog)
- Cook dinner together
- Bake a cake or cookies for a treat
- Do some arts and crafts
- Turn the car radio down
- Family mealtime (No phones at the table)
- Movie night (Let them choose one they like)
- Help them with their homework
- Technology free hour (Let them choose an activity to do in this time)

## SLEEP

What's great about sleep?

- It reduces the chemicals that cause stress.
- It improves learning and even helps us solve problems!
- Improves general mental health.
- Sleep better and longer = us feeling better for longer.

Remember: it won't work overnight.  
Give it at least a week.

## What You Can Do To Help

Have a tech-free hour before bedtime.

Have sweet stuff earlier in the day. Caffeine makes it hard to sleep

Stick to a routine.

Use sleep apps or listen to music

Avoid energy drinks

## EXERCISE

- Exercise doesn't have to be sweaty and painful. Can you do an activity that they find fun?
- Can your child walk the dog, or walk to school?
- Can you dance around the kitchen to your favourite tunes?

Remember: don't stress if you miss a session.

## FOOD & DRINK

- Try to limit your child's sugar intake.
- Encourage your child to drink up to 8 glasses of water a day.
- Try to include fruit or vegetables in every meal.
- Reduce the amount of salt.

Remember: eat consistently, make small changes.

## Avoiding Avoidance:

As parents, we want to minimise our children's distress. and this can lead to allowing our children to avoid situations, for example: school.

However, avoidance isn't always the best way to feel safe.

Instead, children need the opportunity to sit with their discomfort to learn that anxiety is temporary.

## 3 Tips to Avoid Avoidance:

1. Show you understand how they feel by saying something like: "***I know you are feeling worried right now,***" and encourage them by saying: "***and I know that this is something you can manage***".
2. Break situations down into smaller steps. For example: if **they don't like being away from you**, start with a **short amount of time** and build it up. This will build the child's confidence that it is a situation that they can manage.
3. Go **heavy with the praise** when they have put themselves in a situation they wanted to avoid.

## Helping In The Moment

### Breathing:

- High 5 breathing: look at your hand and use your eyes or a finger to trace the outline. Breathe in as you trace up, and breathe out as you trace down each finger.
- Box or triangle breathing: same as above, but imagine a different shape as you breathe.
- Balloon Belly breathing: Place your hands on your belly and feel it fill up like a balloon, then exhale.

### Mindfulness:

- 54321 (Notice 5 things you can see, 4 you feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste).
- Visualise: imagine yourself somewhere beautiful or somewhere you enjoy spending time.

### Body Relaxation:

- Body scan: Lie or sit and starting at your head or your feet pay attention to every body part and how it feels as you move down the body.
- Tensing muscles: Tense each of your muscles for a few seconds and then release.
- Pressure: place your hands together in a prayer like position, begin pushing through the tips of your fingers until your hand begin to part.

### Self Soothe:

- Engage and distract senses: have a bath, use essential oils, get a drink.
- Create a box: with your child, fill up a box with things that they find relaxing.
- Activity: do something that you enjoy.
- Be creative: colouring, art, free write the thoughts that come in to your head.

## Resources



You Can't  
POUR  
from an  
EMPTY CUP.  
**TAKE CARE  
OF YOURSELF  
FIRST.**

## Self Care for Parents

It can take time for parents to understand their child's worries, and for children to manage their own behaviour.

**Remember, change takes time.**

Most importantly, you can only ever give your best. But you also need to need to take care of yourself.

### References

1. Anxiety UK, 2022
2. Young Minds, 2022
3. National Charity Helping People With Anxiety - Anxiety UK. (n.d.). Anxiety UK. Retrieved April 25, 2022, from <https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/>
4. <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/blog/importance-sleep>
5. <https://www.psychom.net/sleep-improves-mental-health>

6. <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/sleep-problems/about-sleep-and-mental-health/>
7. Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, (2022), Guide: 7 ways to support children and young people who are worried. Available online: <https://www.annafreud.org/schools-and-colleges/resources/7-ways-to-support-children-and-young-people-who-are-worried/> (Accessed March 2022)
8. YoungMinds, (2021-2022), A guide for parents: Supporting your child with anxiety. Available online: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/a-z-guide/anxiety/> (Accessed March 2022)

If you continue to have significant concerns about your child, please don't hesitate to seek further advice from your GP.