

Tips for Parents Part 4 Anxiety in Children: How to reduce it.

In the current climate, your child may be suffering increased anxiety. This is understandable. We have put together some top tips to guide you.

1. Avoid over sharing. As a head teacher, I found that many parents 'over shared' information with their child. This would often be adult-like information that the parents felt their child could cope with OR the parents had no idea that their child had picked up on or overheard a conversation not meant for their ears. Sometimes I would hear parents say that their child was a 'friend' to them and they could cope with helping the parent to sort out problems. I NEVER found this to be true. In fact, all too often, I would see children who had far too much responsibility placed on their shoulders. Although in today's world, we treat our children very differently to the Victoria era of 'They should be seen and not heard', this does not mean that we expect them to cope with adult like issues. Not at all. We teach them to question and be curious - yes. Please think very carefully about what you do and don't share with your child.

2. Never dismiss your child's worries. Listen carefully. You're not trying to eliminate their worries; you're trying to help them manage them. Accept their worries as genuine fears. Avoid laughing or making light of them. Equally, don't try to encourage your child to hide their worries: this could lead to your child trying to cover them up, leading to feelings of shame or embarrassment if they admit to them. This in turn can lead to the fear growing and becoming unmanageable.

3. Talk the situation through and problem solve with them. You can't promise that certain things will never happen, but you can say, "If this happens, we'll deal with it. Do you remember when this happened last year and it all turned out ok in the end?" "What could you do if this happens?"

4. Agree on your safe hygiene practice within your family and try not to over think it. Saying, "We will all do these things to minimise the risk as much as we can... That's all we can do". The virus Covid-19 has changed the way in which we regard hygiene for the moment. This could pose a dilemma for children and adults with obsessive compulsive type tendencies who were over hand washing beforehand. It is ok now if we are a little 'OCD' about handwashing and hygiene as we have a very unusual situation; however, when things return to normal we will be able to drop our 'OCD' behaviours again". Make a list of things you as a family are going to do to keep safe, based on good medical advice such as washing hands, keeping safe distances and washing food before eating or putting away. Then don't over think things or keep changing the rules or thinking aloud what if...

5. Avoid listening to non-medical professionals about the latest advice, or what to do if, especially on social media.

4. Check how much time you as a family are focusing on doing interesting, fun things and how much time you spend talking about the virus.

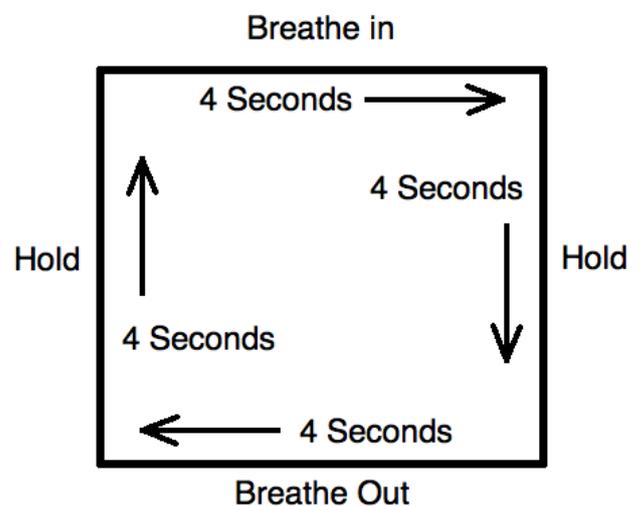
5. Check older siblings are not over sharing with younger siblings.

6. Try not to share your fears or worries. Check your body language. Often a child learns their fears from their parents, not necessarily in what they say but how they behave - these can be very subtle behaviours that you may not recognise in yourself. Check how you deal with anxiety and worries. Model the behaviours you think are healthy to see.

7. Don't avoid the situations that makes them feel anxious. Think about a plan you can come up with, based on taking small steps, in order to improve how they cope with the situation. If they are terrified about going to the doctor or dentist, you can't avoid this, but you can tell them that you will help them to manage their fears. "At this current time, this situation is making you feel very worried - 8 on a scale of 1 to 10; however, next time it will probably be easier. Over time this fear will dampen down".

Strategies for Calming:

- 'Square Breathing' - as simple as it sounds. I have used this with individual children and in assemblies. It can help to focus children's minds especially if you do it together. Sometimes having a mantra to repeat together is helpful such as, "Everything will be OK. We will deal with anything together".



- 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

HOW TO DO IT:

This technique will take you through your five senses to help remind you of the present. This is a calming technique that can help you get through tough or stressful situations.

Take a deep belly breath to begin.

5 - LOOK: Look around for 5 things that you can see, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I see the computer, I see the cup, I see the picture frame.

4 - FEEL: Pay attention to your body and think of 4 things that you can feel, and say them out loud. For example, you could say, I feel my feet warm in my socks, I feel the hair on the back of my neck, or I feel the pillow I am sitting on.

3 - LISTEN: Listen for 3 sounds. It could be the sound of traffic outside, the sound of typing or the sound of your tummy rumbling. Say the three things out loud.

2 - SMELL: Say two things you can smell. If you're allowed to, it's okay to move to another spot and sniff something. If you can't smell anything at the moment or you can't move, then name your 2 favorite smells.

1 - TASTE: Say one thing you can taste. It may be the toothpaste from brushing your teeth, or a mint from after lunch. If you can't taste anything, then say your favourite thing to taste.

Take another deep belly breath to end.

5 4 3 2 1 Grounding Exercise



Useful Links:

<https://copingskillsforkids.com/calming-anxiety>

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/parents-and-young-people/information-for-parents-and-carers/worries-and-anxieties---helping-children-to-cope-for-parents-and-carers>

<https://childmind.org/article/what-to-do-and-not-do-when-children-are-anxious/>

<http://www.handsonscotland.co.uk/relaxation/>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/night-terrors/>