



## HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD DIAGNOSED WITH ANXIETY

Childhood Anxiety is more common than many people realize. Around one in 14 children have an experience with anxiety: this means levels of stress or fear about everyday things that interfere with their day-to-day life in a significant way.

Anxiety is manageable with the right treatment and support.

Let this guide offer you tips to better understand the behaviors related to anxiety. This is not a substitute for professional help, but we hope it helps you best support your child at home.

- 1. Create a Coping Toolbox.** These are tools to help your child calm their feelings of anxiety. Choosing and 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:
  - **Have pictures of loved ones on hand:** For those with separation anxiety, place photos of family by their bed, around the house, or in their backpack.
  - **Create a distraction from worries:** Take a walk outside, listen to music or a podcast, search for an inspiring video to watch online, or take deep breaths to shift a child's focus to something else.
  - **Exercise:** Many children and teens can benefit from activities like a short run, a bike ride, or lifting weights.
  - **Practice mindfulness:** Mindful meditation and yoga are useful for lessening anxiety and stress. In addition to a regular class, there are videos and apps that can be used at home.
- 2. Talk about the anxiety.** Have open conversations about anxiety with your family and child. Think about your child's age and developmental level to explain anxiety in a way that makes sense. 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.
- 3. Validate their feelings.** It is important to let your child know that everyone feels anxious sometimes. It is just as important to let your child know that you can help if they are experiencing levels of anxiety or fear that interfere with everyday activities. Acknowledge your child's feelings, and let your child know that you understand that their feelings are real, and you'll work together to manage their anxiety.

- 4. 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 helping them to find ways to manage 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?”
- 5. Reassure them.** Many children with anxiety worry about failure or feel afraid and vulnerable. Remind your child that you believe in them and 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.
- 6. Help to prevent avoidance.** The more a child avoids a situation that causes anxiety, the greater their fear can become and the more likely they will continue to avoid the situation. It is better to help your child face their fears, while remembering to validate their feelings (tip #3). One way to do this is by using tools from their Coping Toolbox (tip #1).
- 7. Share your experiences openly.** Children learn from watching adults. If there have been times when you have experienced anxiety and had a positive outcome, share that experience with your child. It can be reassuring and helpful for your child to know that you were successful in finding ways to manage your anxiety.
- 8. Take care of yourself.** It can be overwhelming to support a child with anxiety. You are a great parent for learning how to help. Remember, all parents need a break. It’s important to find time to take care of yourself. Use the activities and supports that will help you to recharge your batteries.
- 9. You are not alone.** Just as your child is not alone in this, neither are you. Look for a [support group in your area](#) to connect with other parents/caregivers who are experiencing similar situations with their children.

Anxiety is treatable. It helps to stay open and honest about emotions within your family. Stay connected to your child’s primary care doctor and make sure your child feels comfortable being open with them, too.

Need more information on anxiety disorders in children, including signs and symptoms?  
<http://bit.ly/PTEACH-Family>

Interested in learning more about the different treatment methods for anxiety disorders?  
<http://bitly.com/OMH-Anxiety>

*Special thanks to the Project TEACH Parent Advisor Group, who helped to develop this handout.*