

Anxiety in Children

Just like adults, children and young people feel worried and anxious at times. Regardless of their age, this may be a difficult time for them. Some may react right away, while others may show signs of difficulty later on.

Spotlight on... Managing children's anxiety

How a child or young person reacts can vary according to their age, how they understand information and communicate, their previous experiences, and how they typically cope with stress. Anxious children often show behaviours that can be stressful for parents or caregivers. These behaviours should be seen as 'care-seeking' rather than 'attention-seeking'. Parents and practitioners need to be patient with the children in their care and understand that it may be anxiety that is triggering these difficult behaviours.

Consider the following steps to help manage children's worries:

- **Noticing changes** - Look out for changes in children's behaviour. Signs may be displayed through their emotions, they may be upset, distressed, anxious, angry or agitated, or they could come through in their behaviour if they become more clingy or more withdrawn. Babies and infants may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more. Pre-school children may return to old behaviours, such as toileting accidents, bed-wetting, or being frightened about being separated from their parents. They may also struggle to engage in play with children their own age, have tantrums or have difficulty sleeping. Older children may feel sad, angry, or afraid and not know why they are having angry outbursts or have trouble concentrating. Children may also experience the feelings of anxiety physically, for example, they may have stomach ache or their heart rate will quicken. Children may feel less anxious if they are in a safe and supportive environment where they are encouraged to express and communicate their feelings.
- **Talking about feelings and worries** - Talk to children about anxiety, what is happening in their body and why it happens. Many children don't know what they are feeling when they are anxious, and it can be very frightening and overwhelming. Non-verbal children or those with a special educational need or disability, who communicate differently to their peers, may rely on you to interpret their feelings. Tune in, listen to them and acknowledge their concerns, and give them extra love and attention if they need it. Where possible, it can be helpful to explain any upcoming changes to routine and circumstances before they happen and help them to plan. If children are old enough, it can help to explain what anxiety is and the physical effects it has on our bodies. Help them to recognise anxious feelings so they can tell when they are becoming anxious and can ask for help. Turn an empty tissue box into a "worry" box. Encourage the child to write about or draw their worries and "post" them into the box. Then you can sort through the box together at the end of the day or week.
- **Sharing clear information about the situation** - All children and young people want to feel that they are safe. Talking openly about what is happening and providing honest answers to any questions they have will offer reassurance. Explain what is being done to keep them and their loved ones safe, including any actions they can take to help, such as washing their hands regularly. Use words and explanations that they can understand and make sure you use reliable sources of information such as the GOV.UK or NHS website. You may not have

all the answers to all the questions children ask, but it important to focus on listening to their concerns and acknowledging their feelings to help them feel supported.

- **Being calm** - Children and young people react, in part to what they see from the adults around them. When parents and practitioners deal with a situation calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Practice simple relaxation techniques with children, such as taking three deep, slow breaths, breathing in for a count of three and out for three.

Want to know more?

The [Children's Commissioner](#) has developed a guide aiming to answer older children's questions about coronavirus, tell children how to stay safe and protect other people and how to help them make the best of their time at home.

[NSPCC](#) have put together information to help parents, whether they are working from home with their children for the first time or supporting children with anxiety due to coronavirus.

Share [Young Minds](#) website with parents to offer tips, advice and where to get support for their child's mental health during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Childline have created a [Calm Zone](#) which shares lots of way to feel calmer. It's about finding what works for individuals. There are breathing exercises, activities, games and videos to help let go of stress.

Public Health England have provided advice for parents and carers on looking after the [mental health and wellbeing of children or young people](#) during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

If anxiety is severe, persists, and interferes with a child's everyday life, it's a good idea to get some [help](#).