
Anxiety: Tips for Parents

Anxiety is on the rise in young people and can be really debilitating. It can be tricky to know what is causing a child's anxiety and how best to help. Below are seven tips from experts and parents for supporting children with anxiety.

Tip 1 — Understand what anxiety is

Anxiety is an emotional alarm system that keeps us safe, but it can become unhelpful if it is triggered all the time. Explaining how anxiety works — in the mind and the body — helps children understand what is happening and find healthy ways to cope.

Tip 2 — Distract them in the moment of panic

If your child is having a panic attack, help them focus on their breathing and lengthen their exhales until the feeling passes. Noticing what they can see, hear, and touch around them can help them feel more grounded while the panic subsides.

Tip 3 — Talk about it afterwards

Once things are calmer, talk with your child about what happened. Help them identify what is really going on. When you understand the cause of the anxiety, you can explore together what they need in order to cope.

Tip 4 — Avoid avoidance

It is natural to avoid situations that make us anxious, but in the long term this does not help. Avoidance brings short-term relief, but prevents children from developing the skills they need to handle difficult situations.

Tip 5 — Support, don't accommodate

Supporting a child means accepting and validating their fears while also building up their belief in their own ability to cope. Acknowledge how scared or uncomfortable they are feeling — then work together to find a way forward.

Tip 6 — Sleep, diet, exercise, and connection

A good routine matters for mental health. Make sure your child is getting enough sleep, eating well, staying active, and having time with family and friends.

Tip 7 — For persistent difficulties, seek help

If your child's anxiety is getting worse, they are reluctant to go to school, or they are struggling to cope, speak to the school or ask for help from your GP.