
Managing Anxieties Around School

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Some suggestions for parents if children are struggling to go to school, feel anxious in the lead-up to returning after holidays, or are worried about moving to a new school or class.

Giving time and space to your child

Create a culture in the family where emotions are talked about. Make time daily to be with your child without other distractions — to enjoy time together and have conversations. This opportunity sometimes leads to a child sharing concerns.

Modelling calmness

Parents may be struggling with their own worries. Be aware of how you model your own anxiety.

Listening and validating

Listen to your child. Hear what their concerns are. Acknowledge their feelings and let them know that you understand it is tough for them.

Limit reassurance

Asking questions is helpful, but giving excessive reassurance is not. It is very tempting to reassure your child — it may relieve anxiety in the short term, but in the long term it keeps it going. Instead, listen and ask them what they think and what they think will help.

Deferring worries

Encourage children to make a list of worries and agree a deferred time to discuss them — for example, at 4pm spend 30 minutes going through the list. This can help to contain worries, and often the worry feels less distressing at the deferred time.

Encourage a growth mindset

Help children recognise that building tolerance of uncertainty can help them manage their anxiety and develop their growth mindset — like building up "mind muscles". Encourage children to ask questions and support problem-solving skills so they can consider their own solutions.

Rewards

Use rewards to help children manage their anxiety about getting to school and coping once there. These should be age-appropriate and modest.

Taking care of self and others

Encourage children to think about their own mental health: eating healthily, exercising, doing things they enjoy, and spending time with others. Practise being kind to themselves and to others.