

ANXIETY

Some strategies that you can use with your child

- Help children get rid of ANTS (Automatic Negative Thoughts). Have your child draw ants (the insect version) to make this exercise fun. Then help them talk about, write, or draw ants with negative thoughts next to them. Typical ANTS may be: “Nothing ever goes my way,” “I’m a loser because everyone else thinks I am,” or “I’m a failure.”

The trick is to then change the unhelpful thoughts to more helpful and positive thoughts, for example, saying or thinking, “If I keep practicing, I’ll get better,” or “Even if I make a mistake, I can learn and do better the next time,” the child’s anxiety levels will be reduced.

- Use exposure strategies. Use a strategy called Introceptive Exposure. For example, for a child who reports shortness of breath due to anxiety, have a child sit with you and hold his breath. The goal is for your child to learn that the physical symptoms can be experienced without the anxiety and panic. Following the spirit of exposure being far better for helping anxiety than avoidance, it is important that you stay calm and firm in encouraging your children to confront and work through their fears.
- Guide your child with calming visualisations. Help your child to imagine a relaxing place and to notice the calm feelings in his body. Or, have him imagine a container (such as a big box or a safe) to put his worries in so they are not running wild in his mind and bothering him when he needs or wants to be doing other things.
- Encourage your child to make a “things that went right today” list at the end of the school day. This helps children prone to anxiety to develop an optimistic cognitive style. This can be made into a Success Journal or a ‘jar of smiles’ where each one is put on to a slip of paper and folded in to a jar. During episodes of anxiety, your child can remove some ‘smiles’ to help realise that things do go right.
- Get your child a hoodie. Most children who experience anxiety like to feel safe and a hoodie can give that feeling of hiding without actually hiding!
- Use blankets and sheets rather than duvets – blankets fold around your body and give a feeling of being held whereas duvets sit on top.
- Use blackout blinds for the bedroom and only allow bed as a place to sleep. This may mean setting up a strict bedtime routine to allow the body to calm naturally.
- Restrict screen time after the evening meal. Blue light is not good for you and screens can be addictive which can fuel anxiety.
- Use weighted products to help ground your child. This can be as simple as heatable wheaty bags that can be draped around necks or doorstops that can sit on laps – you don’t have to pay a fortune.
- Practise grounding techniques – more info can be found here: <http://www.unseenfootprints.com/grounding-exercises-children/>
- Keep reminding them of the science behind the anxiety – the book ‘Hey, Warrior’ is a good starting place.

- Have a routine set up for when episodes may occur such as sit in their room and take out their jar of smiles or use the grounding techniques.
- Remind your child that it's normal to feel anxious.
- Speak to your school if there is an issue – schools have vast experience in dealing with anxious children and can give more unique guidance for your situation.
- Remember that it's one tiny step at a time which will build and build until the anxiety is calmed

List of websites that can be useful:

- www.youngminds.org.uk
- www.anxietyuk.org.uk
- www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anxiety.asp
- www.minded.org.uk
- www.anxietybc.com
- Mindshift is an excellent website and downloadable App for young people.

Please also ask your schools for access to some of their resources so you can see for yourself if they may work for your child.