**10 Tips to help an Anxious child**

It is a natural reaction for parents to anticipate a child’s fears and try to protect them from feeling worried or anxious. Here are some tips, for Parents, to help children escape the cycle of anxiety.

**1. The goal isn’t to eliminate anxiety, but to help a child manage it.**

None of us wants to see a child unhappy, but the best way to help children to overcome anxiety isn’t always to remove stressors that trigger it. It’s to help them learn to manage their anxiety and function as well as they can, even when they’re anxious.

**2. Don’t avoid things just because they make a child anxious.**

Helping children avoid the things they are afraid of will make them feel better in the short term, but it reinforces the anxiety over the long run. If a child in an uncomfortable situation gets upset, starts to cry—not to be manipulative, but just because that’s how they feel—and their parents whisk them out of there, or remove the thing they are afraid of. What the child has learnt is a coping mechanism, that cannot always be used, try and help the child to problem solve.

**3. Express positive—but realistic—expectations.**

You can’t promise a child that their fears are not going to happen —that they won’t fail a test, that they will have fun ice skating, or that another child won’t laugh at them on the playground. But you can help your child gain confidence in how they deal with it. Talk about ways to manage it, and that, as they face their fears, the anxiety level will drop over time. This will build resilience and give your child the confidence dealing with different situations.

**4. Respect their feelings, but don’t empower them.**

It’s important that understanding doesn’t always mean agreeing. So if a child is [terrified about going to the doctor](https://childmind.org/article/help-kids-scared-of-going-to-the-doctor/) because they are due for a injection, you don’t want to belittle their fears, but you also don’t want to amplify them. You want to listen and be empathetic**,**help them understand what they are anxious about. Normalise what they are feeling by letting them know that lots of people would be afraid, it’s a natural reaction. The message you want to send is, “I know you’re scared, and that’s okay, and I’m here.

**5. Don’t ask leading questions.**

Encourage your child to talk about his feelings, but try not to ask leading questions— “Are you anxious about ….? Are you worried about …..?” To avoid feeding the cycle of anxiety, just ask open-ended questions: “How are you feeling about ……?”

**6. Stay Calm.**

What you don’t want to do is be saying, with your tone of voice or body language: “Maybe this *is* something that you should be afraid of.” Let’s say a child has had a negative experience with a dog. Next time they are around a dog, you might be anxious about how they will respond, and you might [unintentionally send a message](https://childmind.org/article/how-to-avoid-passing-anxiety-on-to-your-kids/) that they *should*, indeed, be worried.

**7. Encourage Positive thinking**

Sometimes just a change of mind set can make all the difference. Keep pointing out the positives in a situation. It’s about really encouraging them to engage positively in life and enjoying the little things.

**8. Try to keep the anticipatory period short.**

When we’re afraid of something, the hardest time is really *before* we do it. So another rule of thumb for parents is to really try to eliminate or reduce the anticipatory period. If a child is [nervous about going to a doctor’s appointment](https://childmind.org/article/help-kids-scared-of-going-to-the-doctor/), you don’t want to have discussion a long time before you go; some children are likely to get more keyed up. So just try to shorten that period to a minimum.

**9. Think things through with the child.**

Sometimes it helps to talk through what would happen if a child’s fear came true—how would they handle it? A child who’s [anxious about separating from their parents](https://childmind.org/article/what-is-separation-anxiety/) might worry about what would happen if they didn’t come to pick them up. So we talk about that. If your Mum/Dad doesn’t come at the end of football practice, what would you do? “Well I would tell the teacher they are not here.” And what do you think the teacher would do? “Well he would call my Mum/Dad. Or he would wait with me.” For some children, [having a plan](https://childmind.org/article/behavioral-treatment-kids-anxiety/) can reduce the uncertainty and reduce the anxiety.

**10. Try to model healthy ways of handling anxiety.**

There are multiple ways you can help kids handle anxiety by letting them see [how you cope with anxiety yourself](https://childmind.org/article/how-to-avoid-passing-anxiety-on-to-your-kids/). Kids are perceptive, and they’re going to take it in if you keep complaining on the phone to a friend that you can’t handle the stress or the anxiety. I’m not saying to pretend that you don’t have stress and anxiety, but try to let your child hear or see you managing it calmly, tolerating it, problem solving and sharing the feeling of getting through it.