

Coping with Anxiety

Fear and anxiety are normal responses to events that are scary. Below are ways in which you can help your child work through these difficult situations:

Demonstrate Empathy and Show Them Compassion

Acknowledge their fears, listen to what they have to say, and re-state or paraphrase what they tell you to show that you understand. Teach them to pay attention to how their body reacts when they begin to feel overwhelmed and recognize when they need to take steps to calm down.

Normalize Their Anxiety

After you have validated your child's anxiety, it's often helpful to let your child know that anxiety is a normal response to events that are scary. Provide them with examples of how other people, or even you, have coped with their anxiety. Let them know it is okay to take a break from the situation and do something to calm down.

Address Their Negative Thinking

People with anxiety may think that the worst is going to happen, and if it does, they won't be able to manage it. Talk with your child and help them to learn to identify inaccurate thoughts. Then, your child can practice replacing their negative thoughts with more positive ones.

Prevent Avoidance Behaviors

We are all tempted to avoid things that frighten us. Avoidance of feared situations prevents people from learning that they can cope with their fears. Try to prevent avoidance behaviors by encouraging your child to face his/her fears and cope constructively.

Model and Reinforce Brave Behavior

Remember to be a coping model for your child. You can talk about a time that you felt anxious, how you coped with it, and how the outcome may have been better than you expected. Be sure to also praise and reward your child when he/she faces her fears and copes effectively!

Panic Attacks

What is a panic attack?

- A panic attack is when your body thinks you are in danger. It starts to get ready to fight or run away from the danger even though you are safe.
- During a panic attack, you may feel suddenly afraid. This can cause your heart to beat fast, feel dizzy, have a stomachache, feel like you are floating, or experience numbness in your hands and feet. You can get sweaty and want to run away.

What can you do to stop a panic attack?

- Stay where you are; if you are safe, do not run. Try to stay still until the panic attack goes away, usually within 10 minutes.
- Calm your breathing. Take slow breaths that make your belly go out. Breathe slowly through your nose.
- Talk to yourself. Tell yourself that you are going to be OK. Distract yourself by thinking about something that makes you feel peaceful.

How can you keep from getting panic attacks?

- Do things that will make you worry less. Relax, do things you enjoy.
- Get exercise. This helps your body relax.
- Make sure you get enough sleep at night.
- Talk to a counselor. A counselor can help you learn to cope with bad things, so you feel less worried and stressed.

Changing the Channel

- Did you know that you can choose what you want to think about?
- Imagine that what you are thinking about is like watching a TV channel.
- What are you thinking? What kind of thoughts are you having? Are your thoughts calm, sad, happy, angry, worried, good or bad?
- Now, think about what you would want on your happy and feel good channels. Choose 2 different things you could put on these 2 channels that help you feel good. What are these 2 things? Maybe thoughts of petting your dog, playing sports, your favorite music, favorite food, playing your favorite game, or whatever feels good to you.
- If you begin to have negative thoughts, pretend you are picking up a remote control and use it to “change the channel” to one of your happy/feel good channels. Then imagine you are watching what you had already decided to put on that channel.
- Practice “changing the channel” in your mind to your happy/feel good channel.
- Do you feel better when you watch this channel?
- “Change the channel” whenever you have negative or unhappy thoughts/feelings.

How to Belly Breathe

Belly breathing can be very helpful in decreasing stress/anxiety.

1. Place one hand on your belly, above your belly button, and one hand on your upper chest.
2. Relax your belly.
3. Breathe in through your nose, filling your lungs with air.
4. Let your lungs fill downward and make your bottom hand move.
5. Pretend there is a balloon in your belly and try to blow it up.
6. Avoid breathing through your chest and raising your shoulders.
7. Breathe out slowly, as if you are blowing a bubble. Feel the belly move.

How to tell if you are belly breathing:

Place one hand on your belly above your belly button and one hand on your upper chest. Just breathe as you usually breathe and notice which hand moves more. If the bottom hand moves more, great, that's a belly breath. If the top hand moves more, that's a chest breath, which is the same as anxious breathing. **Or try the following:** Lie down on your back. Place an object on your belly such as a small stuffed animal, book or cell phone. Attempt to make the object go up and down as you breathe.

Use belly breathing to do the following exercise:

Inhale through your nose:1-2-3-4. Exhale gently through your mouth with lips puckered, like blowing a bubble: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8. Repeat 3-4 times.

Parents: This breathing technique is helpful in turning off the stress response and can help kids and teens calm down during moments of anger or anxiety.

Useful Apps

ReachOut Breathe- reduce the physical symptoms of stress and anxiety. Slow down your breathing and heartrate and increase your feelings of calmness with simple visuals. This also helps you recover from a panic attack more quickly.

DreamyKid Meditation App- Meditation activities, sleep stories, guided journey, and healing activities for your child. This app includes a timer and background music for each activity with new content added regularly.

Calm- Meditation and sleep stories app with new content being added daily.