

# WELL-BEING SNAPSHOTS K-7

## REDUCING ANXIETY

THINGS YOU CAN DO  
TO HELP REDUCE YOUR  
CHILD'S ANXIETY

VALIDATE THE  
Validating feelings  
of a child



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#### VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS

Validating feelings does not reinforce what they are afraid of or worried about. You are simply acknowledging that their feelings are normal. Validating their emotions will allow them to trust that you understand how they feel and puts you on the same page - this is a critical first step in calming your child.



#### SLOW THINGS DOWN

When you're in a rush to get your child to comply but they are experiencing anxiety, it helps to slow everything down. Take a moment to make eye contact, take a deep breath, and show them you aren't going to rush them. Collect yourselves and then move forward with a slower, calmer, confident pace.



#### HELP GROUND THEM

Offer your child a cold glass of water, ask them to take 5 slow, deep breaths with you, or get them to squeeze something soft. Using their bodies helps bring their minds back to the present, rather than fixated on what they are worried about in their future.



#### OFFER A TRANSITION ITEM

If your child is worried about separating from you, have them choose a small item that reminds them of you and allow them to take it with them. Or, if ending an activity to move to the next is overwhelming, offer them a task or challenge that occupies their attention as you transition.



#### EMPOWER THEM WITH CHOICES

Offering choices to a child helps them feel more in control, which is an antidote to anxiety. Provide 2-3 options that you are okay following through with, and encourage them to choose what works best for them.

Karen Peters, RCGC

Anxiety is an uncomfortable experience and if felt intensely, can be quite scary. It thrives when we feel incapable and out of control. It feeds off of uncertainty and situations where we feel unprepared or unsafe. Anxiety is not the same as worry - while we can use thoughts to manage big worries, anxiety doesn't live in our thoughts, but more in our bodies. It's our nervous system's physiological response designed to turn on when we perceive danger.

If we feel anxious in the face of real danger, it does what it's supposed to - it shuts our slow thinking brain off and ramps up our fight/flight instincts. First get out alive, then analyse the situation once we're safe. Anxiety itself is not a problem. However, if our alarm bells go off when there is no danger in the present, it can interfere with our day-to-day functioning. It can prevent us from showing up to school or work, it invites us to avoid social situations and taking on responsibilities. It tells us we can't handle things, so run or put up your fists!

When kids feel anxious, they might be clingy, avoidant, or complain of stomach or headaches. Or they might push back, argue, show frequent anger, or use their body to "defend" themselves. Anxiety can be generalized and experienced in all sorts of ways about all sorts of people, places, or situations. Or it can be specifically tied to a strongly negative experience, making triggers of their anxiety more clearly recognizable.

It can be tempting to make the world easier for kids with anxiety because it is difficult to watch them struggle so much from day to day. We might help them avoid doing what makes them anxious to alleviate their discomfort and panic. What we know about anxiety is that avoidance makes it grow and take root. The more often we obey our anxiety's wishes, the more power it has and the more difficult it becomes to combat down the road.

These steps can help give your child the tools they need to manage it:

1. Name the anxiety and help your child to understand what it's doing in their body and why.
2. Separating your child's anxiety from who they are as a person - overactive anxiety is the problem, your child isn't.
3. Show compassion for their experience of it - validate the feeling.
4. Learn skills to calm your nervous system.
5. Partner with your child to set goals for facing their fears (not avoiding them).
6. Break the problem down into small steps towards their goal.
7. Follow through supportively and let them know you believe in them.

For more information, check out the listed resources. Anxiety is one of the most treatable conditions; conquer it as a family and everyone benefits! ●

#### RESOURCE LINKS:

[Parenting in the Trenches Podcast, Series 1 Episodes 1-5](#)

[My Kids Locker 3 part series, podcast for kids](#)

[1.](#) [2.](#) [3.](#)

[Anxiety Canada](#)

[When Anxiety Presents as Anger, FamilySmart ItK](#)

[CBT for the Family: home based learning to reduce anxiety](#)

[Blog post: Managing back to school anxiety](#)

Karen Peters

