

10 Tips on How to Help Your Young Child Manage Anxiety

Tips:

1. Establish daily routines so your child can feel that their lives are predictable and ordered, but do not become overly rigid. Order helps children feel safe, including safe to try new things. Rigid structures undermine their ability to adjust to novel situations.
2. Never dismiss your child's worries and feelings. Simply telling your child not to worry may make him or her feel bad about themselves and could make them isolated. Take their fears seriously and give reassurance grounded in facts they can understand. E.g., "I know that you are worried that a tsunami might flood our house. But our house is very, very far away from the ocean, so the water would never reach us, no matter how much there would be."
3. Listen to your child's concerns and feelings and try to understand the exact nature of their anxiety, for example, "I can tell that you are really worried about my going on this trip. What are some of the things you scared about?" You need to know the specific thoughts your child has that are frightening before you can come up with truly helpful coping strategies.
4. Help your child anticipate challenging situations and what s/he child can do, e.g., "There will be some kids at Jamie's birthday party you don't know. And I know that might be a little scary for you. But your friend Anne will be there too. How about we'll go find Anne as soon as we get there?"
5. Do not put pressure on your child to try out things that they are afraid of. Pressure will only generate counter-pressure, more anxiety in this case. Instead, confidently encourage your child to think about small steps they could manage or try out, such as staying in the new classroom with you until they feel safe enough to let you go.
6. Never trick your child into believing situations will not be challenging when you know they really are, e.g., not telling your child that or he or she will get shots during the doctor's visit. This will only make your child more prone to anticipating the worst even in the most benign situations. Instead, calmly tell your child in advance what

will happen, and spend time developing coping strategies, e.g., “Would you like me to tell you the doggie story when you start getting scared?”

7. Get your child involved in physical activities that s/he enjoys. This will help with their sense of accomplishment and self esteem, and also will provide mood boosting exercise.
8. Think about slowing down your family’s pace and busy schedule. Children need down time by themselves and with their family to decompress, engage in familiar activities, express their creative side in an unstructured way, and get their emotional cup filled by getting your attention and companionship.
9. Set clear behavior rules and limits. They help your child know what is expected. Follow up with consistent consequences if your child misbehaves, but do not let your feelings of anger, frustration, or disappointment rule the moment. If those feelings get the best of you, your child will begin to worry that there is no room for his/her imperfections.
10. Become aware and work on your own anxieties before you try to help your child. If your child is anxious about separating from you at preschool, think about how their fear and crying will upset you, and how you can handle your own upset. E.g. get support from a teacher you trust, talk with a friend about it, think about what you can tell yourself in the moment that will help you cope. Remember, to provide calm, you first have to possess it.

Keep in Mind:

- Experiences of anxiety are part of life.
- Our role as parents is not to protect our children from all anxiety, but to teach them how to manage it.
- However, our role is to protect our child from unnecessary anxiety such as very scary movies or upsetting news coverage.
- The better we are able to manage our own anxiety, the better we will be at helping our children with their anxieties.

If, despite your best efforts, your child does not seem to be able to overcome fears or a general state of anxiety or worry, don’t delay seeking professional help.

To contact the Center for Children and Families, call 312-893-7119.