

# Anxiety

The essential feature of an Anxiety Disorder is fear, usually associated with future events, which is out of proportion to threats from the environment and which causes distress or interferes with normal routine, academic functioning, relationships or social activity.

## Possible Effects on Children

An Anxiety Disorder may have the following effects on children:

- ★ Constant fears about the safety of themselves and their parents
- ★ Excessive worry about things before they happen
- ★ Refusal with regards to attending school '
- ★ Frequent stomach aches and physical complaints
- ★ Become panicky or have tantrums when separated from parents
- ★ Find it difficult to meet new people
- ★ Need a lot of reassurance to try anything new
- ★ Preoccupations with cleanliness and hand washing
- ★ Find it difficult to relax and go to sleep



## Tips for Parents

### **Unhelpful Ways of Dealing with Anxiety in Children**

*Every child and every family are different, yet parents and children often slip into some patterns which may maintain the child's anxiety.*

**Excessively reassuring your child** – to an anxious child, reassurance is rewarding their anxiety. The more reassurance you give as a parent, the more reassurance your child will demand.



**Being too directive** – when parents tell children what to do and say in an anxiety-provoking situation or do things on behalf of their anxious child, s/he will learn that s/he is unable to handle the situation without help.

**Permitting avoidance** – when you let your child avoid his/her fears, he/she does not learn that chances are nothing bad will happen. Children must face their fear to really convince themselves that nothing bad will happen.

**Becoming impatient with your child** – becoming angry with your child will only encourage him/her to become more frightened and dependent. If you are losing patience, leave the situation and think about how you would feel a facing a fear. This will help you to understand your child's perspective.

## Helpful Ways of Dealing with Anxiety in Children

*In addition to avoiding things that are not be helpful for the child's anxiety, there are some things parents can do to reduce the anxiety that their child will experience in the future.*

**Rewarding non-anxious behaviour** – look out for any examples of bravery, no matter how insignificant and reward them. What seems small to you may be difficult for an anxious child. This will help your child to realise what he/she is capable of.

**Ignore undesirable behaviours** – ignore your child's anxious behaviour and attend again (give praise) when the anxious behaviour has stopped. Ensure your child knows why you are ignoring him/her and what he/she has to do to regain *your* attention. This is helpful to deal with reassurance seeking.

**Preventing avoidance** – encourage your child to start doing things that s/he is able to do, but which are slightly difficult for him/her. Gradually build up the degree of difficulty. This will help them to learn they the situation is not really dangerous and they can cope with it!



**Communicating empathy** – express your understanding about your child's Anxiousness to ensure s/he feels listened to and supported. Encourage your child to solve the problem rather than focus on how bad they feel.

**Prompt constructive coping** – prompt children to think for themselves to Handle anxiety-provoking situations. Children will gradually learn that they have the ability to solve problems for themselves.



**Model brave behaviour** – children learn how to behave by modelling others, in particular, their parents. The best type of model demonstrates that they experience worry or nervousness and they cope constructively in these situations.

### Anxious behaviour

Headache  
Hot flush  
Lump in throat  
Voice shakes  
Increased heartbeat  
Mouth trembles  
Sweaty palms  
Butterflies in stomach  
Trembling knees

### Brave Behaviour

Slow, deep breaths – stand tall  
Positive thoughts  
Calm Voice  
No tension in muscles  
Decreased heartbeat  
Problem solving  
Feeling confident