

Top Tips for Helping Kids Manage Panic

Help Your Child to Understand Their Panic

Help your child to understand the changes that happen in their body when they're having a panic attack. Knowing its anxiety will make things seem a bit less scary. You can say something like: 'when our head thinks we're in danger our fight/flight switch gets turned on and our body prepares to fight or flee from danger. Our heart works harder to pump more oxygen to our muscles; we breathe differently; and our blood pumps to our legs and away from our head which can make us feel dizzy. These things don't feel good, but none of these changes are harmful. Sometimes our fight/flight switch gets turned on by mistake when we're not in danger, but our body is very clever and has a built in safety switch that turns the fight/flight switch off when it doesn't need to be on. This safety switch means that our anxiety will always go away'

Know Your Child's Early Warning Signs

It's much easier to help your child cope with lower levels of anxiety than it is to help them cope with a full blown panic attack. Know your child's early warning signs so that you can intervene earlier rather than later. When you notice your child's early warning signs help them to calm down. Find out what they're worrying about and help them come up with a solution to their problem. If anxiety is making it too difficult for your child to think clearly, help them to do something calming until they feel ready to talk about what's going on.

Stay Calm

If your child is having a panic attack it's important that you stay calm. If they see you panic they may think that their anxiety is dangerous and harmful, which will make them feel even more anxious. Staying calm shows your child that you're in control of the situation and that you can help them. Your child's panic attack will resolve within minutes. The best intervention you can offer is to stay calm and offer reassurance that they're ok, that what they're feeling is just anxiety, and that it will go away soon.

Address Underlying Causes

If there's a clear trigger for your child's panic help them to address it. For example, if your child's panic attacks are triggered by a phobia help your child to gradually face and overcome their fear. If your child is having frequent panic attacks (more than 1-2 per month) or worries about having another panic attack (a symptom of panic disorder) speak to your GP about a referral to a child clinical psychologist.

Prioritise Sleep and Diet

Sleep and diet can affect anxiety. If sleep is a problem for your child, establish a bedtime routine and help your child relax before sleep.

think TOP TIPS

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PANIC DISORDER

A panic attack is a sudden surge of intense anxiety that's accompanied by physical symptoms like:

- Increased heart rate
- Sweating and feeling hot
- Trembling or shaking
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Dizziness
- Nausea

Panic attacks are a symptom of most childhood anxiety disorders so if your child has a panic attack they don't necessarily have panic disorder.

Kids with panic disorder worry about when they'll have another panic attack and about what their panic attacks mean. Some kids might worry that their panic attacks mean:

- They have a serious illness
- They're going crazy

Kids with panic disorder might also:

- Avoid places where they've had a panic attack before
- Avoid exercise and other activities that trigger symptoms like those of anxiety

This sheet covers tips for helping kids with panic attacks. If the panic attacks persist speak to your GP about a referral to a child clinical psychologist.