

Top Tips for Anxiety in Kids + Teens

Help Your Child to Understand their Worries

Take the time to listen to your child's concerns and show you're listening by giving your child your undivided attention. As you listen try to help your child pinpoint their worry (e.g. "It sounds like you're upset and don't want to go to school tomorrow. Are you worried about a test? Did something happen with your friends today?") Try not to be dismissive of your child's distress, remember as trivial as the situation might seem to you, it's real and distressing to them.

Avoid Jumping in with Solutions

Let your child know that there are things they can do to feel better and reassure them that you're here to help. Encourage them to brainstorm solutions to their problems and help them to come up with a plan for how they can put their solution into action. Try to avoid doing all of the problem solving on your child's behalf and give your child the time and space to come up with their own solutions. Jumping in with solutions might help your child to feel better in the short-term, but it won't help your child to develop the skills they need to cope with their anxiety independently in the longer-term.

Avoid Avoidance

When your child feels anxious they will want to avoid whatever it is that's making them feel this way. While avoidance will help your child to feel better in the short-term, in the longer-term it will actually *worsen* their anxiety. If there's an upcoming anxiety-provoking situation give your child time to be able to plan how they'll cope. Sit down with your child to figure out how you can make the situation more bearable for them – rewards can be effective for building motivation, but only if the rewards are meaningful.

Make Sleep and Diet a Priority

Sleep and diet can affect your child's anxiety. If your child is having trouble sleeping establish a bedtime routine and find ways to help your child relax before sleep. Try having a bubble bath, reading, or listening to soothing music. You can also help your child by encouraging a balanced diet. If your child isn't hungry or feels too nauseas to eat, offer their favourite foods or help them to eat smaller meals at more regular intervals throughout the day.

Address Underlying Causes

If there's a clear trigger for your child's anxiety and it's changeable, offer practical help. For example, if your child is struggling at school offer to help them with their homework. If your child is having trouble with their peers, ask if they'd like help coming up with a solution and help them brainstorm ideas.

CHILD ANXIETY

1 in 5 Australian children have anxiety but not all of these children will receive treatment.

Common types of anxiety in kids and teens are:

- Separation anxiety
- General anxiety and worry
- Specific phobias
- Social anxiety
- Anxiety about physical symptoms
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Unlike behavioural problems which are more obvious, symptoms of anxiety can be subtle and harder to detect. Some anxiety is also normal so it can be hard to tell the difference between normal and problem anxiety.

Signs and symptoms to look out for are:

- Persistent worry
- Reassurance seeking
- Regular headaches or stomachaches
- Distress in anticipation of anxiety provoking situations
- Sleep problems
- Changes to appetite
- Irritability and restlessness
- Trouble concentrating
- Wanting to avoid anxiety-provoking situations

This tips sheet covers strategies for helping kids and teens with anxiety. If your child's anxiety persists, speak to your GP about a referral to a clinical psychologist.