



Anxious About Anxiety

Many parents worry when their children feel anxious. Here are some ideas to help.

Anxiety is normal

It is important to remember that anxiety and worry are normal human emotions. Acknowledge children's feelings, even if they seem irrational. Telling children not to worry rarely helps; it can make them feel unheard or misunderstood. Being anxious is normal, but it does not feel very nice.

What is happening in the brain

When we are anxious, a part of the brain called the amygdala releases chemicals that can cause uncomfortable physical sensations. It cannot always tell the difference between real danger and something less threatening, a bit like a smoke detector that cannot tell whether the house is burning down or the toast has just burned.

Explaining this to children helps: "That tummy ache might be because you're worried, not because you're going to be sick." Common physical symptoms include tense muscles, stomach ache, shortness of breath, a racing heart, and feeling dizzy or faint. Understanding that these sensations are normal can stop them adding to the anxiety.

Helpful strategies to try

- Talking about it
- Deep breathing
- Getting some exercise
- Remembering a happy memory
- Brainstorming possible solutions
- Focusing on what went well today

Agree on a strategy together, give it a try, and review how it is going after a week or so.

When to seek extra help

If anxiety stops someone doing the things they want to do, or affects daily life, it is time to seek further support. Adults can contact their GP or self-refer to Steps to Wellbeing for talking therapies. For children, speak to your child's class teacher or the school's pastoral team, who can help access further support.