

Mrs Dowdell's Parenting Pointer

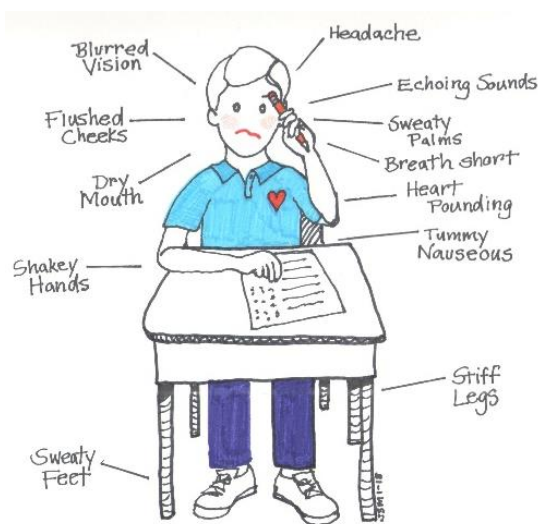
Anxious About Anxiety

I've had a number of conversations recently with parents who are worried about their children being anxious. Following on from the Anxiety Workshop last week, here are some ideas to think about ...



It's important to remember that anxiety and worry are normal human emotions. We need to make sure that we acknowledge our children's feelings, even if they seem irrational to us. It may be tempting to tell them not to worry, or to stop making a fuss. I know that when someone tells me to stop worrying it really doesn't work, I just get cross with them and feel like they either don't care or don't understand what I'm going through. So, being anxious is normal but it doesn't feel very nice.

When we are stressed or anxious a part of our brain, called the amygdala, releases chemicals and hormones which can cause all sorts of uncomfortable physical sensations. Our amygdala can't tell the difference between something that we need to be genuinely scared of, or something less threatening. A bit like a smoke detector that can't tell whether the house is burning down or we've



just burned the toast again. We can help our children by explaining this to them. For example, "that tummy ache is probably because you're worried, not because you're going to be sick". Or, "I wonder if you have a headache because you're feeling anxious?" Normal physical symptoms of anxiety could be, tense muscles (anywhere in the body but especially in the jaw and shoulders), stomach ache, shortness of breath, racing heart, feeling dizzy or faint. When children don't understand that these physical sensations are normal, it can add to their anxiety even further. We can reassure children that these unpleasant feelings happen to us all and help them to begin to make sense of what it happening in their bodies.

We can talk with our children about strategies they can try to manage anxiety. Some ideas to try could be, talking about it, doing some deep breathing, doing some exercise, remembering a happy memory, brainstorming possible solutions to the problem (although there won't always be any), finding ways to focus on what was good today, rather than what went wrong. Once we've agreed to try a strategy, give it a go and then review how it's going in a week or so.

What if anxiety has become a real problem? If anxiety stops us from doing things we want to do or negatively impacts our life on a daily basis, then we need more help. Adults can contact their GP or self-refer to Steps to Wellbeing in order to access talking therapies. If children are really struggling, speak with us and we'll try and work together to help, whether that be through support in school or outside agencies. By working together, we can support each other and our children and learn better ways of coping well and building resilience through tricky times.

If you are dealing with any of these issues and need advice or support, please get in touch at parenting@foundrylanprimary.co.uk