

Create the Calm



All kids worry ...
You can create
the calm



Haldimand-Norfolk
REACH

supporting children, families, communities

EVERYONE WORRIES - KIDS AND ADULTS

Everyone experiences anxiety at one time or another. It is normal to have anxiety at certain times like before a test or going someplace new or unfamiliar. Worries can be big or small.

WORRY AND ANXIETY DON'T LAST LONG

Anxiety feels uncomfortable and can be hard in the moment, but it gets better! Worries come and go, depending on what is going on.

WORRY AND ANXIETY SHOULD BE TALKED ABOUT

But for some reason, some kids (and adults) find it hard. Sometimes we're embarrassed. Sometimes we're confused and don't realize that what we are feeling is worry.

Sometimes we think that if we talk about it that it will make it worse (HINT: this is not the case!!). Sometimes, as parents, we think that something isn't a big deal when it is actually a big deal to our kids.

Let's break through those barriers and improve the opportunities for you and your child to talk more about their worries. The more your child talks and shares their anxieties, the more opportunities you have to *create the calm*.



PAY ATTENTION TO THEIR BEHAVIOUR

Anxiety doesn't always look like what we expect it too. Anxiety can look like anger, avoidance, defiance, refusing, sadness/crying, detachment, withdrawing, unexpected busyness and excitement, confusion, etc. Realize that anxiety could be at the root of some behaviours that we don't understand.

BE AN ACTIVE LISTENER

Show your child that you really care and are hearing what they say. Stop what you're doing, make eye contact, and really listen.

REALIZE THAT YOUR CHILD'S WORRIES ARE REAL

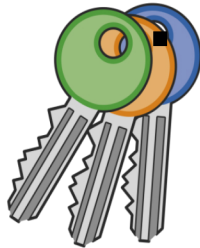
Minimizing or dismissing kids' worries serves to tell them that those thoughts/feelings don't matter, shouldn't happen and are wrong.

HELP NORMALIZE WORRY AND ANXIETY

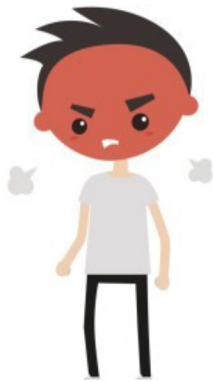
Be aware of your own worries and anxiety and how you work through them. Label and talk about your own worries about everyday things (if appropriate) so they can see there is nothing to feel embarrassed about.

Anxiety looks different in many ways. It could be . .

The desire to control people and events



Difficulty getting to sleep, or staying asleep



Feeling agitated or angry

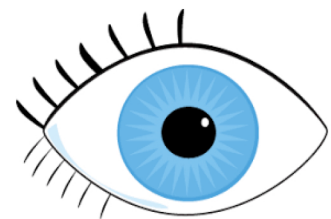


Defiance and other challenging behaviours

Having high expectations for self, including school, work and sports



Struggling to pay attention and focus



Pain like stomachaches and headaches



Crying and difficulty managing emotions

Phrases Kids Said that Were Code Words for "I'm Anxious"



"WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME?"

"I didn't realize I had anxiety and my parents didn't either. They just thought I was being dramatic when I would burst into tears crying, 'What's wrong with me?'"

Kylie L.

"I HAVE A HEADACHE."

"I used the excuse of feeling ill plenty of times to avoid going to school. I didn't realize I had anxiety at the time, but everything makes sense when I look back on it now. I wasn't just being 'lazy' back then."

Ada T.

"YOU DO IT."

"I had such a hard time placing an order for food that I would tell whoever I was with what I wanted and have them place the order."

Becky B.

"CAN'T WE STAY HOME?"

"I hated going out places because the noise and people bothered me. Now as an adult, I try to balance things, but it's still a challenge."

Elyse B.

"IS IT TIME TO LEAVE YET?"

"I always said this because crowds of even more than two people would trigger my anxiety. I couldn't wait till said events or functions were done."

Shannon C.

"CAN YOU TURN THE HALLWAY LIGHT ON FOR ME AT NIGHT?"

"I lived in fear for a few years that someone was going to come into my room and kidnap me. The light didn't help. I would lie in bed for two hours just waiting. I still don't sleep well."

Laura R..

"DON'T MAKE ME!"

"I'd tell my parents this when I didn't want to go to school in the morning. I still don't like going."

Josephine C.

"MY BODY IS UNCOMFORTABLE."

"I used to say, 'My body is uncomfortable, my body is uncomfortable!' I didn't know what it was at the time. Years later, I finally figured it out!"

Barb S.

"I DON'T FEEL WELL."

"My stomach hurts. I remember being sent home several times because I was sick and no one ever knew what was wrong with me. Of course, I couldn't have known on my own that I was just anxious."

Rebecca R.

"I DON'T WANT TO!"

"My 10-year-old has anxiety and he is rarely up for anything new. He digs his heels in and thinks of every excuse in the book to not attend a new event, activity, etc."

Reba S.

Feelings of anxiety are different for everyone, and sometimes these feelings are hard to describe. The best thing we can do as parents and adults in their lives is to be patient and understanding.

Credit: <https://themighty.com/2017/12/anxiety-as-a-child-kid-signs-phrases-code-words-anxious/>
Compiled by Harley Quinn





Be An Active Listener

PAY ATTENTION

Put down the phone, turn off the TV. Look at your child. Get down on their level. Make them your focus while you talk.

SHOW YOU ARE LISTENING

Nod, smile, turn your body and face towards them. Say "yes", "I hear you", "I'm listening".

REFLECT BACK

"What I'm hearing is . . ."
"Sounds like you're saying . . ."

CLARIFY

"What do you mean when you say . . ."
"Did I hear you say . . ."

HELP THEM IDENTIFY FEELINGS

"What are you feeling right now?"
"It sounds like you are feeling . . ."
"Are you feeling _____?"

LET THEM LEAD. AVOID INTERRUPTING.

Be patient. Pause. Allow for silence, they may have more to say and just need time. Ask if they're done before you talk.

PROBLEM SOLVE TOGETHER

Have an open mind. Ask for their ideas and thoughts. Ask if a solution will solve their problem. Work together, remember - there is more than one perspective to consider.

Validate

Validating a child means letting them share their thoughts and feelings without judging, criticizing, ridiculing, or abandoning them. You let your child feel heard and understood. You convey that you love and accept them no matter what they're feeling or thinking.

"I hear you"

"That sounds like it hurts"

"That must have made you feel . . ."

"That really bothered you, didn't it?"

"I can understand you would feel that way"

"I get what you're saying"

KEEP YOUR OWN FEELINGS AND REACTIONS IN CHECK

Now is the chance for your child to talk and feel heard. They need to feel they can say what they need to and be supported.

BEING AN ACTIVE LISTENER SHOWS YOUR CHILD:

- That you care about them
- That their thoughts and feelings matter
- That they are valued and important
- That they are heard

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Child and Youth Crisis Service 1-866-32-REACH

CALMING KITS

A calming kit encourages children to learn how to cope and gives them strategies to enable them to be the boss of their own emotions.

Calming kits can be created inexpensively, often with things you may have at home already.



When little people are overwhelmed by big emotions, it's our job to share our calm, not join their chaos.

L.R. Knost

WHAT TO PUT IN A CALMING KIT

Here's a list of items that you can put into a calming box:

- Small blanket
 - Playdough or silly putty
 - Pipe cleaners
 - Stress balls
 - Bubble wrap
 - Bag of tissue paper to rip
 - Scarves or fabric scraps
 - Spinning top
 - Bottle of bubbles
 - Pinwheels
 - Straws
 - Scratch and sniff stickers
 - Skipping rope
 - Book of yoga poses or yoga activity cards
 - Noise cancelling headphones
 - Chewing gum, hard candies or lollipops
 - Whistle, harmonica
 - Puzzle and books
 - Colouring books and writing utensils
 - Kaleidoscope
 - Eye mask
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TAKING TIME TO BREATHE

Calm breathing is a technique that teaches your child to slow down his or her breathing when feeling stressed or anxious.

When your child is feeling anxious, their breathing will change. When we are anxious, we tend to take short, quick, shallow breaths or even hyperventilate.

This type of anxious breathing can actually make the feeling of anxiety worse!

Doing calm breathing can help lower your child's anxiety, and give him or her a sense of control.



CALM BREATHING? HOW?

Step 1: Explaining calm breathing to your child

This is a tool your child can use anywhere, anytime! Other people will probably not even notice when your child is using this tool. Explaining that taking short, quick breaths actually increases their feelings of anxiety. Calm breathing will calm down their breathing, and their anxious feelings.

Step 2: Teaching the calm breathing techniques

- Take a slow breath in through the nose (for about 4 seconds)
 - Hold your breath for 1 or 2 seconds
 - Exhale slowly through the mouth (over about 4 seconds)
 - Repeat for at least 5 to 10 breaths
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Coping Tools: What Helps

- Read a book or magazine
- Hug or Climb a tree
- Journal or write a letter
- Use kind and compassionate self-talk
- Make a collage or scrapbook
- Rest, nap or take a break
- Go on a hike, walk or run
- Drink water
- Play a board game
- Do something kind
- Make and play with playdough
- Discover treasures in nature
- Take a shower or bath
- Exercise
- Drink a warm cup of tea
- Forgive, let go, move on
- Practice yoga
- Garden or do yardwork
- Jump on a trampoline
- Cuddle or play with your pet
- Practice gratitude
- Do a puzzle
- Blow Bubbles
- Smile and laugh
- Ride a bike or skateboard
- Create origami
- Cook or bake
- Ask for help
- Talk to someone you trust
- Build something
- Get a hug
- Visualize a peaceful place
- Stretch
- Make art
- Take slow, calming breaths
- Clean, declutter, or organize
- Use aromatherapy
- Cry
- Try or learn something new
- Listen to music
- Use a stress ball or other fidget toy
- Get plenty of sleep
- Kick, bounce or throw a ball
- Take or look at photographs
- Eat healthy
- Play outside
- Sing and/or dance



Things You Should NEVER Say to an Anxious or Worried Child



It can be very difficult to watch a child struggle with anxiety and worry, but the goal of the parent is to help the child learn to tolerate and cope with the feelings, not to try to remove all the potential triggers of anxiety from the child's life.

It's essential for parents to remain calm and positive. While a parent should not attempt to 'fix' the anxiety, kids do take their cues from their parents. The way you respond to their anxious thoughts, worries and behaviours can set them up for successful coping or increased anxiety.

With that in mind, avoid using these phrases when your child verbalizes anxious thoughts and feelings:

"DON'T WORRY"

You can't *will* away your child's anxiety by telling him not to worry. They are already worried and would stop if they could. This statement implies that the worries are unreasonable or unacceptable.

Try this instead: "Can you tell me more about your worries?"

"YOU'LL BE FINE"

Anyone who has ever experienced excessive anxiety or a panic attack knows that 'fine' is not something that resonates with an anxious mind. When a child's anxious mind is racing, they don't feel anything close to 'fine'.

Try this instead: "I am here to help you."

"HURRY UP!"

Anxious kids tend to move at a snail's pace. While some get caught in the trap of perfectionism, others are burdened with feelings of regret when making decisions.

Telling them to hurry up only increases feelings of guilt and helplessness.

Try this instead: "How can I help?"

Helpful Resources

BOOKS FOR PARENTS

The Whole Brain Child by Dr. Daniel Siegel

Self-Reg by Dr. Stuart Shanker

Why Smart Kids Worry and What Parents Can Do by Allison Edwards

Anxious Kids Anxious Parents by Dr. Reid Wilson

Helping Your Anxious Child by Dr. Ronald Rapee

Parenting the New Teen in the Age of Anxiety by Dr. John Duffy

BOOKS FOR CHILDREN AND TEENS

The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn

Worry Too Much by Dawn Huebner

Help Your Dragon Deal With Anxiety by Steve Herman

Please Explain Anxiety To Me! by Dr. Laurie E. Zelinger

Put Your Worries Here: A Creative Journal for Teens by Lisa Schab

Hey Warrior! by Karen Young

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