

PARENTAL PSYCHOEDUCATION PACKET

ANXIETY

As a parent, it's natural to want to protect and support your child through life's challenges. If you've noticed that your child seems more anxious than usual, understand that anxiety is a common experience for many children and adolescents. This pamphlet aims to provide you with valuable information on understanding anxiety in children and how you can support your child through their journey.

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

ANXIETY IS ANOTHER WORD FOR

Feeling worried, fearful, or scared.

ANXIETY IS NORMAL FOR CHILDREN AT ANY AGE

Such as if they need to take a big test at school or talk in front of a group of people. But if your child's anxiety gets in the way of normal activities, such as sleeping alone at night, playing outside, or going to school, they may need some extra support.



ANXIETY IS A NORMAL HUMAN EMOTION

Everyone experiences anxiety at various points in life

- However, when anxiety becomes excessive and interferes with daily activities, it may indicate an anxiety disorder. In children, anxiety can manifest in different ways, such as:
 - **Physical Symptoms:** Stomachaches, headaches, muscle tension, fatigue, and restlessness. Feel as if their heart is racing, sweating or blushing, shaking or feeling sick to their stomach, or feeling very cold or hot.
 - **Emotional Symptoms:** Excessive worry, irritability, fear of separation, perfectionism, and avoidance of certain situation
 - **Behavioral Symptoms:** Difficulty concentrating, seeking reassurance excessively, avoidance of activities or situations, clinginess, trouble paying attention or sitting still, and touching the crotch area (for young boys)

ANXIETY IN CHILDREN: RECOGNIZING SIGNS AND CHALLENGES

If your child is feeling anxious, they may not have the language or understanding to express it. They might also feel unwell or fatigued, displaying restlessness or tiredness.



WHY IS MY CHILD ANXIOUS?

There are several factors that can contribute to the development of anxiety disorders in children, including:

1

GENETICS

Sometimes, anxiety runs in families. If someone in your family has anxiety, your child might be more likely to experience it, too.



2

HOW THE BRAIN WORKS

Sometimes, how the brain works can make a child anxious.

3

THINGS AROUND THEM

Stressful things happening in a child's life, like moving to a new place, big changes, or difficult experiences, can make them feel anxious.



HOW CAN PARENTS HELP?

As a parent, you play a crucial role in helping your anxious child navigate their emotions and develop coping strategies. **Here are some tips:**

1 VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS

Acknowledge your child's emotions and *reassure them that it's okay to feel anxious*. Avoid dismissing their feelings or telling them to "just relax."

- Help kids talk about feelings. Listen, and let them know you understand, love, and accept them. A caring relationship with you helps your child build inner strengths.

it's okay to feel



your feelings

2 OPEN COMMUNICATION

Create a *supportive and non-judgmental environment where your child feels comfortable expressing their feelings and fears*.

- Encourage your child to open up about any fears and worries they have. Even if their fears seem irrational or exaggerated, let them know you care and think what they feel is important.

3 EDUCATE YOURSELF

Learn about anxiety disorders and understand what your child is experiencing. Knowledge empowers you to provide effective support.

4 PRAISE SMALL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Notice when your child follows through with trying something new or approaching something that makes them nervous. Tell them how much you admire them for trying and that trying is key regardless of the outcome.

5 TALK ABOUT ANXIETY TO YOUR CHILD

- Help define what anxiety is to your child.
- Children and teens often don't know they are anxious. Help them learn how their body responds to feeling anxious or worried; talk through their emotional and physical feelings with them so they can better identify it when it happens again.
 - Recognize their emotion for them (after having helped define it):
 - "Ohhhh, you're feeling anxious about your math test."

I'VE NOTICED YOU SEEM NERVOUS LATELY. I WONDER IF YOU'RE FEELING ANXIOUS ABOUT THE PLAY PERFORMANCE

YEAH, I GUESS SO. I'M SCARED I'LL MESS UP

IT'S OKAY TO FEEL THAT WAY. WE'RE HERE TO SUPPORT YOU. WANT TO TALK MORE ABOUT IT?

I GUESS. I JUST DON'T WANT TO LET EVERYONE DOWN.

YOU WON'T. LET'S DISCUSS WAYS TO HELP YOU FEEL MORE CONFIDENT.



HOW CAN PARENTS HELP?

6 ESTABLISH ROUTINES

- Maintain a structured daily routine to provide your child a sense of stability and predictability.
- This is particularly helpful for children with high levels of anxiety.

7 ENCOURAGE HEALTHY HABITS

Promote regular exercise, healthy eating, and adequate sleep, and limit caffeine intake, as these factors can affect anxiety levels



8 TEACH COPING STRATEGIES

- Encourage your child to practice relaxation techniques. Generally, these techniques are only effective if practiced consistently over several weeks.
- When your child is calm, start a conversation about things they can do to manage fears and worries when they happen. For example, let them know that they can:
 - Practice deep breathing and muscle relaxation.
 - Use positive self-talk (for example, “I can try this” instead of “I can’t do this”).
 - Think of a safe place, such as their bedroom or favorite place outdoors.

9 BE PATIENT

Sometimes, the behaviors of anxious children and teens may seem unreasonable to others. It is important to remember that an anxious young person who cries or avoids situations is, in fact, responding instinctively to a perceived threat. Changing avoidant behaviors takes time and persistence.

10 ENCOURAGE HELP-SEEKING WHEN NEEDED

Ensure that children and young people know there are people who can help if they find that they can't handle a problem independently. Knowing that they can call on others for support if needed will make them feel less anxious about what might happen in the future.



11 SUPPORT THEM TO ACCEPT UNCERTAINTY

Uncertainty is one thing that people worry about a lot because of the potential for negative outcomes. As it is impossible to eliminate uncertainty completely, you can assist children and young people to be more accepting of uncertainty and ambiguity.

HOW CAN PARENTS HELP?

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MODEL AND COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVE WAYS TO QUESTION AND CHALLENGE ANXIETY-PROVOKING THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS

- When having anxiety-provoking thoughts, such as:
 - “I’m going to fail this exam,” or “Everyone will laugh at me.”
- Work with your child to come up with effective ways to challenge that thought, such as:
 - “I didn’t fail the last exam,” or “No one laughed at me last time.”
- Talk about your own experiences of anxiety, stress, or worry and how you worked through them.

I AM GOING TO FAIL THIS TEST!

YOU’RE DOING GREAT! HAVE YOU FAILED BEFORE? NO. LET’S REFRAME THAT THOUGHT.

I’LL KEEP TRYING, YOU ARE RIGHT, I HAVE NOT FAILED AND I WON’T



13

GRADUALLY EXPOSE YOUR CHILD TO FEARED OBJECTS OR ACTIVITIES

- Help them to face the things or situations they fear - learning to face their fears and reduce avoidance of feared objects and situations is one of the most challenging parts of overcoming anxiety.
- Encourage your child to take small steps forward. Don’t let your child give up or avoid what they’re afraid of, though sometimes it may be best to try again at a later time.
- Facing fears usually works best if undertaken gradually, one step at a time.
- Praise and reward brave behavior: the goal is to cope, not avoid.



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SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

If your child’s anxiety significantly impacts their daily functioning, consider seeking guidance from a mental health professional, such as a psychologist or therapist, who specializes in treating children with anxiety disorders





HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD AT SCHOOL?

Children may find it hard to focus on or even go to school when they're feeling worried. If your child is having trouble in school, try these ways to help:

- Gently but firmly tell your child why going to school is important.
- Talk with your child's teachers and the guidance counselor about what to do if your child asks to go home from school early.
- If you think family stress or pressure to do well in school is upsetting your child, let them know they are doing a good job and that you're proud of them.
- Help your child set realistic goals for school. If they set goals that are too hard to meet, they may feel worse about themselves.
- Remind your child of the skills they have worked on, and talk about preparing to handle stressful situations ahead of time.
- Reward your child's brave behaviors at school. An example reward can be spending time doing fun activities with a parent, which can be very powerful.



PARENTAL SELF-CARE: SUPPORTING YOU AND YOUR CHILD

NOTICE YOUR OWN REACTIONS

Pay attention to your own thoughts and feelings during stressful times. Try to stay calm and positive when your child is anxious.

PARENTAL SELF-CARE

Take care of yourself. Children pick up on the stress and worries of adults, so getting support for yourself can help your child too.

IF YOU'RE FEELING OVERWHELMED:

Seek professional help if needed. Don't hesitate to reach out to family, friends, or community support if you're feeling overwhelmed.

Parenting an anxious child can be challenging, but with patience, understanding, and support, you can help your child overcome their fears and thrive. Remember that each child is unique, and it's essential to tailor your approach to meet your child's individual needs. By working together as a family and accessing appropriate resources, you can empower your child to manage their anxiety and lead a fulfilling life.