

Most children experience anxious moments or have fearful thoughts and feelings from time to time, about certain events. These thoughts and feelings prompt them to proceed with caution and this caution can be helpful in many situations. However, when an individual experiences higher levels of anxiety and fear, disproportionate to the situation/s, it can be difficult for them to move past this to something else. Some children will have difficulty managing worries and anxious feelings which can impact on how easy it is for them to cope in certain situations.

Anxiety is a normal part of life and can be managed, but it takes time to learn the skills that help one to manage their anxiety. When adults around a child stay calm, think clearly and model confident coping, this is likely to reduce a child's anxiety.

Here are some hints on how to support an anxious child.

Calm is created through your words, voice and facial expression. When children become anxious, help them recognise what's happening. Some kids get angry, some become upset and others withdraw. Work out the pattern for your child and help them recognise when they are anxious.

Accept your child's anxious feelings. Your child needs to trust that you are with them, and then they will be more willing to let you help them cope. It's hard sometimes to differentiate between what may be a bad case of negative thinking and true anxiety.

Is a child being negative when she doesn't want to join a new club because she thinks no one will like her, or is there something more going on? Try to confirm whether there is any validity in their fears. If not, point out diplomatically, that they may be catastrophizing. If you feel there is reason for concern, help them to overcome their anxiety.

Challenge the validity of your child's fears and anxiety, using logic and rational thinking. But this must be done in a kind and compassionate way, so as to not invalidate their worries. Get them to generate their own alternatives. A method from the Cool Kids program is to use "Detective Thinking".

Encourage your child to overcome their anxiety through action.

Anxiety is normal, and part of everyday life however there are times when children may need support to manage their anxiety. Strategies for managing anxiety can take time for children to learn, but it is a valuable life skill that parents/teachers and health professionals can teach children. If you are worried about your child's anxiety or would like support with strategies to help them manage you may want to speak with your school psychologist or General Practitioner for professional advice.