

## Strategies to handle the anxious child

It is an unfortunate but very real fact that stress and anxiety is a common problem in today's fast-paced, high-tech, activity-packed society. If your child is experiencing stress and anxiety, try these simple but effective ways to help her manage her feelings.

**Don't dismiss her feelings.** Telling your child not to worry about her fears may only make her feel like she's doing something wrong by feeling anxious. Let her know it's okay to feel bad about something, and encourage her to share her emotions and thoughts.

**Listen.** You know how enormously comforting it can be just to have someone listen when something's bothering you. Do the same thing for your child. If he doesn't feel like talking, let him know you are there for him. Just be by his side and remind him that you love him and support him.

**Offer comfort and distraction.** Try to do something she enjoys, like playing a favorite game or cuddling in your lap and having you read to her, just as you did when she was younger. When the chips are down, even a 10-year-old will appreciate a good dose of parent TLC. Distract only when there is a need in the moment vs trying the 'brave' approach.

**Get him outside.** Exercise can boost mood, so get him moving. Even if it's just for a walk around the block, fresh air and physical activity may be just what he needs to lift his spirits and give him a new perspective on things.

**Stick to routines.** Balance out any changes by trying to maintain as much of her regular routine as possible. Try to stick to her regular bedtime and mealtimes, if possible. Can change the routine gradually over time to increase system tolerance.

**Keep your child healthy.** Make sure he's eating right and getting enough sleep. Not getting enough rest or eating nutritious meals at regular intervals can contribute to your child's stress. If he feels good, he'll be better equipped to work through whatever is bothering him.

**Avoid overscheduling.** Soccer, karate, baseball, music lessons, playdates the list of extracurricular activities kids can take on is endless. But too many activities can easily lead to stress and anxiety in children. Just as grownups need some downtime after work and on weekends, children also need some quiet time alone to decompress.

**Limit your child's exposure to upsetting news or stories.** If your child sees or hears upsetting images or accounts of natural disasters such as earthquakes or tsunamis or sees disturbing accounts of violence or terrorism on the news, talk to your child about what's going on. Reassure her that she and the people she loves are not in danger. Talk about the aid that people who are victims of disasters or violence receive from humanitarian

groups, and discuss ways that she may help, such as by working with her school to raise money for the victims.

**Consult a counselor or your pediatrician.** If you suspect that a change in the family such as a new sibling, a move, divorce, or a death of a family member is behind your child's stress and anxiety, seek advice from an expert such as your child's school counselor, your pediatrician, or a child therapist. They can suggest ways to help a child talk about death, for instance, or help him through any other shift in the family.

**Set a calm example.** You can set the tone for how stress and anxiety in children and adults is handled in your house. It's virtually impossible to block out stress from our lives in today's high-tech, 24-hour-news-cycle world, but you can do something about how you handle your own stress. And the more you are able to keep things calm and peaceful at home, the less likely it is that anxiety in children will be a problem in your household.