



BRIDGE ROAD FACT SHEET

ANXIETY

NB: The information in this document has come from the websites listed below in the reference section. Bridge Road School has created a summary of useful information relevant to the families and students that attend our school.

Some level of anxiety is a normal part of life and growing up. But if it stays for long periods of time then it could be a problem.

- Everyone experiences anxiety sometimes, especially when faced with new, stressful or dangerous situations
- If high levels of anxiety continue over time, this can mean constant physical feelings of panic and avoidance of anything that might trigger it.

An anxiety disorder should not be ignored and it usually won't get better on its own.

Types of Anxiety In Children

Children experience several types of anxiety. A child might have only one type of anxiety, or they might show features of several of them.

Social Anxiety In Children

Social anxiety is fear and worry in situations where children have to interact with other people, or be the focus of attention. Children with social anxiety might:

- believe that others will think badly of or laugh at them
- be shy or withdrawn
- have difficulty meeting other children or joining in groups
- have only a few friends
- avoid social situations where they might be the focus of attention or stand out from others – for example, talking on the telephone and asking or answering questions in class.

Separation anxiety in children

Separation anxiety is the fear and worry children experience when they can't be with their parents or carers. Children with separation anxiety might:

- protest, cry or struggle when being separated from their parents or carers
- worry about getting hurt or having an accident (they might worry about their parents or themselves)
- refuse to go to or stay at day care, preschool or school by themselves
- refuse to sleep at other people's homes without their parents or carers
- feel sick when separated from their parents or carers.

Generalised anxiety in children

Children with generalised anxiety tend to worry about many areas of life – anything from friends at playgroup to world events. Children with generalised anxiety might:

- worry about things like health, schoolwork, school or sporting achievements, money, safety, world events and so on
- feel the need to get everything perfect
- feel scared of asking or answering questions in class
- find it hard to perform in tests
- be afraid of new or unfamiliar situations
- seek constant reassurance
- feel sick when worried.

Gozen highlights how anxiety can show up in many different ways.

<https://gozen.com/8-ways-a-childs-anxiety-shows-up-as-something-else/>

8 WAYS A CHILD'S ANXIETY SHOWS UP AS SOMETHING ELSE

1. Anger

The perception of danger, stress or opposition is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.



4. Chandeliering

Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.



2. Difficulty Sleeping

In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.



5. Lack of Focus

Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.

FOCUS

6. Avoidance

Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.



7. Negativity

People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.

3. Defiance

Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child's defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.



8. Overplanning

Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.



gozen.com

Psycom suggests a few of these strategies to help your child learn to cope with anxious thoughts and feelings.

<https://www.psycom.net/5-ways-calm-anxious-child>

1. Deep breathing
2. Self-talk
3. Get moving
4. Write it down; tear it up
5. Hug and empathize.

1. Deep breathing

Children are often told to take a deep breath when they feel anxious, but learning to use deep breathing effectively actually requires practice. Daily deep breathing, especially when children are calm, helps them learn to control their breathing on their own. When they're anxious or under stress, using deep breathing will slow their heart rate and regulate their physical responses to anxious feelings.

Adding a visual to deep breathing makes it more fun for children and helps them remember what to do when they are under stress. Try these two strategies from *The Happy Kid Handbook*, to practice deep breathing in your home:

- **Balloon breathing:** Ask your child to close her eyes and blowing up a balloon. First, they should choose the colour for their balloon. Second, explain that blowing too hard or too fast will cause the balloon to pop right out of their mouth. To inflate the balloon, they need to inhale and exhale slowly. Third, cue them to breathe in for a count of four, hold for a count of four, and exhale into their balloon for a count of four. Repeat three times. Finally, ask them to “write” one worry on that balloon and let it fly off into the sky.
- **Rainbow breathing:** This strategy often appeals to older children. Have your child lie down on the floor in a comfortable position and play some relaxing music in the background. Cue your child to inhale, hold, and exhale while you count out loud, but add one colour per breath. Tell your child that when they takes a red breath, you want them to visualize as many happy red things as they can (e.g. strawberries, watermelon, kites, etc.) Repeat for all seven colours of the rainbow. Talk about the rainbow or relaxing things they created while working on her breathing.

One great way to practice deep breathing is to use the Stop, Breathe, & Think Kids app each night before bed. This app takes kids through guided meditation in short increments to help them understand and practice mindfulness for feeling calm.

2. Self-talk

Children can learn to boss back their worries by reframing their thoughts and using self-talk to feel empowered. While it might feel strange for children to talk to themselves at first, bossing back their worries in an assertive voice helps children gain control over their anxious thoughts.

Practicing self-talk is easy and can be fun for children. Follow these steps to work on bossing back those pesky worries:

- State the anxious thought
- Talk about why that thought keeps popping up
- Come up with a reasonable counter statement
- Boss it back

If a child is afraid of dogs, for example, practicing might look like this:

Dogs are scary because dogs bite.

I once saw a dog bite someone and that scared me.

Dogs can be friendly and are soft to pet.

Stop it worry brain! I'm not afraid of dogs! My friend has a friendly dog and I know I will be safe near that dog.

3. Get moving

Daily exercise can help reduce the body's physical response to anxiety. One study found that children who practice yoga not only experience the uplifting effects of exercise immediately following the workout, but that the results last long after they are finished.

Children also benefit from playing on team sports, taking exercise classes, and simply taking a walk through the park. Going for a nature walk, be it a hike along a trail or a walk through your neighbourhood, helps children reconnect with the world, calm anxious thoughts, and practice mindfulness.

4. Write it down; tear it up

Children need time to vent their feelings, but they also need to learn how to get their anxious thoughts out on their own. They need strategies they can use at school, and camp, or even on a sleepover.

Writing down anxious feelings is a great way to vent those negative emotions on paper.

Encourage your child to write down their anxious thoughts and then tear them up and throw them away. The process of getting it down on paper and tearing up the paper helps children symbolically throw away their worries for the moment. Sure, those worries might come back another time, but once a child learns that they can overcome them by bossing them back and throwing them out, they feel greater control over their anxiety.

5. Hug and empathize

Sometimes we underestimate the power of human touch. Physical touch releases oxytocin, a feel-good hormone, and reduces cortisol, a stress hormone. A long hug can help comfort an anxious child in the moment and restore a feeling of calm.

It also helps to empathize with your child during that hug. It's perfectly normal to experience stress and anxiety, and anxious children need to hear this often. Whisper empathic statements, hold your child tight and wait for the physical symptoms subside. Once your child is calm you can also talk about the fact that giving yourself a hug or holding your own hand (by clasping your hands together) can actually help you control the physical symptoms of anxiety.

How To Support Your Child With Anxiety

If your child shows signs of normal childhood anxiety, you can support him in several ways:

- Acknowledge your child's fear – don't dismiss or ignore it.
- Gently encourage your child to do things she's anxious about, but don't push her to face situations she doesn't want to face.
- Wait until your child actually gets anxious before you step in to help.
- Praise your child for doing something he's anxious about, rather than criticising him for being afraid.
- Avoid labelling your child as 'shy' or 'anxious'.

REFERENCES

<https://kidshealth.org/en/parents/anxiety-disorders.html>

<https://www.anxioustoddlers.com/supplements-childhood-anxiety/#.XTBpV-gzY2z>.

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/health-daily-care/mental-health/anxiety-in-children>

<https://gozen.com/8-ways-a-childs-anxiety-shows-up-as-something-else/>

<https://www.psychom.net/5-ways-calm-anxious-child>