



Helping Children With Anxiety

All children at some point or another will feel worried or anxious about something that is happening or about something they must do.

There are some common things throughout children's lives that can cause anxiety, such as separation anxiety from around age 6 months to about 3 years of age. During early childhood, it is common for children to develop anxieties around animals, insects, heights, water, the dark. As they grow, starting a new school or moving up to a new year group, exams and new social situations can all cause anxiety too.

It is normal to feel anxious at certain times in our lives and, for children, during the above situations. Experiencing anxiety is part of our survival instinct and is a healthy part of life in small doses in a situation where the body needs to deal with a scary or unknown situation. The brain's fight or flight is our protective system, it switches on our sympathetic nervous system and allows the body to react quickly to a situation that is dangerous or it can even give us a boost of adrenalin to help us to work through an event that makes us feel nervous. We've probably all had a few butterflies in the tummy when having to go into a new situation or had a deadline looming that needs to be met; perhaps felt overwhelmed and worried about how you would cope. This happens to us all at some point and, in small doses, won't massively impact our lives long term.



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What Can Cause Anxiety?

As well as the above situations, a traumatic event such as a car accident or house fire, moving house or school, family arguments can all cause a child to be anxious. Teenagers are more likely to suffer with social anxiety and want to avoid social gatherings where there are lots of people.

When Is Anxiety An Issue?

If your child becomes withdrawn or goes to great lengths to avoid things or situations it may signal that anxiety is an issue. If anxiety is affecting your child's self-esteem and confidence long-term, it can harm their mental and emotional wellbeing.

What Signs May Indicate Your Child Is Suffering With Anxiety?

Very often, a child may not understand that what they are feeling is anxiety. They may not be able to identify the cause of their unease. Children may complain of a stomach ache and, in the absence of there being something wrong with their tummy, it can be a sign that they are feeling anxious about something.

Other Signs They May Display:

- Being irritable, clingy or tearful
- Having difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep
- Start wetting the bed

In Older Children You May See:

- Lack of confidence in trying new things
- Difficulty facing simple, everyday challenges
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Problems sleeping or eating
- Outbursts of anger
- Experiencing negative thoughts or thinking bad things are going to happen
- Avoiding everyday activities such as seeing friends, going out in public or to school
- Feeling nervous, on edge or panicky all the time
- Feeling out of control
- Feeling tired or grumpy
- Heart beating really fast
- Dry mouth
- Trembling, feeling faint, hot or wobbly legs

How Can You Help Your Child?

Listen to their concerns and how they are feeling. It can be tempting to tell them it'll be ok or you may feel that their anxieties are silly or not really something to be worried about. It is important to hear them out and to be empathetic. Help them to describe how it is making them feel physically and emotionally.

Help them to reframe their thoughts around their anxiety. For example, if they have a maths test and they get some answers wrong they may feel they are unable to do maths and be anxious about future tests. Talking to them about the area they struggled in and help them to see that they are good at maths but they need a little help in this one area.

It can be tempting to avoid the situation all together but helping them to find a way to face the situation without forcing them is important. For example, perhaps they are worried about a sleepover. Helping them to put a plan in place so that they can feel in control and enjoy the experience rather than thinking they won't ever be able to enjoy a sleepover.

Simple things for smaller children, such as giving their worry a name can help them to feel the worry is more manageable. Creating a worry box or jar so that they can write them down, perhaps choosing a time for them to sit down and discuss their worries so that they feel heard.

Using a grounding technique such as bare feet on the grass or to focus on their senses by counting 5 things they can see, 4 things they can hear, 3 things touch, 2 things they can smell and 1 thing they can taste.

Meditation and mindfulness can help children to understand their emotions and to find ways to cope with them using strategies such as deep breathing.

Further Information

For further information and a thorough assessment, contact the Torus wellbeing book an appointment email: info@toruswellbeingclinic.co.uk



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