

# *A Parent's Guide to Anxiety*

## **What is anxiety?**

- Anxiety is a **NORMAL EMOTION**- it helps us to cope with difficult, challenging or dangerous situations
- Anxiety is **COMMON**- there are times when we all feel worried, anxious, uptight or stressed
- Anxiety becomes a **PROBLEM WHEN IT STOPS** your child from enjoying normal life by affecting their school, work, family relationships, friendships, or social life.

**When we become anxious, our body prepares itself** for some form of physical actions, often called the **FIGHT OR FLIGHT REACTION**. As the body prepares itself, we may notice a number of physical changes such as:

- ✓ Shortness of breath
- ✓ Tight chest
- ✓ Dizziness or lightheadedness
- ✓ Palpitations
- ✓ Muscle pain, especially head and neck pain
- ✓ Wanting to go to the toilet
- ✓ Shakiness
- ✓ Sweating
- ✓ Dry mouth
- ✓ Difficulty swallowing
- ✓ Blurred vision
- ✓ Butterflies or feeling sick

Often there is a reason for feeling anxious such as:


- Facing a difficult exam
- Saying something to someone they may not like
- Having to go somewhere new or do something scary


Once the unpleasant event is over, our bodies return to normal and we usually end up feeling better.

**HOWEVER**, sometimes there may not be an obvious reason for feeling anxious.

Another cause of anxiety is the **WAY WE THINK** about things. We may think that:

- Things will go wrong
- We will be unsuccessful
- We will be unable to cope

 Life can start to feel like one big worry as minds become full of negative and worrying thoughts. We can't seem to stop them, and we find it hard to concentrate and think straight, and the worrying and negative thoughts seem to make the physical feelings worse.

 Because anxiety is unpleasant, we find ways of making ourselves feel better. Situations we fear or find difficult **MAY BE AVOIDED**. However, the more we stop or avoid things, the less we do and the harder it becomes to face our fears and overcome our worries.

**COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)** is often used to address anxiety, because it is a therapeutic model that is based on the idea that how we feel and what we do are due to the way we think. If we can change the way we think, we can learn to control our anxious feelings.

Teaching children and adolescents to understand their thoughts is important. Children with anxiety tend to:

- Think in negative and critical ways
- Overestimate the likelihood of bad things happening
- Focus on things that go wrong
- Underestimate their ability to cope
- Expect to be unsuccessful

CBT is a practical way of helping children and adolescents to:

- Identify negative ways of thinking
- Discover the link between what they think, how they feel, and what they do
- Check out the evidence for their thoughts
- Develop new skills to cope with their anxiety

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## **As A Parent, You Can Support Your Child By:**

### **Showing Your Child How to Cope in a Healthy Way**

*Parents can model healthy coping to their kids in the way that they respond to situations.*

### **Understanding that Your Child Has a Problem**

*Keep in mind that your child is not being willfully naughty or difficult. They are struggling and need your help.*

### **Patiently Approaching the Issue**

*Don't expect things to change quickly. Be patient and encourage your child to keep trying to work on their anxiety.*

### **Prompting New Skills**

*Encourage and remind your child to practice and use their new skills to help them learn to live and deal with uncertainty and unpredictability, since they are inevitably part of life.*

### **Observing Your Child**

*Watch your child and highlight the positive or successful things they do.*

### **Rewarding and Praising Their Efforts**

*Praise and reward your child for using their new skills & for trying to face and overcome their problems.*

### **Talking About It**

*Discussing your child's struggles with them shows that you care for and support them.*

Adapted from *Anxiety* by Paul Stallard