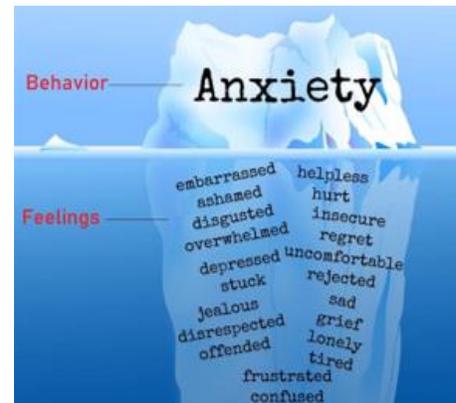




Working Through Worry – Part 1

What is anxiety or worry?

All children and adults experience anxiety at some point in their lives. Anxiety is a normal response to situations that we find threatening or stressful. It is adaptive – it alerts us to threats, protects us from danger, and helps us reach important goals. For example, it is normal to feel anxious when encountering a bear on a hike or before the first day of school. It can also help us perform our best and motivate us to study for an exam or practice for a big game. Anxiety is a part of life and trying to eliminate anxiety from our lives is almost impossible. Since anxiety is everywhere, it is best to help kids gain confidence and learn skills to tolerate worry whenever it occurs.



What are the common symptoms of anxiety?

Body Reactions	Heart beats faster, breathing quickens, feeling sick/having butterflies in your tummy, chest pains, fidgety and jumping, sweating, shaking, muscles tense, dizzy, light-headed
Feelings	Nervous, anxious, worried, frightened, panicky, scared, embarrassed
Thoughts	Difficulties concentrating, racing thoughts, imagining the worst, imagining that something bad is going to happen, thoughts of failure and judgment
Behaviours	Avoid situations, people, or places, difficulties sitting still, changes in appetite and sleep, pacing, irritability

Negative thoughts and uncomfortable physical symptoms often lead children to avoid anxiety-provoking situations. Avoiding the situation is likely to reduce the feelings of anxiety in the short term. However, in the long term the 'problem' will worsen. If a child avoids a feared situation, they learn that avoidance makes them feel safe again. As a result, they do not get the chance to learn that nothing bad will happen to them if they try and face their feared situation.

A child needs to stay in their feared situation long enough to allow the anxiety to come and then to subside. If they leave while anxiety is high, they will learn to associate high anxiety with the feared situation, and further that relief only comes by avoiding or escaping the feared situation.

When does anxiety become a problem?

While all children experience anxiety, some children experience anxiety that does not go away on its own and impairs daily functioning. When your child is worrying much of the time, avoiding fun activities, or refusing to go places (e.g., school, the park) because they are scared or worried, anxiety has become a problem.

Does your child feel anxious when there is no real danger (e.g., like a smoke alarm that goes off when you're just making toast)? Does your child seem anxious a lot of the time? Is your child having trouble coping with their anxiety (e.g., needing a lot of reassurance and assistance from parents to manage their anxiety)? If so, your child may be struggling with anxiety.

I think my child may be struggling with anxiety. What should I do?

The good news is there are lots of things that you can do to help your child cope with anxiety. Please check out Part Two of our Working Through Worry series for more information. Here, you will find practical strategies and tools to help you manage your child's anxiety.

Parent Resources

Websites

- Anxiety Canada: <https://www.anxietycanada.com/>
- Worry Wise Kids: <http://www.worrywisekids.org/>
- Child Mind Institute: <https://childmind.org/article/what-to-do-and-not-do-when-children-are-anxious/>
- Strategies to Help Anxious Children: <https://www.psycom.net/help-kids-with-anxiety#letyourchildworry>
- Fight, Flight, Freeze Response - <https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/fight-flight-freeze-anxiety-explained-for-kids/>