



Working Through Worry – Part 2

Working Through Worry – Part 2 is the second part of our series on helping your child cope with anxiety. In Part 1 we focused on learning about anxiety and recognizing when it becomes a problem. If you have not already, please review in this information before proceeding! Part 2 is designed to provide specific information about how to support your child in managing their anxiety and is a multi-video series that focuses on a) taking care of the basics, b) deep breathing, and c) progressive muscle relaxation.

What should I do if my child is struggling with anxiety?

First, **ensure that their basic needs are met**. When children have a balanced diet, adequate sleep, plenty of water, downtime to decompress, daily exercise, and time to play outside they are (just like us adults!) better able to function and cope with any stressors.

Strategies used to manage anxiety focus on the three components – physical, cognitive, and behavioural. With this in mind, the following strategies are provided.

Set an appropriate goal for your child (i.e., what would you like to see your child do that they cannot do/or do with extreme distress today because of anxiety?). “Feeling better” is likely not the best goal because it’s not normal to feel calm all the time. Once you have a big goal break it down into small, achievable goals.

Teach your child about anxiety and what it is (e.g., it is normal and adaptive). **Label and identify anxiety** for the child (e.g., “It looks like you’re feeling worried right now”).

- Read books together and label the emotions of the characters in the book
- Help your child to name the anxiety in the body (e.g., sick stomach, racing heart, shaking knees, headache)
- Point to “anxiety” in a drawing of the body
- Help the child to recognize the physical symptoms as anxiety (“My stomach feels funny – that’s my worry acting up again!”)

Focus on bravery and effort (e.g., Instead of saying “Don’t worry” say something like, “I know you can do this, and I can help you”). Instead, give positive attention for brave behaviour and prevent avoidance by encouraging your child’s approach to whatever is anxiety-provoking for them.

Model positive coping strategies, such as relaxation strategies (e.g., deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation). These strategies help to counter the physical symptoms. Many children prefer having something more concrete to imagine when doing breathing exercises. Here is an example:

- **Blowing on soup:** Imagine that you have a big spoon full of yummy soup in front of you. But it’s too hot and you need to gently blow on the spoonful to cool it off. The breath must be steady and gentle enough that the soup does not blow off the spoon.

Keep in mind that different people find different things calming. Try different options and find out what works for your child. The things that do work may vary over time or even day to day! However, relaxation strategies take practice and are rarely effective after the first try.

When should I seek additional help? What are my options?

It is ok to not have all the answers to your children's questions or to know how to manage your child's anxiety. In these situations, it would be a good time to seek out professional help from a psychologist. We also encourage you to reach out to your child's school to see what school-based supports might be available.

Resources

Books for parents (all available at Edmonton Public Libraries):

Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents: 7 Ways to Stop the Worry Cycle and Raise Courageous and Independent Children by R. Wilson & L. Lyons

The Opposite of Worry: The Playful Parenting Approach to Childhood Anxieties and Fears by L. Cohen

Books for children (all are available at Edmonton Public Libraries or click link for a read-aloud version):

Breathe by Scott Magoon - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AoseOLDB0ow>

Captain Starfish by Davina Bell - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G_pBOz9fS2Y

How are you Peeling? Foods with Moods by Saxton Freymann & Joost Elffers - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lqX_TIjZC4

Thank Goodness for Bob by Matthew Morgan - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWTnPQqVhHg>

The way I feel by Janan Cain - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITPUxVQ6UIk>

Scaredy Squirrel books by Melanie Watt - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyX1ev3wg4M>

Worries are Not Forever by Elizabeth Verdick - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xmEodxDtFKQ>

When My Worries Get Too Big! A Relaxation Book for Children who Live with Anxiety by K. Buron

Apps



Breathe, Think, Do Sesame



Breathing Bubbles



Stop, Breathe, Think Kids

Websites/Videos

Square breathing visual: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YFdZXwE6fRE>

Visual (fish): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLbK0o9Bk7Q>

Breathing with shapes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wdbbtgf05Ek>

Progressive Muscle Relaxation for Kids: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDKyRpW-Yuc&t=12s>

Relaxation Script for Younger Children: <https://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/PDF/TF-%20CBT/pages/4%20Emotion%20Regulation%20Skills/Client%20Handouts/Relaxation/Relaxation%20Script%20for%20Younger%20Children.pdf>