

Helping your child to cope with anxiety

1. Understanding anxiety

- It is normal to feel anxious or worried at times. But sometimes these feelings can get in the way of the things we want or need to do.
- We all have a fight and flight response that can 'turn on' when we are anxious. Your child may notice feeling short of breath, dizzy or sick when they are worried.
- This is the body's way of preparing us to tackle our fears but it often gets in the way and makes us want to avoid what is scaring us. The more we avoid things, the scarier they become.
- Anxiety can't hurt us but can be uncomfortable and scary.
- Using relaxation and distraction can help your child to manage these feelings and help stop anxiety getting in the way of their daily life.

2. Relaxation and distraction

Here are some things you can try to help your child to manage their anxious feelings

- Keep **active** – go for a walk or bike ride.
- Do something **enjoyable** – e.g. play their favourite game, do some painting together.
- Find ways to **relax** (especially before bed time) – e.g. a warm bath, listen to soothing music, read a story together.
- Encouraging slow/calm breathing can help 'turn down' the fight/flight response:
 1. **Breathe in through your nose (count 1,2,3)**
 2. **Pause for a second**
 3. **Breathe out through your mouth for longer (count 1,2,3,4,5)**

3. Dealing with Anxious thoughts

- When we are anxious we tend to focus on what might go wrong and how badly things might turn out.
- Encourage your child to tackle anxious thoughts by using coping thoughts or positive self talk:

'I can do this'
'It's ok to feel nervous but I can manage'
- Can your child come up with their own coping statements? What would they say to their friend if they felt worried. Would it help to say this to themselves?
- Try to be calm, encouraging and model confidence in your child's ability to face their fears.

4. Face your fears

- Feeling anxious understandably makes us want to avoid our fears. Unfortunately this keeps anxiety going!
- Encourage your child to face their fears by breaking them down into small manageable steps.
- If a step feels too hard, is there a way of breaking it down into more manageable chunks, or perhaps trying it together a few times first?
- Reward your child for attempting to tackle their fears no matter how small the achievement.
- Remind your child to use distraction, relaxation and coping thoughts to help them when facing their fear.

5. Don't forget to look after yourself

- Seeing your child upset and anxious will undoubtedly have an effect on you. You may feel upset or anxious yourself
- This is normal but it is important your child sees that you are confident with the plan and carrying it out. Identify other adults who can support you but avoid discussing doubts and worries with your child.

6. Additional resources

More information on managing anxiety can be found at:

- <https://services.nhslothian.scot/camhs/Resources/Pages/Online-Resources.aspx>
- <https://young.scot/>
- www.parentclub.scot