

Ordinary Magic

Anxiety

Fact Sheet and Top Tips

What is it ?

Anxiety is a useful and natural response which helps us avoid dangerous situations by motivating our brain and body to solve issues quickly.

We need anxiety to survive but sometimes anxiety can be triggered in young people when there is no external stress. If this becomes a frequent thing that stops us taking part in or enjoying everyday activities then this is when it is considered a problem.

Where does it come from?

The causes of anxiety are:

- Adverse life events which have caused stress.
- Not yet having opportunities to develop creative ways of coping.
- Medical issues (anxiety can be the symptom of lots of illnesses, related to coming to terms with an illness or the side effect of a medication).
- Genetics - Anxiety can run in families. children who have parents with anxiety have a higher chance of suffering from anxiety disorders themselves.

Signs of Anxiety

Psychological

- Irritability, frustration and anger
- Tearful and withdrawn
- Excessive worry about the past or the future
- Low mood
- Restlessness
- Tiredness

Physical

- Belly ache, diarrhoea and nausea and vomiting
- Dizziness, pins and needles, sweating, tingling and numbness
- Rapid heart beat, chest pains, getting hot
- Back ache, Neck ache and headache.
- Restless and shakey.

Behaviour

- Avoidance of situations
- Distress when facing triggers for anxiety
- Overwhelming behaviours such as angry outbursts or running away
- Regular need for reassurance
- Being snappy at family and friends

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Talk

With a child who has anxiety it is important that we help them open up about their behaviours, thoughts and feelings. Here are our top tips:

Try not to use the word why

When we are facing extreme anxiety the part of our brain that helps us explain why is not switched on and asking this question to a child in the fight or flight side of their brain will only cause disengagement or anger as they won't know why. Some key phrases that help explore anxiety we use are:

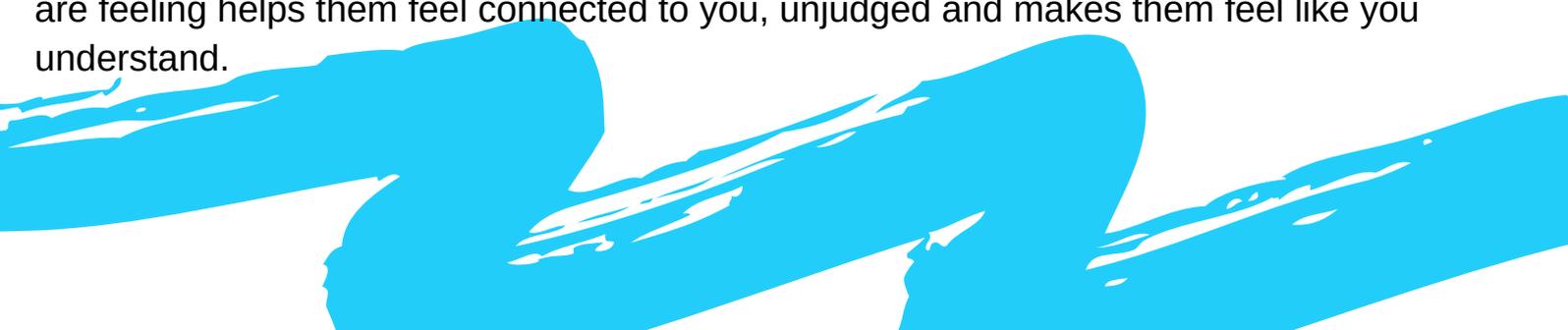
- I have just noticed that.....
- I am curious about.....
- I am wondering what just happened there.....

Let them know you are available and present

Tell your child that at any point if they have a thought or a feeling that is making them anxious they can talk and you will listen. Put 15 minutes a week aside to discuss any challenges that week and help your child to describe their feelings to develop their emotional language.

Connect

If your child is overwhelmed leave the exploration for a later time. Be present with them and tell them that you are there. Talking about your own emotions or a time you felt what they are feeling helps them feel connected to you, unjudged and makes them feel like you understand.



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Ground

Children with anxiety are normally worrying so much about the past and the future they may struggle to feel the present. Grounding techniques can help a child with this and are a great tool when symptoms of anxiety are peaking.

Count and Descibe

- Go for a walk and count the leaves on the tree's count how many birds you can see or the windows in your house.
- Ask which is the scariest looking tree they can see or the most beautiful flower and ask them to explain their reason to you.
- Count 3 breaths in, hold for four and blow out for five.
- Describe 5 things you can touch, 4 you can see, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell and 1 thing you can taste.

Use a prop

Tell you child that teddy is worried and ask if they can help. Place the teddy on their belly and ask your child to use their belly to lift teddy up and drop him down gently to calm him. Doing this will give your child a great awareness of their breathing and support slow and steady breaths.

Squeeze something

Sand, playdough, slime, flour, a wet sponge, a stress ball or your fists. Squeezing helps activate our muscles and upon release relieves tension we may be feeling. It is a very relaxing and fun activity especially using kinetic sand!



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Explore

To help children combat stress we need to help them explore their thought process and help them to create their own way of beating the thoughts that are holding them back.

Some of our tips for exploring anxiety are:

- Create a chart which asks What Happened, How the child responded and what they could change for next time.
- Read a book that looks at anxiety. There are tons of great books for lots of different ages, get in contact if you would like a specific suggestion based on your individual child.
- Identify the thought if your child expresses a feeling and ask them the feeling if they express a thought.
- Help them with their negative self talk. Most of the time children are telling themselves they are no good or something bad will happen. If your child makes a mistake talk to them about when they were a baby and how many times they had to try and keep trying to walk, explore what would have happened if they had given up. If they think something bad will happen explain that must feel scary for them but then reassure them with the likelihood of that bad thing happening.

Other help

If your child's anxiety is having a profound effect on their life please take them to visit their GP.

Ordinary Magic can provide information advice and guidance to families and support with anxious thoughts to clinical anxiety.

Panic attacks:

- If it your child's first first panic attack, to be safe please call 999.
- If you are sure it is a panic attack, try to move them to an area of calm and help them breathe in for 3 seconds and out for three.
- The young person will think they cannot breathe in, they can. Help them to work on breathing out long and slow to calm them down. demonstrate the breathing technique.
- Assure the young person they will be ok and that the attack will stop soon.