

## If you have an anxious child ...

Some children seem to have been born more anxious than others, but just because they have an anxious disposition doesn't mean that they are doomed to forever being terrified of every new experience. Anxious children can be taught and learn coping mechanisms that allows them to acknowledge and accept their anxiety but also keep it in check, not letting it take over completely. If your child is more anxious than others then you can help your child to find ways to handle their anxiety by using some or all of the following suggestions:

1. **Commit to reducing anxiety in the household:** This can be done in a number of different ways however, just like any other negative habits, significant change will only come about after a commitment to change.
2. **Lead by example:** The parent can set the tone as you confront each new experience; the tone can be nervous & worried or positive & expectant. However this tone needs to be authentic as children can easily see through false positivity. The parents need to commit to the long-term and not be disheartened if the anxious child doesn't immediately get swept along with your new easy-going manner.
3. **Stop reassuring your child mindlessly:** Take a moment and try instead to enter the child's world for a moment. When you have entered their world and shown that you understand their worries, ask them to slowly breathe with you. Breathe in for 5, hold it in for 7 and breathe out for 9.
4. **Search for accuracy, not for positivity:** Whenever your child catastrophises a situation make sure that you bring some rationality to the situation; 'We may be late but the world won't end.' 'You might fail but that might be good for your character.'
5. **Bring more humour into your lives:** It's hard to stay terrified if you're laughing. Some children find it helpful to give their needless worries a funny name; 'My gremlins are bothering me again.' This is a well-known psychotherapeutic technique that keeps the emotion in its place.
6. **Create a Worry Box:** Where the child can write down their worries for a set time every day (or record them on the phone if writing doesn't suit). This means the child is free to worry – it comes naturally to them anyway – but you are no longer enabling them to worry excessively.
7. **Help them to enjoy the present:** Most people who are prone to anxiety tend to live in the future. Teach your child to train their thoughts to stay in the present. Direct them to use their senses asking them to become specifically aware of what they can see, hear, smell, touch and taste.
8. **Educate them:** When a person becomes anxious their body's resources fly towards their arms and legs, getting ready to activate the 'fight or flight response'; this is why many anxious people feel their heart pounding and feel lightheaded. If they can become more physically aware that anxiety, although it is very distressing, is not dangerous – it is your body helping you to be quick to respond to attack.
9. **Have a personal checklist that they make up and use when they need to:** Am I in danger? Am I worrying needlessly? Am I ruining my fun? Have I tried breathing mindfully? Can I distract my mind? What will help me right now?
10. **Practice self-compassion:** Many children feel bad and guilty for being anxious - don't make them anxious about feeling anxious! Make your child feel 'good enough' – not perfect because that would only make them anxious – but just as good as anyone else. Self-acceptance of their tendency to become anxious will open the door to the concept that they often worry needlessly; they are not perfect and nor is anyone else.