

# PARENT INFORMATION SHEET

[www.parentline.org.au](http://www.parentline.org.au)



## Helping Your Child Deal with Anxiety

### REMEMBER:

- *Anxiety is common in children and adults*
- *Emotionally support your child and reassure them that we all have fears*
- *Encourage children to gradually face their fears*
- *Set goals*
- *Recognise small improvements*
- *Remember to be patient – change takes time*

*Proudly managed by*



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We all become anxious at times during our lives and children are no different. Changes to routines and unfamiliar circumstances can be difficult for children to manage.

It is very common for children to have different fears that come and go at different stages of their lives. Some of the common fears in childhood include:

- The dark
- Monsters
- Nightmares
- Separating from parents or carers
- Being kidnapped
- Natural disasters
- Animals such as spiders, snakes, sharks or dogs
- Death and dying

Children are very attuned to parental fear and anxiety, as well as to what is happening in their world around them. It is common for example, for a child who fears dogs, to have a parent with the same fear. Children can develop fears or anxiety after experiencing or witnessing others experience a natural disaster such as an earthquake, tsunami or flood.

Understanding that some level of anxiety is a normal human response is the start to learning how to manage these feelings. It is important for children to develop strategies to deal with their anxiety. It is a skill that all humans need as they negotiate different circumstances in their lives.

### Label Feelings

Help label the feeling as “anxiety”, “scared”, “worried” or “frightened”. Tell your child “It sounds like you’re anxious about talking in front of the class”. Explore with your child what anxiety feels like in their body. This helps the child identify their feelings and understand that they have some strategies to deal with them.

# Helping Your Child Deal with Anxiety



## Set Goals

Help your child to set goals each day that are small steps to becoming more confident. For example if they are scared of your dog, one step towards being more comfortable might be to pat the dog once on its back while it is sitting down under your control on a leash.

## Choose Self-talk

Teach your child to use positive self-talk – to say “I can” or “I’ll try” rather than “I can’t”. Listen to them when they tell you about their day and help them to be aware of and change any negative talk. Tell your child that you are proud of them for trying something new.

## Teach Relaxation

Show your child how to take 3 slow breaths in and out to calm down when they start to feel anxious. Count the breaths in (1 to 6) and out (1 to 6).

## Develop Strengths

Work on strengths – focus on when your child does something well, has a good interaction with someone, or tries something new. Let them know exactly what you have noticed.

“That’s good” is not enough information. It is better to say “I knew you were worried about your talk, but you did it anyway”. Talking about the specific behaviour makes it much more likely that it will happen again.

## Focus on Success

Talk about your child’s successes – big and small. Remind your child from time to time of the things they have achieved. These don’t just have to be complete “successes”. They just need to be steps towards their goal, however small they are. These could include things such as giving a challenge a try, asking for help, and being “brave”.

## Encourage Bravery

It is important to give your child lots of attention when they make a brave attempt at something. This encourages them to become less fearful.

## Provide Emotional Support

Always support and console your child if they are very distressed. At the same time do not give them too much time and attention by excessively reassuring them.

Too much reassurance can encourage the fearful behaviour you are trying to reduce. Just reassure enough to show you support and care about them, and not so much that it rewards fearful behaviour, and does not encourage their growth and independence.

## Hold Balanced Discussions

Be understanding and encouraging but try to spend time balancing discussion of fears and problems with successes and opportunities.

Help your child to understand that we all have fears, the bravest of us, are able to face those fears and come to see mistakes as an opportunity to learn something new.

## Don’t Give Up

Encourage effort and persistence. Remember and teach your child that change takes time.

## Be Patient

Most importantly be patient and understanding with your child. These are skills and strategies that people sometimes don’t master in their adulthood!

Learning the skills in dealing with anxiety is age related. It might be a good idea to talk to one of our counsellors about your specific concerns for your child.

## Resources and links:

The Emotional Health Clinic <http://emotionalhealthclinic.com.au/>

Health Insite – Anxiety in children [http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Anxiety\\_in\\_Children](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Anxiety_in_Children)

Raising Children Network– Anxiety and fears [http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/anxiety\\_and\\_fears.html](http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/anxiety_and_fears.html)