



50 WAYS TO HELP PRIMARY-AGE CHILDREN WITH ANXIETY



DR KATHY WESTON
EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACHES TO PARENTING

- 1 Remember that anxiety problems in children are extremely common and can be overcome. ☒
- 2 If you wish to address your child's anxiety, it is a whole-family effort. Ensure that you set aside time and mental energy to deal with it. ☒
- 3 Remember to take a good hard look at your own levels of anxiety. Can you do work on yourself first? What are you modelling when it comes to anxiety? ☒
- 4 Share how your body feels when you are anxious and strategies you use to cope with it. ☒
- 5 Try to choose one particular fear or phobia to concentrate on when you are helping your child overcome it. Work on that particular fear together using these tips. ☒
- 6 Spot when your child is having 'anxious thoughts' and make a note of the circumstances and what they say (quickly jot it into your phone for example or make audio notes). ☒
- 7 With your child, develop a strategy together for overcoming one particular fear that involves a step by step approach. ☒
- 8 Remember your child has the ability to think of strategies for thinking differently about their fear or phobia – our job is to coach them into surfacing those. ☒
- 9 When they are anxious, try to coach rather than soothe. You might ask questions such as: "What are you worried about? What is frightening you? What do you think will happen?" ☒
- 10 Keep an open mind. Never assume you know why they are concerned or worried, so avoid making suggestions. ☒
- 11 Always check you have understood exactly what your child has said to you. Show them you are truly listening. ☒

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| 12 | Don't be afraid to explore your child's feelings or worries. Talking about fears and worries will not make things worse. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/> | | |
| 13 | Help them see anxious thoughts as 'external' to them and causing them to act differently. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 14 | Help them act 'like a judge in court' – where is the evidence to support that thought? Is there an alternative way of thinking about it? Let your child come up with the suggestions, but a little nudging is ok. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 15 | Take your child seriously and praise their great efforts. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 16 | Let your child draw conclusions about the conversation you are having. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 17 | Remember that your primary aim is to help your child feel able to come up with alternative thoughts and ways of thinking to the normally anxious ones. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 18 | Help your child rate their anxiety on a scale of 0-10 when they are feeling anxious. Stay with them or help them reduce the score before you leave. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 19 | Use praise and rewards when they exhibit non-anxious behaviour. You might say: "Well done for having a go!" | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 20 | Remember that there may be setbacks along the way; you are trying to change your child's often ingrained thinking in a particular way. Chipping away at that may take time, but you will get there! | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 21 | Don't reassure too much as this will have limited effect. Better to help your child look for evidence whether their fear is justified or not. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <hr style="border-top: 1px dotted #ccc;"/> | | |
| 22 | If anxiety is truly excessive and has started to interfere with a child's day to day functioning and enjoyment of life, it is time to seek professional help. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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If your child is worrying a lot, they might place all worries in a jar at home and then discuss them at a designated 'worry time' (perhaps a 20-30 minute window where they can 'let it all out' with you as a listener).

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Work in partnership with teachers who want the best for your child too (share your plan of action with them and encourage them to praise your child for having a go or being brave and making progress!)

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Develop little rewards and treats that you agree on with your child for when they make progress or little steps forward.

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Encourage your child to be kind to others around them and to get involved in helping others in the community. Acts of altruism and empathy are highly beneficial to your growing child's self-esteem.

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Recognise that anxiety is not always the enemy (it is also a sign that the engine is revving inside us getting ready for a performance or a big match!)

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Remember the goal is not to eliminate anxiety, but to develop strategies for better managing it.

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Writing, drawing and talking about anxieties is healthy, whether it is with adults, dollies, puppets or the pet dog!

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If they have a role model (e.g. Jessica Ennis), encourage your child to think about how they might experience anxiety and use it to their advantage.

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Ensure your child gets a great night's sleep; sleep deprivation only exacerbates anxiety. Keep technology out of their bedroom.

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Don't let your child read inappropriate material online or listen to age-inappropriate news bulletins that might contribute to their levels of fear. There are plenty of appropriate child-friendly newspapers and magazines out there!

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Reducing anxiety takes practice – don't give up!

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| 34 | When your child is out and about expressing worries, distract as much as possible with enjoyable and engaging activities. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 35 | Remind your child of the progress they have made and help them to reflect on how they managed in certain situations before (reflection is an important component of resilience!) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 36 | Use relaxation techniques as a family or even an app that helps with calming down and being peaceful (e.g. Headspace). If you have an 'Alexa' device, the child can actually activate some pleasant music when they are feeling worried or anxious. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 37 | Where you can, use books and films that your child enjoys to talk about fear, worries and how favourite characters may have overcome them. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 38 | With younger children, think as imaginatively and creatively as possible – often the 'worry jar' can be replaced with a 'worry tent' or 'worry teddy' (that you can stuff with scary thoughts that teddy eats etc). | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 39 | Help your child identify all their key strengths and work on their general self-esteem as far as possible. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 40 | Don't let your children witness physical or verbal aggression at home. Try to maintain as stable and consistent a family life as possible. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 41 | Spend quality 1:1 time with your child (where play is led by them). Don't dictate what you do, let them guide you. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 42 | Identify what your child enjoys doing and try to engineer more opportunities for them to do it. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| 43 | Let your child be an active participant in battling their worries. Engage them in activity books such as: 'What to do when you worry too much' by Dawn Huebner) or 'No Worries' by Katie Abey. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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- 44 Anticipate and pre-empt a child's worries by taking a look at what is coming up in their family or school calendars. Develop strategies for ensuring that your child feels supported to deal with whatever is coming their way. ☒
- 45 Create maximum giggling opportunities for children in your home. Giggling helps children feel calm, reduces anxiety and reduces family stress. ☒
- 46 Spot who makes your child feel good about themselves (it could be a friend or a family member) and invite them over more often. ☒
- 47 Consider getting a family pet. Evidence suggests that animals can play an important role in reducing anxiety in children (particularly those with autism and ADHD). ☒
- 48 Help your child create a little relaxation backpack filled with their favourite things that make them feel better. It might contain: cuddly toy, squidgy, colouring book and/or picture of favourite people. ☒
- 49 Create a key ring to help you remember the most important things to say to your child when they are feeling anxious (from this tip list). ☒
- 50 Give your child cuddles when they don't expect them and tell them how proud you are of them. ☒