



HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND AND MANAGE ANXIETY

It's really hard for children to understand and articulate their worries, so anxiety often manifests itself in lots of different ways.

Helpful books for children:

'The Huge Bag of Worries' by Virginia Ironside

'How are You Feeling Today?' by Molly Potter

'Me and My Fear' by Francesca Sannav

'Ruby's Worry' by Tom Percival

'My Hidden Chimp' by Professor Steve Peters

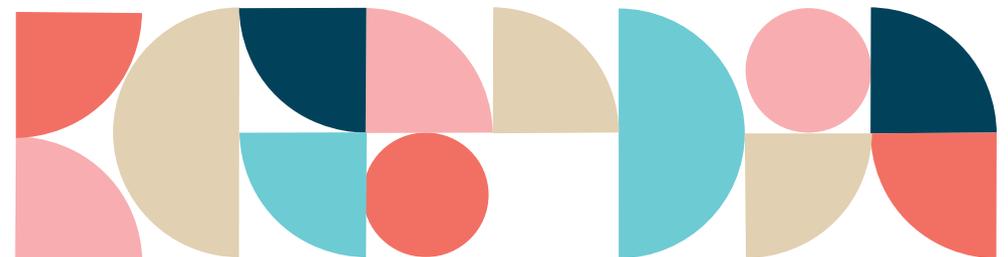
'The Truth Pixie' by Matt Haig

Helpful websites and organisations:

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.anxietyUK.org.uk

www.keep-your-head.com



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY IN CHILDREN

Anxiety is a physical response to a threat in our environment, and we all experience it in different ways. While some children exhibit anxiety by shrinking away, others want to break out of scary situations.

Anxiety in children is normal, and so are the ways they behave as a result. Try to stay calm and normalise it, rather than getting excessively worried or annoyed.

Some commonly recognized symptoms are things like trouble sleeping in their own room or avoidance of certain activities.

Here are some other key signs:

- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Not sleeping, or waking in the night with bad dreams
- Not eating properly
- Quickly getting irritable, or having angry outbursts
- Constantly worrying, or having negative thoughts
- Feeling tense and fidgety, or using the toilet often
- Frequent crying
- Being clingy
- Complaining of tummy aches and feeling unwell

SOME WAYS TO HELP IF YOUR CHILD IS UNSETTLED OR ANXIOUS

Validate their feelings

Try not to tell children to stop being silly. Whilst their anxiety may seem silly to you, for them their worries and fears are very real.

Listen, validate and accept your child's feelings - it helps them gain control over their emotions and calms them.

Teach them to process

Make a 'worry box' or a 'worry boat' so your child can write each worry down and post it in the box - they might enjoy decorating it too!

Work on positive-thinking, naming worst case scenarios and thinking through what to do if it happens, e.g. 'I'm worried that we'll miss the bus!' 'What do you think we could do if that happens?' 'We could get the next bus.'

Calm them gently

Make them feel as safe as you can, give them a cuddle or hold their hand if they will let you

Encourage them to breathe deeply and slowly, in through their nose and out through their mouth.

Distract them by focusing on something else, or taking them away from the stressful situation.

Help them understand

Talk to your child about anxiety, what is happening in their body and why it happens.

Help them to recognise these 'funny feelings', and explore what emotions they might be linked to.

Try to normalise it and let them know that it'll be okay - the anxiety will pass, like a wave.

