

# 7 EASY WAYS

# YOU CAN SUPPORT YOUR CHILD WITH ANXIETY

AS PARENTS WE WANT TO STEP IN AND SOLVE OUR CHILDREN'S PROBLEMS, AND HELP OUR KIDS AVOID TRIGGERS OF ANXIETY OR PROVIDE A "WORRY FREE" ENVIRONMENT, HOWEVER WE CAN NOT PROTECT OUR KIDS FROM EXPERIENCING ANXIETY, HOWEVER WE CAN HELP THEM LEARN TO MANAGE THEIR ANXIETY.

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## PRACTICE REFRAMING

The anxious thought cycle is overwhelming because it causes feelings of helplessness. Anxious kids tend to engage in a variety of cognitive distortions such as black and white thinking and overgeneralizing. Carving out regular time to work on positive reframing empowers your anxious child to take control over their anxious thoughts.

- Name a worry floating around your brain right now? What is the worry telling you? Let's break it down and see if that worry is 100%, right?
- How can we take that worry thought and change it into a positive thought? (Example: your child voices a fear that kids in their class don't like them. Why do you think this? Now **reframe** the situation: "it hurt my feelings when the boy laughed, but I have other good friends in my class.")

## LET YOUR CHILD WORRY

No child ever stopped worrying because a parent said, "Don't worry!" or "Relax." In fact, worry serves an important function in our lives. Without some amount of worry, we wouldn't stop to consider actual dangers that do threaten us. Give your child uninterrupted time with you each day to vent worries and brainstorm solutions together.

## SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

It is important have similar expectations for anxious children that you have for non-anxious children. However, it can also be helpful to proceed at a slower pace and make some accommodations. While your other kids likely want to attend every birthday party, your anxious child probably wants to avoid them all. In this situation, it may be helpful to attend small parties that don't include overwhelming triggers (bounce houses, loud music, lack of structure/supervision. Setting clear expectations and helping your child create appropriate benchmarks to meet those expectations teaches your child they can work through anxious feelings and manage their anxiety.

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Just like telling your child not to worry won't make those anxious thoughts disappear, avoiding triggers of anxiety won't help your child learn to cope. Example: if you child becomes anxious around dogs, staying away from all dogs only validates the anxious thought. It is better to desensitize your child to triggers of anxiety by taking small steps. Try looking at pictures of different breeds online and talking about what feelings they trigger. Next, watch dogs at play at a dog park from a safe distance. Finally ask to visit with a calm dog. By taking small steps, kids can learn to work through their fears and worries.

## HELP THEM BUILD A COPING KIT

If you want to empower your child to work through their worries, you must help them learn a variety of coping skills. One thing that helps anxious kids is having a concrete list of strategies to use in a moment of anxiety. While some can memorize a list of strategies, others might need to write them down. Try these:

- Deep breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Stress ball
- Grounding
- Write it out
- Talk back to worries and reframe thoughts
- Get help from an adult.

Your anxious child doesn't need to play every sport and attend every party, but they do need to slow down and focus on their basic health needs.

- Sleep
- Healthy Meals
- Plenty of Water
- Downtime to decompress
- Outdoor free play
- Daily exercise (riding bikes, playing in the park, gardening, walking, etc.)

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Anxiety can be paralyzing for children. When kids feel completely overwhelmed by anxious thoughts, they struggle to do everyday things like attend school, or go to soccer practice. Anxious children even avoid fun things like play dates and movies. It is important to **empathize** with your child. This normalizes what they experience and helps them understand that they are not alone, and you will guide them

## EMPATHIZE OFTEN