

How can I support my child with their anxiety?

It is completely normal to be feeling anxious or on edge particularly when we are hearing everything that is going on in the media.

Our nervous system is always assessing our environment for our safety and/or danger. If we believe we are in danger we will focus on the danger and our body will prepare to take action. This is our fight, flight, freeze response.

Given the uncertainty at this time we are unable to use our fight, flight freeze in an effective way. This is because the danger never seems to pass and we are experiencing constant levels of heightened anxiety, which means we are frequently getting ready to take action but have no way of dealing with the additional energy. This can mean we could feel more anxious, agitated and frustrated.

This leads to a panic response from people of all different ages. This can cause people to isolate further, start fights and disagreements and make bad decisions, these things can end up causing further anxiety.

What does anxiety look like?

New and unfamiliar situations and challenging times can lead to us all experiencing an element of anxiety. We may be able to recognise this in ourselves but not in our children, here are some of the things you may notice about your child:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">🔗 Restlessness🔗 Fatigue🔗 Defiance🔗 Reassurance seeking🔗 Trouble concentrating🔗 Irritability🔗 Refusal to be without a parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">🔗 Muscle tension🔗 Trouble sleeping🔗 Avoidance of completing tasks🔗 Visible distress🔗 Headaches, feeling sick and other medical symptoms that we don't always recognise as anxiety.
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Intense anxiety can cause physical symptoms for your child, these can include; A racing heart, sweating, shaking, shortness of breath, feeling choked, chest pain, nausea, dizziness, numbness or tingling, feeling detached (depersonalisation or derealisation). They are all normal so don't panic! Using techniques like the balloon breathing and grounding (please see below) to get through these unpleasant feelings.

What can we do?

- Engage with people we care about in a **safe way** (it help to calm the stress) e.g. on the phone or FaceTime.
- Limit the time watching or reading about the media as there is a lot of false information going around at the moment. Still **stay informed** but during a particular time so we are able to calm down and relax afterwards.
- **Take time** for your body to relax.
- Breathe from your stomach (we call it **balloon breathing**). Picture a balloon in your stomach when inhaling and push your stomach out. By doing this the breathing system is able to cope better with anxiety. When we are anxious we breathe from the chest which creates more shallow and rapid causing hyperventilation, a faint feeling and sometimes holding the breath.
- **Calm breathing**: breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. It's thought to be the most calming way to calm the body
- Try **grounding exercises** when you are feeling panicked or anxious, such as focusing on the five senses; list 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can feel, 2 things you can taste or smell and 1 big breath. This should bring us back to reality and let us focus on something more enjoyable and relaxing.
- **Mindfulness** on a morning or evening can help us to relax and feel less anxious, some useful apps are: Smiling mind, Worry time, Clear Fear, Calm and Headspace

How can I support my child with low mood or depression?

Encouraging your children to **plan activities** they enjoy sounds simple but can be really useful.

Sometimes these activities might be things like playing their Xbox, which is absolutely fine, and can be part of a variety of activities such as football or cooking or speaking with friends. It's about understanding **what your child finds enjoyment in** and looking at doing more of things they value. These activities could be around physical fitness, friends, family, hobbies or education.

This is harder than you might think for your child when they feels low.

For your child, they may be experiencing extreme tiredness, lack of energy and no motivation. They may also not enjoy things as much as they used to. Therefore they may find that dragging themselves out of bed to play football doesn't feel worth it as they don't enjoy it anymore, whereas staying in bed feels easy and comforting.

Despite how tempting it may be to stay in bed and your pyjamas all day, this can have a negative effect on our mood, and starting our day as normal (showering, getting dressed, some light exercise) can make a massive difference to our mood. Try to stick to a routine and give purpose to your/their day.

The cause of the low mood may seem irrelevant to you but to your child it is a very real issue so try not to make unhelpful comments about others in worse situations and focus on sharing your concern for them and making a plan to move forward.

What does low mood look like?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">↳ Sadness or low mood↳ Loss of interest or pleasure↳ Feeling tired or low energy↳ Disturbed sleep (Increased or Decreased)↳ Lack of interest in activities↳ Less interactions↳ Struggling to relax	<ul style="list-style-type: none">↳ Indecisive↳ Low self-confidence↳ Changes in eating (Increased or Decreased)↳ Suicidal thoughts or acts / Self-Injury↳ Guilt or negative thoughts about themselves

Some useful questions to ask your child might be...

- What was the best day of the past week? What made it the best?
- Are you happy with the way you spend your weekends? How could you improve them?
- What, if anything, did you do this week of which you are proud?
- List one or two ways in which the week could have been better.
- How would you like to spend your free time?
- What is fun for you?
- Are there any hobbies or activities you used to enjoy doing like playing sports, going to a club, watching films, seeing friends, exercise, reading or playing?

Use the answers to these questions to help your child plan activities, and remember to start small. Remember this is not easy, and sometimes it can feel easier to not bother at all with the activity.

It can be useful to remind your child that despite how difficult it might feel, doing the activities will help them feel better in the long run.

Things you can do whilst you are at home (feel free to tick them off as you go):

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Plan your week with little things you want to accomplish<input type="checkbox"/> Set specific times for school work<input type="checkbox"/> Get up and dressed like any normal day<input type="checkbox"/> Clear out your wardrobe (could do it Marie Kondo style)<input type="checkbox"/> Self-care: Shower, skin care<input type="checkbox"/> Read a book<input type="checkbox"/> Watch Netflix (but not all day)<input type="checkbox"/> Bake<input type="checkbox"/> Dance<input type="checkbox"/> Home work-out<input type="checkbox"/> Make a travel bucket list<input type="checkbox"/> Learn a language<input type="checkbox"/> Call your grandparents<input type="checkbox"/> Learn a new skill (YouTube could be a great resource for this)<input type="checkbox"/> Classic board games: monopoly, charades<input type="checkbox"/> Draw or Paint<input type="checkbox"/> Create a scrap book | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Lego<input type="checkbox"/> Change the bedding<input type="checkbox"/> Tidy your room<input type="checkbox"/> Organise school work<input type="checkbox"/> Paint names<input type="checkbox"/> Play on X-box/Play station (again not all day)<input type="checkbox"/> Go for a walk<input type="checkbox"/> Have a warm drink<input type="checkbox"/> Start a jigsaw puzzle<input type="checkbox"/> FaceTime a friend<input type="checkbox"/> Wash the pots<input type="checkbox"/> Have a bath<input type="checkbox"/> Eat tea/ dinner with family<input type="checkbox"/> Listen to music<input type="checkbox"/> Sing in the shower<input type="checkbox"/> Watch a movie with your sibling or on your own<input type="checkbox"/> Social media detox for a few hours<input type="checkbox"/> Give someone a compliment<input type="checkbox"/> Watch the sun set or sun rise |
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Helpful and important contact details:

If you feel that your child's low mood or anxiety is causing negative thoughts around ending their life or intentionally harming themselves then please look to the contacts provided below for support and/or advice.

Always look at information you are sharing with your child first to ensure that you feel it appropriate for their age or development level.

Hull & East Yorkshire MIND	https://www.heymind.org.uk/	Tel: 01482 240200 Text: 07520 633447 Information Line (9am-5pm Monday to Friday): 01482 240133
Samaritans	https://www.samaritans.org/branches/	01482 323456
Childline Anyone under 19 in the UK with any issue they're going through. Trained counsellors.	https://www.childline.org.uk/ Download the Childline App – Pin locked, 1-2-1 chats, tips and advice.	Tel: 0800 1111 – FREE doesn't show up on phone bills.
Child Adolescent and Mental Health Services	http://camhs.humber.nhs.uk/	CAMHS: 01482 303810 CAMHS 24hr Crisis: 01482 301701
Prevention of Young Suicide (Papyrus)	https://papyrus-uk.org/ Email: pat@papyrus-uk.org	0800 068 41 41 – Call 07786209 697 - Text
The Calm Zone	https://www.thecalmzone.net/	5pm – midnight 365 days a year 0800 58 58 58
Thirteen (website) Information website	http://thirteen.me.uk/	Advice and Support on an array of potential issues
YoungMinds' Support for parents on their child's mental health	www.youngminds.org.uk	Free helpline for advice on: 0808 802 5544
NHS Advice number for medical issues.	https://www.nhs.uk/using-the-nhs/nhs-services/urgent-and-emergency-care/nhs-111/ If you have difficulties communicating or hearing you can: - Call 18001 111 on a text phone	For urgent medical problems but unsure what to do? Call 111 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.