

Helping Your Child with Anxiety

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers



Feeling worried is normal. Kids may worry about school, friends, family changes, or everyday things. If feeling worried makes it hard to focus, play, sleep or do well in school, your child may need extra help.

You might notice your child is:

- Irritable or clingy
- Trouble sleeping or bad dreams
- Hard time focusing or sitting still
- Avoiding certain places or people
- Picking or biting skin or fingernails

What your child might feel:

- Stomachaches or nausea
- Headaches
- Fast heartbeat or trouble breathing
- Worrying all the time
- Easily overwhelmed

How You Can Help At Home

Avoiding causes of anxiety (like staying home from school) can feel helpful, but it often makes anxiety worse over time. Try to do this instead:

1. Connect and Listen

- Spend 10–15 minutes each day with your child. Try doing something fun like playing games, reading, cooking, or taking a walk.
- Ask open-ended questions like, “What was the hardest part of your day?”
- Show you care. Try saying, “It’s okay to feel nervous. I’m here to help.”

2. Build Confidence

- Praise effort, not just results: “You were brave to try that!”
- Celebrate small wins like speaking up in class or sleeping alone.
- Help them face fears slowly.
- Let kids try to solve problems on their own.

3. Build Healthy Habits and Routines

- Physical activity: Kids should get 60 minutes daily like bike riding, dancing or sports.
- Eat healthy meals: Include a mix of fruit, veggies and protein.
- Sleep at night: 9–12 hours/night (kids), 8–10 hours/night (teens)
- Keep screen time to less than 2 hours per day.
- Regular schedules help kids feel safe.

4. Teach Coping Skills

- Practice deep breathing.
- Look at calming pictures.
- Encourage positive self-talk: I can be brave if I try; I am strong.

Supporting Your Child At School

- Talk with teachers or counselors about your child’s needs.
- Help set small goals or plans to manage stress.
- Encourage school attendance.
- Reward brave actions like making a new friend or asking for help.

Don’t Forget Yourself

Your well-being matters. Kids reflect adult stress. Ask for help when needed. Taking care of yourself is important—not selfish.

Activities to Reduce Worry by Age

Try some of these activities to help your child calm their body and mind. These activities can help your child understand their feelings and learn new ways to handle tough times or worry.

Age	Activities
1–3 (Toddler)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Blow bubbles slowly for deep breathing• Use soft cloths for comfort• Sing calming songs together
4–5 (Preschool)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play with clay to release tension• Practice naming feelings (frustrated, worried, excited)• Read books about brave characters
6–8 (Early Elementary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Try yoga poses and stretch together• Work on a craft together• Practice slow, deep breathing• Pretend to be a superhero to face fears
9–11 (Late Elementary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play calm music before bed or school• Use positive self-talk (“I can do this”)• Face fears slowly, with support• Spend time outside
12–14 (Middle School)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a plan for managing stress• Take a walk or exercise• Try creative activities, like drawing or journaling• Listen to enjoyable music or have a dance party
15–18 (High School)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Have daily check-ins together• Unplug from devices and social media• Volunteer or help others to build purpose• Meditate and exercise to give your brain a break• Join clubs or do fun activities

When to Seek Professional Help

If you notice any of these things in your child, talk to your child’s primary care provider:

- Feeling sad for 2 weeks or more
- Not wanting to be with friends or do things they like
- Talking about death or hurting themselves
- Big changes in mood or behavior
- Trouble sleeping or eating
- Finding it hard to pay attention
- Getting lots of headaches or stomachaches
- Not wanting to go to school or a big drop in grades

Call 988 for free, confidential support during a mental health or emotional crisis

For More Information and Resources Visit:

<https://ohiomindsmatter.org/health-professionals/disorders-conditions/anxiety>



References

1. American Academy of Pediatrics. Help Your Child Manage Anxiety: Tips for Home & School. HealthyChildren.org. Updated October 17, 2023. Accessed October 20, 2025. www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/Pages/help-your-child-manage-fears-and-anxieties.aspx
2. Ohio Minds Matter. Warning Signs and Common Symptoms. Ohio Minds Matter. Accessed October 20, 2025. www.ohiomindsmatter.org/youth-families/warning-signs-and-common-symptoms
3. American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. Anxiety Disorder Resource Center. AACAP. Accessed October 20, 2025. www.aacap.org/aacap/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Anxiety_Disorder_Resource_Center/Home.aspx