



Westways Parent/Carer Support

ANXIETY

MRS A REYNOLDS

Our school aims

Be equipped to recognise the signs of anxiety in primary aged children.

Have a better understanding of the causes of anxiety and its potential impact on primary school children's mental health and well-being.

Be able to appropriately respond to the needs of children with anxiety, including working collaboratively with available services.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is one of the most common causes of stress in young people.

Everyone experiences anxiety in different ways and it can be brought on by a range of experiences.

It is often related to a sense of fear or uncertainty and can be for a short time or can be prolonged.

Types of anxiety- fear, panic, tension, dread and nervousness.

A child could experience a range of these at any given time.

The development of anxiety

Anxiety is a normal human emotion. It is the basis of survival because it prepares our bodies to cope and react to danger - Humans are primed for survival to respond to situations where there are dangers or threats. However, some of us - including children - can react more intensely to situations that we feel indicate danger.

Some times a singular event can trigger problems with anxiety, for example an accident, bereavement or illness of a family member.

Anxiety can also be a learned behaviour - Family and friends responses to the world can contribute to a child's idea of what is dangerous. Children mirror the behaviours that they witness in the adults closest to them.

Types of anxiety

Generalised anxiety disorder - worrying about anything and everything, something that may or may not ever happen. Always feeling on edge and restless.

Panic attacks - intense and over whelming feeling of panic, terror or fear. Lasts for a short time and can cause difficulty breathing, heart palpitations and dizziness.

Specific phobias - an exaggerated feeling about the level of danger from a situation, thing or object.

Social phobia - extreme shyness and fear of being un-liked or seen in a negative light.

Types of anxiety

Separation anxiety - fear and distress at being away from a member of their family. Often a fear that something bad will happen to their loved one when they are separated.

Health anxiety - focusing obsessively on their health, body and symptoms- often worrying about death or dying.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OSD) - repetitive, intrusive and unwanted thoughts- often about something bad happening. May have compulsive rituals that they have to carryout or they fear something bad will happen to them or someone they love.

How can we help?

First and foremost, it is important to speak to your child about their anxiety and show that you understand and want to help.

Support and teach your child to recognise signs of anxiety in themselves - e.g. a stomach ache or a headache is actually a sign that they are feeling anxious/nervous.

All children can find a change in routine stressful, so try and stick to your daily routines as much as possible. If you know that there is going to be a change then try and prepare them as best as you can and with enough time for them to process the information you are sharing with them.

Try not to be overprotective and speak to them about their concerns in a relaxed and calm manner. Children will mirror your behaviours - if you are stressed and nervous then they will pick up on this and act in a similar way.

How can we help?

Practise mindfulness and relaxation techniques, for e.g. taking 3 slow breaths, breathing in for 3 seconds and out for 3 seconds.

Create a worry box or give your child a notepad that they can write their worries or keep a feelings diary.

Focus on positive emotions and things that make your child happy- create a poster of all of their likes and interests - encourage them to focus on the things that they enjoy and discuss positive aspects of their life.

Engage in creative play - drawing, colouring and making can often be a form of escapism for children and can often help take their mind off whatever is making them anxious.

Discuss positive and negative thoughts with them and how explain that replacing their negative thought with a positive one can impact their mood and behaviour- in school we call these red and green thoughts.

Red and Green thoughts

Examples of red thoughts-

- “Nobody likes me”
- “I am rubbish at maths”
- “I can’t do it”
- “I hate school”

Examples of green thoughts-

- “sometimes I get things wrong but everyone makes mistakes”
- “If I have a go then I might get it right”
- “most people in my class think I’m great”
- “I like most things about school”

Challenging red thoughts

Challenging our red thoughts is based on the primary ideas of CBT (Cognitive behavioural therapy). CBT states that if we change our thought processes we can alter how we feel which can then change our behaviour.



This will take time...

By challenging the negative thoughts we have about ourselves and changing them to a positive can hugely impact how we feel about ourselves or a certain situation. This will then alter our behaviours as we will feel more positive and relaxed - which will then minimise the physical impact of our anxieties as we will not feel as though we are in a fight or flight state.

However, retraining our thought processes in this way can take time and consistency as there is no quick fix for anxiety or intrusive thoughts. Your child will need constant reminders to try and alter their negative thoughts and perceptions and speak to themselves in a more positive way.

Protective factors

Attachment and affection - positive parental attachment creates a sense of security for a child - increasing their confidence when interacting with others and exploring their surroundings.

Paying attention to your child and making them feel heard - listening to your child and making them aware that you care. This will make their thoughts and feelings feel valued and increase the chances of them sharing their concerns with you.

Strong support networks - extended family, community and friendship.

Health factors - sleep, exercise and diet.

Further reading and resources

<https://copingskillsforkids.com/calming-anxiety>

<https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/blog/2017/09/28/new-free-resources-to-help-anxious-children>

<http://www.worrywisekids.org/>

<https://healthyfamilies.beyondblue.org.au/age-6-12/mental-health-conditions-in-children/anxiety/strategies-to-support-anxious-children>

[https://www.copingcatparents.com/Resources for Kids](https://www.copingcatparents.com/Resources_for_Kids)

Books

How Big Are Your Worries Little Bear?

by Jayneen Sanders

The Huge Bag of Worries

by Virginia Ironside

When My Worries Get too Big

by Kari Dunn Buron

Wilma Jean the Worry Machine

by Julia Cook

David and the Worry Beast

by Anne Marie Guanci

When to seek further help

If you feel that your child's anxiety is severe and is interfering in their ability to participate in day-to-day life, it may be a good idea to ask for further help.

We would recommend that you arrange an appointment with your GP and speak to your child's school- you can also receive advice from Young Minds free parental helpline - [0808 802 5544](tel:08088025544) - this service is available Monday-Friday 9:30am-4pm (these hours may have changed due to Covid-19).