



3. Be Patient

Be **patient** with your child as it is hard to face fears. Conveying understanding and an **empathetic tone** can help comfort your child and help them feel like they are **not alone** in facing their anxiety.

4. Don't Reinforce Anxiety

Be mindful of assuming that your child will be anxious in a certain situation and **try not to anticipate what might happen** (e.g., if they have been mildly anxious about dogs, don't move them away from one before they have moved or expressed any discomfort).

Don't reinforce anxiety by talking about it as absolute. For example, don't label your child as "shy" or "scared of spiders". Instead, try to use language like, "It takes them some time to warm up to new people." or, "He's not the biggest fan of the outdoors."

5. Your Bravery is Theirs

Children learn through **mirroring**. Anything you say or do is constantly being absorbed by your child.

If you also feel anxious often, consider getting help for yourself first so that you can stay calm and be brave.

6. Practice, Practice, Practice!

The more we do something, the better we become! This principle also applies to anxiety. By practicing how to approach feared situations and **continuously** helping your child find ways to reduce their anxiety, the anxiety the child feels in response to their feared situations will **fade overtime**.



Recommended Resources

Books:

Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents
Rapee, R., Wignall, A. et al.

Keys to Parenting Your Anxious Child
Manassis, K.

Website:

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/>



www.thefeelingsplace.com



The Feelings Place
MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR FAMILIES



A Parent's Guide to Childhood Anxiety



Why Do We Get Anxious?



Anxiety is as a **warning system** that protects us from danger. It prepares our bodies for the "**fight, flight (run away) or freeze**" response to danger. It sends chemical messages from our brain around our body to prepare (e.g., energy to muscles to run).

Anxiety is adaptive and is meant to protect us from actual danger. However, for some people (including children), this warning system can be **oversensitive**, activating even when there is **no real danger**. For instance, feeling anxious when approached by a classmate.

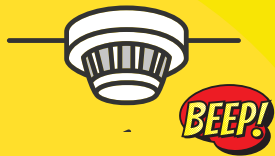
What Does Anxiety Feel Like?

When we are anxious, the hormones adrenaline and cortisol are released from the brain and pumped through our body. This can lead to feelings of lightheadedness or dizziness, stomachaches, cold hands and feet, shakiness in the legs, inability to speak and a flushed face.

Physical symptoms are not experienced by all children and some children may report some, but not all of the physical symptoms shown here.

Let's think about it...

Anxiety is like a **smoke alarm**. Normally, it does its job and alerts you when there is a fire. But in some children, this smoke alarm can go off even when there is no sign of a fire. This can be a very exhausting experience but the good news is we can train our alarm system to be less sensitive.



Normal Anxiety Anxiety Disorder



How to help your Child Cope with Anxiety



1. Exposure to Anxiety Situations

Although it is tempting to avoid things that make us anxious, avoiding them altogether will only allow anxiety to grow.

Finding ways to **slowly expose** your child to the feared situations and prevent them from completely avoiding their anxiety can help them learn that the object of their fear is not as dangerous as they feel it is.

2. Reward Brave Behaviour

Notice if your child steps out of their comfort zone even a little and make sure to give them specific praise for it. Your child may also benefit from a structured reward system for taking small steps towards facing their fear(s).