



Angela Cook, MSW, LCSW
angelacounseling5@gmail.com
wk: 314-275-8599 cell:314-724-4355

ANXIETY NO MORE!

ANXIETY IS DEFINED by overestimating the risk of doing, coping or dealing with something perceived as being difficult, while underestimating the ability to cope. All kids get really nervous or worried at times but it is often temporary. So what sets them apart from a child who might have an anxiety disorder-the intensity, duration & frequency of the anxious thoughts.

GENERAL SIGNS OF ANXIETY

Sometimes symptoms show up in behavior and sometimes they go unnoticed

- Excessive worry
- Chronic stomachaches or headaches with no apparent cause
- Irritability, frequent tantrums, jitteriness
- Extreme shyness
- Extreme perfectionism
- Sleep disturbances
- Excessive skin picking, nail biting, hair pulling, hoarding
- Avoidance of certain places or situations
- Intense dread about going somewhere
- Repetitive rituals that interfere with getting places on time
- Intense dread regarding certain social situation, going to school, etc.
- Constant fear of being judged negatively or getting embarrassed
- Overly emotional and over reactive at times
- Age inappropriate fears about monsters, dogs, etc.
- Seem to struggle with being in the present because of constant worry about past or present
- Trouble concentrating or staying focused

Risks of Untreated Anxiety

- Lack of healthy relationships and poor social skills
- Poor academic performance because the child does not work to their full potential
- Secondary depression from feelings of hopelessness, helplessness & low self esteem
- Prone to addictions later in life due to poor coping skills
- Self injury and/or suicidal thoughts

WAYS TO HELP

- Let the child voice their fear & validate feelings
- Don't constantly reassure, rescue or shield from the stressor
- Help focus on times when management of anxiety was successful
- Provide clear rules & expectations for behavior, yet be flexible when needed
- Encourage open dialogue about stress management & model healthy ways to relax
- Challenge anxious thoughts rather than avoid them, 'how can you see it in a different way?'
- Model healthy ways to cope with difficult situations that do not involve screens
- Promote good sleep hygiene, a healthy technology diet & proper nutrition
- Do help identify triggers that worsen anxiety & help them become a thought detective
- Use role plays to practice dealing with anxiety-provoking situations & stay calm-Continue to -Educate yourself about anxiety & give teachers a heads up if needed

BUILDING THE ‘COPING KIT’

Come up with a name for a container that you and your child put together to hold both tangible & symbolic ‘tools’ (objects) used to self soothe when nervous, stressed, or upset. The process of talking about ways to calm down helps normalize the importance of dealing with difficult situations, while creating new healthy habits. The ‘tool box’ uses various grounding strategies that help practice mindfulness by bringing one’s attention to the present moment, away from troubling thoughts.

SENSORY SOOTHERS: Try to integrate a variety of tools for all the senses

See: Picture books, comics, feeling books, picture of mom/dad/dog, favorite landscape, ASMR videos, balloon, inspirational quotes

Smell: candles, wax melts, lavender, coffee or vanilla cotton balls, etc.

Hear: Musical instrument, ear plugs, ear phones, music, nature sounds, guided meditations, various playlists for calming, getting pumped up before a game/test

Taste: herbal tea bags, gum, hard candies, mints, straws to chew on, suckers, sucking type water bottle, pinwheels or balloons to encourage deep breathing

Touch: Stuffed animal, fidgets, small rocks or marbles to use as worry stones, soft pieces of fleece or cotton balls, squishy balls, play doh, paper, writing tools, coloring books

SELF-CARE REMINDERS:

- Small water bottle (encourage staying hydrated)
 - Exercise cards, jumprope, small ball
 - Sleep reminders, eye mask, guided relaxation scripts, ear plugs
 - Pics of foods high in Calcium, Magnesium, & B vitamins, which is calming for the nervous system
- Limit /avoid sugar & caffeine

DEEP BREATHING REMINDERS: Encourage deep breathing: pinwheels, balloon, birthday candle

- Square breathing, In/Out breathing

EXERCISE: Encourage more physical activity & lifelong sports

- Motor breaks: short bursts of exercise for mental health, ie; 10 jumping jacks or 10 wall push ups
- Stretching and/or yoga poses pics (or use phone app)

PROMOTE POSITIVITY: Listen to YouTube positive affirmations on positive energy, productivity, and/or decreasing anxiety. Encourage healthy rituals, like prayer.

Practice the *Victory Candle* at dinner: each person says something they are proud of or happy about

RESOURCES: Stay Informed

Phone Apps: Mindful Powers, Brainwave, Calm, Sanvello, Escapes,

YouTube Videos: Strategies on mindfulness, positive affirmations for decreasing anxiety in kids

Websites: Anxiety Disorders Association of America (ADAA), Psycum, Green Child

Remember, anxiety is treatable but it takes work. Anxious kids need more practice learning how to cope. If your child’s symptoms of anxiety are wreaking havoc on your home life or interfering with their ability to learn, then professional help is needed.

Angela Cook, MSW, LCSW has over 25 years helping people of all ages find peace within. Her areas of focus include the following: anxiety, ADHD, trauma and OCD but she also works with adjustment issues, mood disorders and binge eating.