

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal emotion that everyone will feel at some point in their lives. This typically involves a scared, nervous, or panicky feeling with physical sensations such as shaking, sweating, stomach aches and a racing heart rate. Anxiety is our body's natural response to stressful events such as exams, but we usually will soon feel calmer after the event has passed.

Anxiety starts to become a problem when a young person feels stuck in it and it has lasted for a prolonged time. This can then impact a young person's ability to function and can limit the things that they usually feel able to do.



Signs that your child may be struggling with anxiety:

Every young person is different, but typical signs that your child is struggling with anxiety may include:

- **Physical signs:** feeling sick, trembling, or shaking, struggling to sleep, loss of appetite, headaches, or stomach aches, sweating, feeling tired, or difficulty concentrating.
- **Thoughts:** worrying about what is going to happen in the future; worrying what people think of them; worrying about not being able to cope in everyday situations like lessons or assemblies etc.
- **Feelings:** irritable, nervous, restless, on edge, scared, worried, panicked, overwhelmed or out of control.
- **Behaviours and coping mechanisms:** isolating themselves or withdrawing from their hobbies or social situations; repeatedly seeking reassurance etc.

If you recognise any of these signs in your child or are concerned that anxiety is taking over their life, encouraging them to regularly practice relaxation techniques can help to ease their anxiety (see techniques below).

Types of anxiety:

- General anxiety – this involves persistent or excessive worry that interferes with everyday life. Worries can be hypothetical or practical.
- Separation anxiety – excessive fear or anxiety around separating from people who a person is attached to.
- Social anxiety – significant anxiety or discomfort about being embarrassed, humiliated, rejected or looked down on in social interactions.



- Health anxiety – excessive worrying around being ill or a fear of becoming ill.
- Phobias – an excessive and persistent fear of a specific object, situation such as a fear of spiders, flying or vomit.
- Panic – this mainly involves panic attacks which include an overwhelming combination of physical and psychological distress.
- OCD – this involves obsessive (unwanted and unpleasant) thoughts and compulsive behaviours (repetitive behaviours to relieve the unpleasant feelings).

What causes anxiety?

Everyone experiences anxiety differently, so it's not always easy to pinpoint a cause. There are a lot of reasons why a child may feel anxious. But they may be more likely to feel anxious if they:

- have experienced a lot of change in a short space of time, such as moving house or school
- are around someone else, such as a parent, who is very anxious
- struggle at school and feel overwhelmed by work and exams
- have responsibilities beyond their age, for example, if they're a young carer
- have gone through a distressing or traumatic experience, such as being bullied or being in a car accident or a house fire
- have experienced family conflict, abuse, or neglect
- have experienced grief or bereavement

How to help your child with anxiety:

There are many techniques and strategies that you can try with your child if they are struggling with feeling anxious. Every young person is unique and so different techniques may work better for different individuals. To start, practice these soothing, breathing and grounding techniques below.

SELF-SOOTHING

Self-soothing is a quick and effective way to reduce the intensity of negative emotions.

- Sight**
 - Low lighting
 - Soothing colors
 - Sleeping masks
 - Coloring books
- Touch**
 - Soft things
 - Cuddle things
 - Massage
 - Hot/cold shower
 - Heated/weighted blanket
- Sound**
 - Calming noise
 - ASMR videos
 - Nature sounds
 - Guided meditations
 - Binaural beats
- Smell**
 - Aromatherapy
 - Fresh air
 - Candles/incense
 - Comforting smells
- Taste**
 - Strong flavors
 - Warm drinks
 - Eat slowly
 - Nostalgic flavors

BOX BREATHING

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GROUNDING TECHNIQUE

A calming technique that connects you with the present by exploring the five senses.

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| 5 THINGS YOU CAN SEE | 4 THINGS YOU CAN TOUCH |
| 3 THINGS YOU CAN HEAR | 2 THINGS YOU CAN SMELL |
| | 1 THING YOU CAN TASTE |

For further tips and support, visit:

[Supporting A Child With Anxiety | Tips and Advice | YoungMinds](#)

[Anxiety in children and young people | Barnardo's \(barnardos.org.uk\)](#)

