

Confident Parents Thriving Kids

ANXIETY PROGRAM



Canadian Mental
Health Association
British Columbia
Mental health for all

Module 2: Parent management

Self-Care

It's important to set yourself up for success by building a good foundation through self-care.

- **Self-care for children**
 - Healthy eating
 - Regular exercise
 - Sleep (quality and quantity)
 - Balance between scheduled activities and free time
 - Quality time with parents
- **Self-care for parents**
 - Helps you stay calm and be prepared to fight back the worries
 - Sleep
 - Exercise
 - Healthy eating
 - Balancing scheduled activities and free time

Team-Up Against Anxiety

Caregivers can have different approaches to responding to the anxiety:

- **Tough-love approach**
 - These parents know that their anxiety is a false alarm and want the anxiety to be defeated right away
 - May be harder to set gradual and more manageable steps to facing fears
 - May be harder for these parents to show that they really do understand how hard it is to face the anxiety
 - In the long run, scolding and punishment are not as effective as rewards for facing your fears

- **Rescue approach**

- These parents also don't want to see their child held back by the anxiety but find it hard to see their child in distress.
- These parents tend to jump in and rescue, helping their children to avoid situations that are stressful

- **Find the middle ground**

- Children need to feel understood and encouraged to face their fears
- In private: Set common goals for your child and talk through disagreements
- With your child: validate your child's emotion and communicate confidence in your child ("We can see this is hard for you and I know you can do it")
- Stay united as caregivers when setting clear and consistent expectations ("Today we will...")
- Play to your strengths and support each other in the areas that are harder

- **Ask for help from the other caregivers in your community**

Stay Calm

Your child takes cues on how to react to their anxiety by how you and other caregivers react to the anxiety.

- **Tools to settle yourself**

- Pause—take deep breaths before reacting
- Remind yourself that anxiety is a false alarm that you don't need to react to
- Think of a brave step your child has taken
- Remind yourself that things will get better

- **Communicate your confidence**
 - Use regular volume and neutral tone of voice
 - Make eye contact
 - Relax your body
 - Keep your comments brief
- **During times of anxious behaviour**
 - Stay calm
 - Give anxiety a name: "I know the worries get really loud when you try new things"
 - Ignore the anxiety:
 - Remind your child of previous successes
 - Use distraction
 - Pay attention to brave steps: "Let's just go take a look"
- **Staying calm communicates to your child:**
 1. There is no danger
 2. You are confident they can take steps to gradually face their fears
- **Paying attention to brave behaviour and giving specific, effective praise**
 - Focus on the behaviours you want to see more, not the ones you want to change
 - Be specific
 - Praise right away
 - Praise the little steps in the right direction
 - Avoid slipping into criticism after praise (e.g. "You did such a great job at the birthday party today. Why can't you do that at school?")

Model Bravery

Let your child see you face your own fears or do things that are hard for you!

Pay Attention to Bravery

Children learn a lot about the world from what we, as parents, pay attention to, including what is safe and what is not safe.

- When kids are anxious, they often have a lot of big behaviours (e.g., clinging, whining, crying, and negotiating)

Encourage brave behaviour by:

- **Ignoring anxious behaviour, not the child**
 - Stay silent
 - Look away; direct attention to something else
 - Stay calm (try to keep your reactions neutral)
 - If safe, leave the area if necessary
 - Watch for brave behaviour, even the littlest steps!
 - Some behaviours (i.e., those that cause harm to self, others or property) cannot be ignored