



# Activities to Help Your Child or Adolescent Manage Anxiety

Feelings of anxiety are common in children and adolescents. These include fears about harm to themselves or loved ones, vague “worries,” distress or “butterflies” when they are asked to engage in a feared activity, or concerns such as a headache or stomachache, associated with fears.

A certain level of anxiety is typical in some circumstances, such as new situations (and high-stakes testing of adolescents), and naturally protects against real dangers. However, anxiety can sometimes keep young people from activities that are important to their development. It is important to help children cope with their fears instead of avoiding the things that make them fearful.

## General Ways to Help Your Family Manage Anxiety

- Seek help from a trusted friend or professional counselor if your own worries may be contributing to your child’s distress.
- Be sure that both the adults and the young people in your family are getting enough sleep, which is extremely important to mental health and resilience.
- Place limits, appropriate to your child’s age, on screen time (for example, TV, computer, and cell phone time) and monitor for content that is upsetting to your child.
- Encourage healthy routines such as family meals, physical activity, and “special time” with you (see ideas in the Share Special Time section below) that help children and adolescents become more resilient to stress.
- Consider doing yoga as a family: it is a healthful, calming activity that all age-groups can enjoy together, indoors or out.
- Encourage mindfulness practices: they involve being purposefully aware of one’s emotions, senses, and thoughts at a particular time (they are techniques that can be demonstrated within 2–3 minutes). Mindfulness apps for children and adolescents include *Sesame Street Count, Breathe, Relax* (<https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/activities/count-breathe-relax>) and *Inner Explorer* (<https://innerexplorer.org>).

In addition, try one or more of the following activities:

## Activities to Help Young Children

### Blowing Bubbles

- Encourage your child to take slow, deep breaths to produce as many bubbles as possible.
- Do this at least once a day, or as often as needed.

### Modeling Clay

- Have your child knead, roll, pound, and shape the clay.
- Do this at least once a day, or as often as needed.

### Rubbing Textured Cloths

- Corduroy and silky cloths work best.
- Have your child rub a material that feels soothing.
- The material can be kept in a pocket or attached to the top or bottom of a desk.

### Lotion

- Give a squirt of lotion to your child, and ask your child to calm themselves.
- Have your child give themselves a hand massage.
- Or you can give your child a hand massage.

### Superpower Hands

- Ask your child to show you how to make fists.
- After a person makes fists, their hands rise up and their muscles tense.
- Have your child give a completely opposite response, by relaxing their hands.

### “Big Daddy” Sunglasses

- You can help your child discuss things that are scary or embarrassing.
- Give your child a pair of big, inexpensive sunglasses to help provide some distance for the worries or fears.
- Once the sunglasses are on, no one can “watch” them talk about the “scary” thing or embarrassing behavior.



## Activities to Help Young Children (continued)

### Superhero Comic Books or Movies

- Have your child choose a favorite superhero comic book or movie.
- Ask your child to describe the superhero and their superpowers.
- Have your child take on the superhero's powers and use those to get through the scary situation.

### Music

Have your child listen to soothing, relaxing, and meaningful music before a stressful situation, to calm themselves after a stressful situation, or at the end of the day to relax and help themselves get to sleep.

### Glitter Jars

Fireflies and Mud Pies “How a Glitter Jar Can Help Kids Control Their Feelings” ([www.firefliesandmudpies.com/glitter-timers](http://www.firefliesandmudpies.com/glitter-timers))

### STAR Breathing Charts

- Coping Skills for Kids “Deep Breathing Exercises for Kids” (<https://copingskillsforkids.com/deep-breathing-exercises-for-kids>)
- Conscious Discipline “Safe Place Breathing Icons” ([https://consciousdiscipline.s3.amazonaws.com/Free-Resources/Printable-Posters-Tools-Activities/FREE-Printable-Safe-Place\\_Breathing\\_Icons.pdf](https://consciousdiscipline.s3.amazonaws.com/Free-Resources/Printable-Posters-Tools-Activities/FREE-Printable-Safe-Place_Breathing_Icons.pdf))

### Gradual Exposure

Gradually increase your child's exposure to feared objects or activities, staying as calm and confident as possible yourself. If any step causes your child distress, coach your child to use a coping technique (above) that they have practiced.

- Help your child imagine or talk about the feared object or activity or look at pictures.
- Support your child to learn to tolerate a short exposure.
- Encourage your child to tolerate a longer exposure in a group or with you or another coach.
- Encourage your child to tolerate the feared activity alone (when appropriate) but with a chance to get help, if needed.

- If anxiety is intolerable at any step, go back to a previous step.
- Praise and celebrate success.

### Share Special Time

Share special, one-on-one time with your child. Even 10 to 15 minutes daily, without interruptions or use of electronic devices, will demonstrate your enjoyment of spending time together and offer you a break from your own tensions. Examples of activities you can do together include reading, cooking (for fun), outdoor play, and acts of gratitude or kindness to others, such as making a thank-you card for a teacher or taking cookies to a neighbor. (See “Family Handout: Guidelines for Special Time and Time In.”)

## Helping Older Children and Adolescents

### Model Behavior

Show your child or adolescent how to reduce anxiety and stress by thoughtfully assessing a challenging situation, tackling one small step at a time, engaging in coping strategies, and making sense of confusing or troubling things.

### Teach Coping Strategies

- How to plan, mentally rehearse, and prioritize activities that are worrisome (eg, schoolwork, other responsibilities)
- Mindfulness
- Deep breathing
- Muscle relaxation
- Positive self-talk (for example, saying to themselves “You got this” or “That was smart”)
- Thought-stopping (suppressing, or pushing away, unwanted thoughts)
- Imagining themselves in a safe place

### Encourage

- Listening to soothing music
- Participating in physical activity
- Spending time outdoors (especially in natural environments)
- Spending time with friends who have a calming effect (virtually during the COVID-19 [coronavirus disease 2019] pandemic)
- Spending time doing hobbies
- Helping others



## Helping Older Children and Adolescents (continued)

### Share Special Time

Share special, one-on-one time with your child or adolescent. Even 10 to 15 minutes daily, without interruptions or use of electronic devices, will demonstrate your enjoyment of spending time together and offer you a break from your own tensions. Examples of activities you can do together are taking a walk or bike ride, playing a board game, chatting about their day, and planning for an upcoming fun event. (See “Family Handout: Guidelines for Special Time and Time In.”)

***With all the above activities, parents should notice and praise the child’s or adolescent’s progress.***

Adapted in part, with permission, from Building Mental Wellness Learning Collaborative. *Helping Your Child Cope With Anxiety*. Ohio Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics; 2013. Accessed January 27, 2021. <http://www.ohioaap.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Helping-Your-Child-Cope-with-Anxiety.pdf>.

Derived in part from Bridgemohan C, Weitzman C. Pediatric anxiety: tools and resources for primary care. *AAP News*. December 14, 2018. Accessed January 27, 2021. <https://www.aappublications.org/news/2018/12/14/anxietyresources121418>.

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The information contained in this resource should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Original resource included as part of *Addressing Mental Health Concerns in Pediatrics: A Practical Resource Toolkit for Clinicians*, 2nd Edition.

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### Counseling/Therapy, Psychology, + Psychiatry Referral List

**Counselors/Therapists** include various types of providers - social workers, licensed clinical therapists, psychologists. These providers can help manage mood disorders, anxiety, and provide behavior strategies for conditions such as ADD or disruptive/oppositional behaviors. **Psychologists** generally have a broader scope than Counselors. While some may provide counseling, many do more thorough diagnostic testing and evaluations. This may include ADD testing and learning disability testing. **Psychiatrists** are medical doctors. Although some may do therapy, generally, their role is prescribing medications. For specific needs/conditions, please check out [cap4kids.org](http://cap4kids.org) for more resources. **We have a counselor in our office, Mary Evans, LISW. She is an NCH Behavioral Health provider who does telehealth appointments and in office appointments. Referrals are made by use to NCH but scheduled by Mary.** Please always check with providers as to the insurances they accept.

Practice/Provider	Restriction/Special Interest	Counseling	Psychology/Testing	Psychiatry	Scheduling Contact
NCH Behavioral Health		X	X	X	614-355-8080
New Horizons	Fairfield County	X		X	Lancaster: 740-277-6733 Pickerington: 614-834-1919
Access Ohio	All Medicaid Plans	X		X	614-367-7700
Sondermind	No Medicaid Plans Therapist Coordination Service	X			844-256-8915 sondermind.com
St. Vincent Family Services		X		X	614-252-0731
Syntero	Offers Case Management + Parenting Resources	X			614-889-5722
Buckeye Ranch	Intensive/Residential Options	X		X	614-384-7798
Directions for Youth		X			614-294-2661
Practical Solutions - Rhonda Moskowitz	Parent Coaching				614-459-8628

Practice/Provider	Restriction/Special Interest	Counseling	Psychology/Testing	Psychiatry	Scheduling Contact
Center of Cognitive Behavioral Health		X	X	X	614-459-4490
Boundless	Intellectual/Developmental Disability Services	X	X		800-409-2729
Lifestance Health		X	X	X	216-468-5000
Gahanna Counseling	Lori Baker, LISW	X			888-336-1772 614-342-0990
Playful Therapies	Ted Borkan, PhD	X			614-231-9495
After the Storm Counseling				X	614-783-6010
Metta Psychology Group		X	X		614-705-0026
Sommer Group	Disordered Eating	X			614-985-5500
Beth Rosner, PhD		X			614-804-3436
Worthington Psychological Assoc.	Lisa McCarthy, PsyD	X			614-888-1800
Tawnya Foster, PsyD	Early Childhood, Grief	X	X		614-947-0918
Mid-Ohio Psychological Services		X			Franklin Co: 614-751-0042 Fairfield Co: 740-687-0042 Licking Co: 740-281-1777
Behavioral Healthcare Partners (BHP)		X		X	Licking Co: 740-522-8477 Knox Co: 740-397-0442
Emily Program	Eating Disorders Only	X		X	888-364-5977
Jacqueline Lewis-Lyons, PsyD	Interest: Sports Psychology	X			614-433-7040
Smarter Therapy	All Virtual Services	X			740-913-1140
Prime Behavioral Health	Erin Bryant, LISW	X			Lancaster: 740-653-6500 Pickerington: 614-833-6900
Apex Counseling Service		X	X		614-571-1090
Psychological + Counseling Services	David Miller, PhD (5 yr+) John Wagner, PhD (teens)				614-863-4125 614-863-2399
North Suburban Counseling		X			614-895-9998
ADDvisor.com - William Benninger, PhD	ADD Only	X	X		614-888-2343
Dr. Steven Guy + Assoc.			X		614-848-9708
Colvin Psychological Services	Dr. Andrew Colvin Dr. Cheryl Colvin Dr. Schwartz	X	X		614-430-9870 614-848-5154

<b>Practice/Provider</b>	<b>Restriction/Special Interest</b>	<b>Counseling</b>	<b>Psychology/Testing</b>	<b>Psychiatry</b>	<b>Scheduling Contact</b>
Westerville Therapy	Sandra Webster, PhD	X	X		614-698-6640
Anne Reckling, PsyD		X	X		614-222-1888
Daybreak Counseling	Ed Wojniak, PhD	X	X		614-268-3939
Psychological Health Services	Vijay Belraj, PhD	X	X		614-430-9697
Alkire Creek Psychiatry	Jordan Weiss, DO	X		X	614-818-0101
Northwoods Clinic		X		X Dale Richards	
Central Ohio Counseling		X		X	614-785-1115
Forum Ohio			X		614-636-4779
Mt Carmel Hospice + Evergreen Center	Grief	X			614-234-0200
Well Within Psychiatry				X	614-392-5933
WCAP (We Care About People) Counsel.	Alcohol/Substance Use	X			614-239-9965
Columbus Springs Changes	Addiction				Pickerington: 614-962-6488 Dublin: 614-652-3998



# Managing Anxiety: Tips for Families

## What is anxiety?

*Anxiety* is another word for feeling worried or scared. If your child is feeling anxious, they may not be able to tell you. Your child may feel bad or sick without knowing why, or you may notice they seem restless or tired.

These are some other common signs of anxiety in children.

- Feeling as if their heart is racing
- Sweating or blushing
- Shaking or feeling sick to their stomach
- Feeling very cold or hot
- Trouble paying attention or sitting still
- Touching the crotch area (for young boys)

It's normal for children at any age to feel anxious sometimes, such as if they need to take a big test at school or talk in front of a group of people. But if your child's anxiety gets in the way of normal activities, such as sleeping alone at night, playing outside, or going to school, they may need some extra support.

The good news is there are things you can do to help prevent your child from feeling anxious and help them handle worries when they happen.

## How can I help my child at home?

These tips are helpful for all children, but they can be especially helpful for children with anxiety. Parenting is a busy job, so use your judgment about which tips make the most sense for your family.

### Connect with your child

- **Set aside one-on-one time every day without TV or other media.** Even just 10 minutes each day can make a big difference. Try gardening or taking care of houseplants, drawing, or going for a bike ride.
- **Praise your child** and make them feel good about themselves. For example, "You did a great job on that homework assignment!" or "Thank you for helping me with the laundry. I'm so lucky to have your help."

- **Find out what's worrying your child**, because stress can make them feel anxious. Things such as being bullied at school, divorce, or a death in the family can make a child feel anxious. Your child may need extra help to handle issues such as these.

### Help your child learn to manage fears

When your child is calm, start a conversation about things they can do to manage fears and worries when they happen. For example, let them know that they can

- Practice deep breathing and muscle relaxation.
- Use positive self-talk (for example, "I can try this" instead of "I can't do this").
- Think of a safe place, such as their bedroom or favorite place outdoors.

Also,

- Gradually expose your child to feared objects or activities.
- Praise and reward brave behavior: the goal is to cope, not avoid.

### Build healthy habits

- **Get active!** Encourage your child to be active for at least an hour every day. This activity can include playing outside, joining a sports team or an activity at the YMCA, biking or walking to school, or dancing at home to favorite music.
- **Eat healthy.** Eat healthy meals every day, including fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and protein foods. Remember to eat breakfast!
- **Get plenty of sleep.** School-aged children need 9 to 12 hours of sleep every night, and teens need 8 to 10 hours.
- **Limit screen time.** Try for less than 2 hours a day of entertainment screen time. Avoid scary or violent TV shows, video games, and movies.
- **Set up family routines.** Follow a regular schedule for playtime, mealtime, and bedtime. Knowing what to expect can help your child feel safe and secure.



## How can I help my child at school?

Children may find it hard to focus on or even go to school when they're feeling worried. If your child is having trouble in school, try these ways to help.

- Gently but firmly tell your child why it's important to go to school.
- Talk with your child's teachers and the guidance counselor about what to do if your child asks to go home from school early.
- If you think family stress or pressure to do well in school is upsetting your child, let them know they are doing a good job and you're proud of them.
- Help your child set realistic goals for school. If they set goals that are too hard to meet, they may feel worse about themselves.
- Remind your child that they can take steps to control their worries. For example, they can think about what to do ahead of time to handle a stressful situation.
- Reward your child's brave behaviors at school. Spending time doing fun activities with a parent is a very powerful reward.

### Remember, you know your child best.

Whether it's at school or the doctor's office, you are your child's biggest advocate. Don't hesitate to speak up on behalf of your child.

## When do I need to go back to the doctor?

If your child's anxiety doesn't go away or gets worse, get back in touch with the doctor. You and the doctor can make a plan to try new approaches or strategies with your child.

It's especially important to talk with the doctor if

- Your child starts to experience other behavior problems, such as shyness.

- Something scary happens in your child's life that may make their anxiety worse, such as an injury or death in the family.
- You suspect your child's anxiety is affecting another medical condition (for example, if your child's asthma gets worse with anxiety).

The doctor can also help you decide whether visiting a specialist may help. For example, a type of therapy called *cognitive behavioral therapy* can be helpful for children with anxiety.

### Make time to care for yourself too.

Parenting can be stressful. If you're feeling overwhelmed, don't be afraid to ask for support from family, close friends, social services, or your faith community. Children pick up on the stress and worries of adults, so getting support for yourself can help your child too.

To learn more about childhood anxiety and what you can do to help, visit these websites.

- American Academy of Pediatrics HealthyChildren.org: [www.HealthyChildren.org](http://www.HealthyChildren.org)
- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: [www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)
- American Psychological Association: [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness: [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org)
- National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health: [www.ffcmh.org](http://www.ffcmh.org)

## More resources about anxiety

This space is for you to write notes about other helpful resources you have found for anxiety.

