



## PARENTAL GUIDE

### Anxious

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There are many feelings that children experience daily that are easier for parents to recognize and label, like feeling mad, sad, or excited. However, anxiousness is one feeling that can be elusive for parents to identify. That's because anxiousness can manifest itself in many ways, both internally (real or imagined thoughts that result in feeling anxious) and/or externally (situations that result in an outward display of anxiousness, like pacing or biting nails). It can be tricky for a parent to pinpoint anxiousness, but if you educate yourself in some general ways in which anxiousness can manifest, you will be in a better position to identify it in your child and feel empowered to offer a helping hand when it's needed. You will be better equipped to support your child and know when it might be time to seek professional help from your child's medical practitioner, or a therapist trained to help children experiencing anxiousness.

#### LET'S GET STARTED!

First things first, no matter what your child is experiencing, it's important to believe them! They really are feeling unwell and may really have an upset stomach or headache. You may come to think that your child is "faking it" or that they are being "manipulative" to get out

of doing something or going somewhere. While it might be true that they would rather not engage in whatever is making them feel anxious, you can rest assured their feelings are real!



Listen to your child without talking or offering advice. If you notice you are interrupting, imagine a button being placed on your lips. In order to talk, you must take some time to unbutton your lips. This will serve as a reminder that if your mouth is open, your ears are closed!

Empathize with what your child is experiencing. While the situation they are sharing may seem trivial or inconsequential to you, it may be a big deal to your child. Tell them that you can see how anxious they're feeling about what they have shared. Listening to your child's experience helps them feel heard and validates their feelings.

When anyone feels anxious, that person can go to great lengths to make the associated feelings stop. Once the source of the anxiety is eliminated, the feelings of unease gradually fade away, and your child returns to a state of balance.

## PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Here are just a few physiological symptoms of anxiety that your child may experience. It is possible to feel some, or all, of these symptoms at different times depending on the situation/circumstance.

- Feeling butterflies, tremors, or nerves in their stomach
- Sweaty palms, underarms, forehead, back, in the folds of elbows and knees
- Tensing or tightening of different body parts, (hands, stomach, legs, and jaw)
- Having to use the washroom suddenly
- Getting flushed in the face or chest
- Feeling lightheaded
- Heart beating fast or pounding

When your child is feeling anxious, often their behavior changes too!

## BEHAVIORAL CHANGES

You know your child better than anyone else, but even parents can be confused by the various ways anxiety can present itself. Look for changes in your child's general behaviors and take note of when and where these changes happen most often.

The following are just a few behavioral changes that may offer insight into whether your child might be feeling anxious:

- Avoiding eye contact and looking down  
(while taking cultural differences into account)
- Crying



- Clinging and not wanting to be separated from you
- Nausea and vomiting
- Lashing out
- Refusal to go to school
- Not wanting to participate in fun activities

## HOW TO BE SUPPORTIVE

Here are some ways that parents can help children cope with anxious feelings:

- Remembering that anxious feelings are temporary
- Engaging in breathing exercises to help your child calm down
- Providing a well-balanced diet
- Engaging in exercise such as hopscotch and skipping together
- Keeping to a routine so your child knows what to expect
- Striving for an adequate amount of sleep nightly
- Unplugging from devices well before bedtime
- Encouraging your child to talk to someone, even if it's not you
- Being mindful of the ways you deal with your own anxiety and leading by example

## TRY THIS

Utilizing deep breathing is an effective method for maintaining a sense of calm. The book *Anxious* outlines a specific technique to guide you through the practice. To enhance this exercise and make it more engaging, consider incorporating physical touch. Physical touch can help children feel comforted while reducing feelings of anxiousness. Try using the following suggestions:

Deep Breathing:

Imagine a triangle. It has 3 sides. Breathe in slowly as you count to the number three, then hold that breath while you count to three. Gently let that breath out through puckered lips while counting to three. Take a little break and repeat the steps three to five times. Be sure to watch your tummy rise and fall with each breath so you can see that you have the right technique.

Find a quiet and comfortable space for you and your child to sit cross-legged in front of each other. Hold hands and complete the breathing exercise. Repeat the exercise again, but this time, close your



eyes for a deeper, more focused experience. If your child is not averse to closer physical touch, try the breathing exercise standing up in a gentle hugging embrace.

### **KNOWING WHEN TO SEEK SUPPORT**

Always take your child's symptoms seriously. If your child shares that they are feeling sick or parts of their body hurts, have them assessed by your family doctor. It's important to ensure there aren't underlying medical concerns responsible for their symptoms.

After ruling out any medical causes with your child's doctor, explore the recommendations provided in the included resources of the book. If your child shows no improvement in symptoms despite consistent engagement of the techniques offered over several weeks, your child may need professional support by a trained child therapist. In cases where your child poses a risk of self-harm or harm to others, seek help immediately.

