

Quick Tips to Lower Your Child's or Teen's Anxiety

Giving your child or teen the gift of less stress and worrying

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Anxiety is one of the biggest emotional health challenges facing our children and teens. It can destroy their self-esteem, reduce joy, and interfere with, or even sabotage, them from taking healthy risks in life. Being a calming, skilled, and steadying influence to help your children learn to manage anxiety is a valuable lifelong gift that you can provide to them.

Here are seven strategies to help your children manage their anxiety:

- 1) Closely listen and observe your teen. True panic attacks include shortness of breath, heart palpitations, dizziness, dry mouth, nausea, or diarrhea, high levels of muscle tension, and possibly an irrational fear that he or she will die. If your child is panicking, encourage slow deep breaths, be reassuring and non-judgmental.
- 2) Be patient, present, and soothing. Use consistent eye contact, active listening, and a warm accepting demeanor. Gently encourage your child to reflect on positive memories, personal strengths, and valued past accomplishments
- 3) Listen for irrational thoughts (e.g., "My future is ruined", "I can never get anyone to like me", "No one ever takes me seriously", "I suck in everything I do", "Everyone in the school is going to talk about this all the time for the next ten years.").
- 4) Help your child to see that irrational self-talk raises anxiety (or even lesser forms of worry) off the charts. Explain how, like a snowball rolling down a hill, the more he or she dwells on negative thoughts, the larger the snowball will grow.
- 5) Coach your child or teen to realize the lack of evidence for irrational (unhelpful) thoughts and help him or her find evidence for more rational (helpful) thoughts. So, for example, point out how the student is not a total failure or total loser or totally unpopular. Go back in time and point out times when the problem did not exist and when the current problem does not exist. Finding such exceptions to the rule is very helpful.
- 6) Point out how "What is the worst thing that can happen?" is a more helpful question than, "What if?" Explain how worries often begin with "What if" and that these worries can often be squashed when realistically considering how the worst case scenario is not likely to actually happen. Even if the worst case scenario occurs, it may be upsetting but not the end of the world.