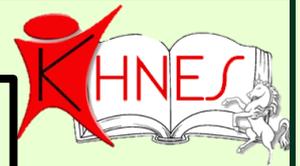


## Anxiety Disorder



Anxiety is a normal part of life and can affect us all in different ways and at different times. It can differ in severity from a minor worry to a panic attack. It can also differ in how long it lasts, from a few seconds to many years.

All children and young people may experience anxiety at times. Anxiety in children and young people can occur around school, different phobias, social interactions and many more situations.

Anxiety becomes a problem for children and young people when it starts to influence their day-to-day life, slows down their development, or starts to have a significant effect on their education or relationships.

### *Recognising Anxiety*

- ⚙ Irritable, tearful
- ⚙ Difficulty sleeping
- ⚙ Lack of confidence
- ⚙ Hard to concentrate
- ⚙ Problems with eating
- ⚙ Prone to angry outbursts
- ⚙ Repetitive negative thoughts, e.g. thinking that something bad is going to happen
- ⚙ Avoidance; this can be with everyday activities such as going to school, seeing friends or going out in public.
- ⚙ Complaining of tummy aches and feeling unwell
- ⚙ Constant fidgeting e.g. shaking leg, playing with hands.

## How to help an anxious child or young person



Recognition	<p>Talk to the child or the young person about their anxiety or worries. Reassure them and show them that you understand how they feel.</p> <p>Teach the child or young person to recognise signs of anxiety in themselves and to ask for help when it strikes.</p>
Help Find Solutions	<p>Focus on exploring solutions with the child or the young person. For example, it may be helpful to say "I understand that you're worried about this. What can you/we do that could help you?"</p>
Routines	<p>Children and young people of all ages find routines reassuring, therefore try to stick to regular daily routines/activities where possible. For example, in a school environment, this can be done with keeping a regular timetable for the pupil that they can manage which is agreed with pupil, parents and the school. It will help the young person knowing what time they will be going in, which lessons they will have with which teachers.</p>
Prepare for Change	<p>Change is something which can cause a significant amount of anxiety and stress for a child or young person. To minimise the level of anxiety, preparation for change can take place. Talk to the child or young person about what is going to happen, when it is going to happen and why it is happening.</p>
Simple Relaxation Techniques	<p>Practice simple relaxation techniques with the child or young person. Such as; taking three deep, slow breaths, breathing in for a count of three and out for three.</p>
Distraction	<p>Distraction can be helpful for children or young people who are experiencing anxiety. For example, if a young person is feeling anxious, distract them by talking about something which they have a great interest in or enjoy. This could be their favourite book/film/place.</p>
Worry Box	<p>Worry box is a small box which can be decorated with the young person. Ask the young person to write down or draw any of their worries and post them in the box. At the end of the day/week or month, the young person can sort through the box with a trusted adult and try to find solutions to solve those worries.</p>
Safety	<p>Safety concerns come into play when symptoms are severe. Adolescents with anxiety may engage in suicidal or other dangerous behaviours. Establishing and maintaining their safety and ensuring a stable school environment should take priority, especially in an acute episode when symptoms are severe.</p>
Pupil Support Plan (PSP)	<p>Each pupil should have a Pupil Support Plan (PSP) which should identify triggers which</p>

school staff should be aware of. If school does not provide a PSP, this then could lead to members of staff working with the student not being aware of their triggers and needs and causing significant stress to the student. The PSP should also include strategies school staff should be using with the child at all times. Risk assessment is another item which should be included in a PSP. The risk assessment should highlight the risks involved around the young person and their diagnosis. This then should be RAG rated – Red, Amber & Green. Red will indicate high risk which will mean that there are current indicators of risk present, suggesting the risk outcome could occur at any time. Amber should be indicating medium level of risk; Current indicators are present but the risk outcome is unlikely to occur unless additional risk factors intervene/arise. Green should be indicating low risk; No current significant indicators of risk.

## Classroom Strategies

- +** **Clear Targets:** Small precise targets need to be clearly specified, with prompts and cues to enable the student to achieve these. These prompts and cues, often very visual, are there to help the student work through a given task. Rules need to be clear especially for these students, with positive rewards directed primarily to effort in staying on a task rather than for attainment. It is helpful if teachers try to adopt the viewpoint that they have the responsibility for communicating what the task is about and how to do it. Then, if students do not achieve, it is because the teacher has not been successful in communicating rather than the students' 'fault' for not understanding. This fundamentally non-judgemental response to failure sometimes needs to be expressed quite explicitly by the teacher: 'I'm sorry, I don't think I explained that to you very well'.
- +** **Safe Zone:** What is needed in classrooms and schools is a safe place that is free from questioning and exploration of what happened, and why, by authority figures. Quite safe zones, where someone is available to simply 'be there' when students have become very distressed, provide an important whole-school intervention. It is very important that arrangements for withdrawing students from classrooms do not place them in 'confrontational' situations immediately after an outburst or episode of very 'difficult' behaviour. Staff asked to work in such situations need to be selected because they are less likely to adopt confrontational attitudes and behaviour themselves.
- +** **Deep Breathing:** Students, whether angry or anxious, need to acquire strategies for calming themselves and reducing physiological arousal. Calming techniques need to be taught explicitly. Teach slow deep breathing at the rate of approximately six breaths per minute while, at the same time, consciously trying to evoke remembered feelings of affection, tenderness and so on. This technique has demonstrated effects on aspects of heart rate, leading to greater coherence in the functioning of the brain.
- +** **Prompts to Calm Down:** The teacher may set up a system of prompts to remind students to use the techniques practised to achieve calming. The prompt might be a verbal signal or card placed unobtrusively or given to the student with an outline (either visually or verbally) of the agreed procedures.



- + **Praise Personal Improvements:** *The first task of the teacher is to be aware of those students who are particularly vulnerable to upset and to notice the first signs of anxiety or distress. It is clear that the way feedback is given needs to be carefully considered for such students and the teacher needs to establish an ethos in the classroom whereby targets are set for effort rather than attainment and praise is given for aspects of student behaviour such as listening, effort and carrying out procedures rather than how well the student has completed the task. An inclusive classroom is one that celebrates success in the improvement over the individual's previous performance rather than one that highlights and ranks students according to attainments.*
- + **Coping strategies:** Encouraging learning together ethos (teacher and child).
- + **Valuing the child:** Actively seeking the child's opinion at least once a day, Initiating formal and informal progress reviews and academic achievement.
- + **Positivity and self-esteem:** Crediting effort not 'ability', Sharing golden moments of achievement, humour and creativity.
- + **Developing reaction:** Recognising the importance of the emotional competence as well as academic attainment, developing the child's skills of reflection and contemplation.
- + **Providing Management and support:** Ensuring and improving the emotional climate in the classroom, using circle time and other positive self-worth activities. Ensure a good working knowledge of literacy skills develops as early as possible, Using a mentor /TA/ Peer for additional support.

#### + **Use of Language**

##### **Do:**

- Reassure
- Empathy not sympathy
- Our own attitudes about emotions and how we respond to them.
- Validation and accepting.
- Naming the emotion, calming.
- Trust - Acceptance of your guidance – modelling.
- Mirroring.
- Positive reinforcement/praise – just as important for when a young person has done something as well as when they haven't (i.e. not had a meltdown).

##### **Don't:**

- Shout/show frustration
- Lose patience
- Refraining and dismissing.
- Ignoring
- Isolation
- If they self-harm, do not ask them to stop – this only adds pressure.
- Do not overload the young person with a group of staff – it will only exasperate the situation.

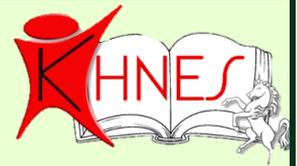
#### **Further Reading**

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/anxious-child>

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg159/ifp/chapter/Treatment-for-children-and-young-people>

<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/>

## Where to get help



### YoungMinds Crisis Messenger

- Provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK if you are experiencing a mental health crisis
- If you need urgent help text YM to 85258
- All texts are answered by trained volunteers, with support from experienced clinical supervisors
- Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.

### No Panic

- [www.nopanic.org.uk](http://www.nopanic.org.uk)
- No Panic are the people to call if you are suffering from panic attacks, OCD, phobias, and other related anxiety disorders.
- Helpline: 0844 967 4848 (Daily 10:00 – 22:00 Charges apply)
- Youth Helpline for 13 - 20 yr olds: 0330 606 1174 (Mon - Fri 15:00 – 18:00 Charges apply)
- Having a panic attack? Crisis number with recording of a breathing technique: 01952 680835 (24 hr)
- Email: [admin@nopanic.org.uk](mailto:admin@nopanic.org.uk)

### ChildLine

- [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
- If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, email or chat online about any problem big or small
- Freephone 24h helpline: 0800 1111
- Sign up for a childline account on the website to be able to message a counsellor anytime without using your email address
- Chat 1:1 with an online advisor

### The Mix

- [www.themix.org.uk](http://www.themix.org.uk)
- If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix for free on the phone, by email or on their webchat. You can also use their phone counselling service, or get more information on support services you might need.
- Freephone: 0808 808 4994 (13:00-23:00 daily)