

TIPS FOR HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH ANXIETY OR EXCESSIVE WORRY

Whether your child has been diagnosed with anxiety or they “simply” tend to worry a lot, managing your child’s anxiety, or worry is a tough job for any parent. We have put together a list of six ways to help ‘YOU’ help your child during times of increased worry, anxiety and/or stress.

1. Stop reasoning. It is extremely common for adults to try to reason with their child and reassure them that there is nothing to worry about. This does not work to help calm your child when they are in full worry-mode. Chemicals are being released and blood flow may be increased in their brain, so sound reasoning and decision-making is not available to them at that moment.

Try instead: [GoZen](#) has a great technique called FEEL:

F - Freeze. Pause with your child and take some deep breaths together;

E - Empathize. Worry is scary, it’s time to acknowledge that your child is worrying about something scary for them. Let them know you understand what they’re going through.

E - Evaluate. This does not work during any high anxiety moments, but once your child is calm, discuss possible solutions to the worry.

L - Let go. Parents hold a lot of guilt if they have an anxious child. You need to work at letting that go. You’re providing tools and strategies to help. You’re amazing.

2. Keep an eye out for worry “tells”. Once you notice that your child worries a lot, or if they’ve been diagnosed with anxiety, it becomes easy to notice physical movements they make that let you know they’re sliding further into anxiety. They may march their feet, fidget, become angry, or their mood may shift quickly. All kids have different cues that you can learn to help you to help them manage the worry, anxiety or panic.

3. Time to distract. When you notice your child is slipping into worry/anxiety, it’s time for you to step in. Acknowledge what is happening (they might not be aware and they will most likely deny it) and then work to distract them. There are many ways to try to distract your child and you’ll need to figure out what works best for them. You could ask them questions about something they love. You could ask them to find five blue items in the room. You could ask them to list their 10 favorite foods. Some kids may figure out what you’re trying to do and get angry at your attempt to distract, but forge ahead - find the distractions that do work for your child, and help them ignite a different part of their brain.

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4. Open your patience gates. When your child worries a lot, or has an anxiety episode, or panic attack, your patience may falter. Having a worrisome child can be taxing and thoughts of “Why are you worrying about that?” or “There’s zero chance of anything bad happening to you, I don’t get it!” These types of thoughts may run through your mind. That’s okay for you to feel that loss of patience, but try your best to not display it in front of your child

Try instead: Take a few big breaths and remind yourself that your child is not doing this to you. In fact, their worry or anxiety has nothing to do with you, but they do need you to remain calm and support them, even if their worry doesn’t make any sense to you.

Try 5-5-5- breathing; inhale for 5 seconds, hold for 5 seconds, exhale for 5 seconds. Repeat at least 5 times. If deep and slow breathing isn’t working for you, it’s okay for you to leave the room for a moment to take those breaths, calm your own mind, and prepare yourself to be the support your child needs.

5. Create Worry-Time. Telling your child to not worry is like trying to tell water to not be wet. It’s impossible. Allow your child time to worry. Worry is good - in fact, worry saves their life daily. If your child didn’t have worry, they’d cross a street without looking, they’d go with strangers in a parking lot and they’d eat anything off the ground that they found. Worry is essential to living a full life - but excessive worry may become anxiety which may become panic attacks, which then can lead to depression (this may happen for untreated anxiety).

Bedtime Worry-Time. If your child tends to worry about little things all day long, acknowledge their worry and ask them to put it in their ‘mental worry box’. That allows them to acknowledge their worry and file it away during the day. At bedtime, ask them to open their worry box and go through each worry they had throughout their day. Help them create solutions or “put that worry to bed for the day”. Instead of bottling up their worry, they’re able to put it away during the day, but unleash it at night with the goal of letting each worry go, so they don’t stay bottled up.

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6. Build a checklist. After a while, you'll learn what strategies work for your child and what strategies do not. We highly recommend you find a counsellor to help your child manage their worry or anxiety. Clinical counsellors are a fountain of information on strategies to manage worry and can act as a huge support for not only your child but also for you. Some strategies you try may inflame your child's worry - but you don't know until you try. Why not begin writing down the strategies that helped lessen the worry?

Create your "Annihilating Anxiety" checklist. It may take a while to create this checklist, but once you know what strategies work for your child, you can add each strategy to your checklist to combat worry/anxiety. Again, work with a counsellor to help your child find strategies that work for them. If breathing exercises help calm them, put that on your list. If particular distraction exercises work, add it to the list. Music, reading, exercise etc. can all be a part of your checklist. Put as many strategies on the list as needed and help your child work through the list when in a state of worry, anxiety or panic, but be sure to review it with them beforehand.

How to implement the checklist: Once you and your child "see" (or for your child, feel) the first signs of worry, help them work through the checklist with the top strategy as #1, second most useful strategy as #2, etc. Continue down the list taking your time at each strategy to really focus on it and "allow" it to work.

7. Practice self-compassion. This may be the hardest tip we have for you because you're going to want to blame yourself for your child's anxiety or worry. Please know that there are multiple reasons a child may experience anxiety including genes, brain physiology, your child's personality, environment, etc. You are not to blame.

We recommend that **you** also see a counsellor for yourself if possible to help you manage your own worry about your child's situation. Again, you are not to blame. Nor are you alone in being the support system for your child, so reach out for help, forgive yourself for anything you feel you have done and be the pillar of strength you need to be to help your child. Love yourself. Respect yourself. Work toward seeing yourself as the strength you are to help the child you love.