Understanding Anxiety in Children:
11 Practical Tips for Parents
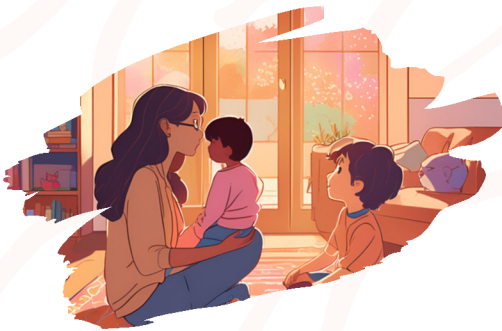
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PSYCHIATRY

If your child has anxiety, it's important to recognize that their feelings are real and challenging.

Parenting an anxious child comes with unique hurdles, but there are ways to support them that can make a significant difference.

1. AVOID TRYING TO "FIX" THEIR ANXIETY

It can be tempting to want to fix things right away, but anxiety doesn't just disappear with a quick solution.

Instead of jumping to fix it, **focus on listening to your child's feelings.** Let them know it's okay to feel anxious and that you are there to support them.

2. MODEL WAYS OF HANDLING ANXIETY

Kids often learn by watching their parents. Show them how you handle stressful situations.

For example, if you're feeling overwhelmed, demonstrate healthy coping strategies like deep breathing, taking a short break, or calmly talking about your feelings. This helps your child understand that anxiety is manageable.

3. HELP THEM THINK OF SOLUTIONS—DON'T GIVE THEM ANSWERS

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Rather than offering quick-fix solutions, guide your child in coming up with their own ideas to handle anxious situations. This encourages independence and problem-solving.

You can ask, **"What do you think would help right now?"** rather than telling them what to do. You can even post a visual poster of different coping strategies on the wall for them to choose from (they have these on Etsy!)

4. ALLOW EXTRA TIME FOR TRANSITIONS
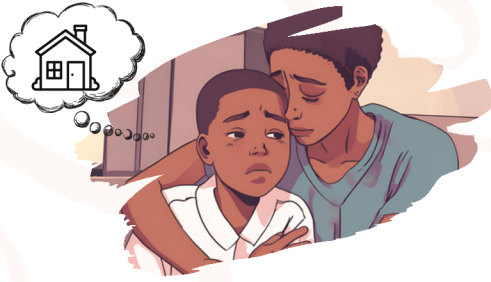
Transitions, like leaving the house or starting a new activity, can be particularly tough for kids with anxiety.

Make sure to **give them extra time** during these moments, so they don't feel rushed, which can heighten their stress.

5. SHORTEN ANTICIPATORY PERIODS

If your child gets anxious about upcoming events (like a doctor's appointment), don't tell them about it too far in advance. If possible, give them a heads-up just a few hours before the event. This prevents them from worrying for days.

Your child may feel less anxious if they understand a play-by-play of the event. Who will be there? Will there be a lot of people? What will happen? What is the location? What does it look like?

6. MODIFY EXPECTATIONS AND DEMANDS

Sometimes, anxiety can make everyday tasks seem overwhelming. Be mindful of what you're asking your child to do and adjust expectations when needed.

If a task is causing too much distress, it may help to **break it into smaller, more manageable steps**.

7. USE VALIDATING EXPRESSIONS

It's important to **validate your child's feelings**, even when you don't fully understand their anxiety.

Phrases like, "That must be really hard" or "I know this is scary, but I will help you through it" can provide comfort and reassurance.

8. LIMIT EXPOSURE TO ANXIETY-PROVOKING MEDIA

Distressing news stories, intense movies, or shows can increase anxiety in children.

Try to limit their exposure to these kinds of media, especially if they are already feeling anxious.

9. BE FLEXIBLE BUT CONSISTENT WITH ROUTINES

While routine is important, **don't be too rigid**. Flexibility is key when dealing with anxiety, but avoid letting anxiety disrupt important routines like school.

If your child feels too anxious to attend, work with the school to find ways to ease their stress rather than allowing them to stay home. A **504 plan** can come in handy here to prevent overwhelming anxiety around school.

10. SET "WORRY TIME"

Allow your child a specific time each day—say an hour—to focus on their worries.

If they want, you can have them vent and say all of their worries out loud. Work on solutions together. Once that time is up, encourage them to move on to something else. This helps keep anxiety from overwhelming the entire day.

11. UNDERSTAND THE LEVELS OF ANXIETY

Anxiety isn't one-size-fits-all.

Help your child understand different levels of anxiety and work with them to de-escalate before tackling a problem. For instance, if they are extremely anxious, focus on **calming strategies** before discussing solutions.

Parenting a child with anxiety is challenging, but with patience and the right strategies, you can help them manage their feelings and build confidence. While you can't "fix" anxiety, the best gift you can give your child is to equip them with tools to navigate it.