

# Managing Anxiety

January 27, 2020

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# Agenda

1. What is Anxiety
  - Definition
  - Physical and Other Signs
2. Tools to Help Your Child Manage Anxiety
  - Communication Strategies
  - Tips for Parents
  - Types of Coping Skills
  - Proactive Strategies
  - In the Moment Strategies
  - Relaxation Apps
3. Outpatient and School-based Supports
4. The Importance of Self-Care
5. Questions from Parents/Guardians/Caregivers

# What is Anxiety - Definition

According to the American Psychological Association, anxiety is “an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes . . .”

A little anxiety can be helpful...

Motivation

Protection

Improved performance

YET too much can be detrimental...

Distress then avoidance

Interference with functioning

Other difficulties (potential depression)

# What is Anxiety - Physical Changes

- Pounding heart
- Sweating
- Hot and cold flashes
- Trembling voice
- Shaky hands
- Headache
- Upset stomach/nausea
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Tense muscles
- Difficulty with sleep
- Changes in eating habits

# What is Anxiety - Other Signs

## Somatic Complaints

- Frequent headaches, upset stomach or somatic complaints

## Worried Thoughts

- Unrealistic worries
- Unrealistic demands of self
- Concerns expressed as “what might happen if...” in many situations
- Fear they are going crazy or will die
- Fear of evaluation in social situations
- Concerned with being perfect

## Behavioral Changes

- Avoidance of situations where evaluation is possible
- Withdrawal
- Trouble relaxing
- Excessive need for reassurance

## Cognitive Difficulties

- Difficulty concentrating or easily distracted

## Mood Changes

- Unhappy or irritable

# Successful Communication Strategies

- Use opportunities as they arise to talk about possible difficulties
- Talk, but listen more - Stop the multi-tasking, listen carefully
- Start conversations! Share information about your day/experiences/feelings and model this exchange of ideas/feelings
- Listen, repeat, empathize, and respond
- Try to control your reactions
- Don't bring up the past
- Ask kids what they need from you
- Keep conversations private
- Problem solve together
- Plan a date for a one-on-one activity with your child

# Other Tips for Parents

- Help your child maintain a routine for sleep, mealtimes, and activities
- Anticipate stressful situations
- Family dinners - high point and low point of the day
- Teach relaxation - gentle music, relaxation tapes, dim lights, warm baths, meditation, guided imagery
- Offer emotional support and reassurance, that with time and help, they will feel better
- Focus on your support system
- Listen and tell your child how you plan to help - GOOD COMMUNICATION
- Have your child evaluated by a licensed mental health professional in order to get appropriate diagnosis
- TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

# TYPES OF COPING SKILLS

## **Self-Soothing**

(Comforting yourself through your five senses)

1. Something to touch  
(ex: stuffed animal, stress ball)
2. Something to hear  
(ex: music, meditation guides)
3. Something to see  
(ex: snowglobe, happy pictures)
4. Something to taste  
(ex: mints, tea, sour candy)
5. Something to smell  
(ex: lotion, candles, perfume)

## **Distraction**

(Taking your mind off the problem for a while)

### Examples:

Puzzles, books, artwork, crafts, knitting, crocheting, sewing, crossword puzzles, sudoku, positive websites, music, movies, etc.

## **Opposite Action**

(Doing something the opposite of your impulse that's consistent with a more positive emotion)

1. Affirmations and Inspiration  
(ex: looking at or drawing motivational statements or images)
2. Something funny or cheering  
(ex: funny movies / TV / books)

## **Emotional Awareness**

(Tools for identifying and expressing your feelings)

### Examples:

A list or chart of emotions, a journal, writing supplies, drawing / art supplies

## **Mindfulness**

(Tools for centering and grounding yourself in the present moment)

### Examples:

Meditation or relaxation recordings, grounding objects (like a rock or paperweight), yoga mat, breathing exercises.

## **Crisis Plan**

(Contact info of supports and resources, for when coping skills aren't enough.)

Family / Friends  
Therapist  
Psychiatrist  
Hotline  
Crisis Team / ER  
911

# Proactive Strategies

\*\* DO NOT avoid everything that causes anxiety. The flight-fight-freeze response urges your child to escape the uncomfortable situations.

Meditation and mindfulness

Daily exercise helps stimulate endorphins and feel good hormones so try incorporating that into your child's routine (even before school)

Adequate sleep, healthy meals, plenty of water, downtime to decompress, outdoor play

Limit screen time as this can increase anxiety, especially social media

IPAD apps that they can use before bed or when needed to relax

# Proactive Strategies

Teach your child to be a thought detective. Imagine every thought you have floats above your head in a bubble (like what you see in a comic strip). Now catch onto the worry thoughts and collect evidence to support or negate the thought. Teach your child not to make judgements about what to worry about based only on feelings. Feelings are not facts. Teach your child to have a debate in their mind.

Help your child go from “what if” to “what is”

Develop a step by step checklist to calm down - a coping list with concrete strategies to use in the moment of distress (deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, stress ball, write it out, talk back to worries)

Make sure that they practice the strategies when they are not anxious so they gain confidence when needing to use them

# In the Moment Strategies

## Belly Breathing

Help your child pretend to blow up a giant balloon. “We’ll take a deep breath and blow it up to a count of 5” - do this together with them

I will say something and I want you to say it exactly as I do: “ I can do this” say it 10 times at variable volumes

“Let’s put your worry on the shelf while we \_\_\_\_\_ (listen to your favorite song, read a story, walk the dog, bake) Then we’ll pick it back up again.

“Let’s count...”- distraction techniques. Count the number of people wearing sneakers, number of kids in the room.

# In the Moment Strategies

Grounding exercise – Look around the room and have your child identify and name 5 things they see, 4 things they feel, 3 things they hear, 2 things they smell, 1 think they taste

Tell me the worst thing that could possibly happen. This helps to change their thought process. Talk about the likelihood of that situation happening. Ask about the best possible outcome. Then ask them about the most likely outcome. The goal of this is to help your child think more accurately during their anxiety. (similar to thought detective)

“Close your eyes and picture this”- visualization is a powerful techniques used to ease anxiety. Guide your child through imaging a safe, warm, happy place where they feel comfortable. (Encourage this skill in the classroom or on the ride to school)

# Relaxation apps

Calm

iZen

Relax App

5 minute escapes

Breathe

buddhify

Breathe2Relax

Stop, Breathe & Think

NatureScenes

Mindshift

Color Diary

Colorfly

Smiling Mind

Guided Mind

# Outpatient Supports

## 1. INTERFACE Referral Service

Helpline 1-888-244-6843

Monday - Friday 9am - 5pm

Consult with a mental health professional about resources and/or receive personalized, matched referrals.

## 2. [sscit.org](http://sscit.org)

South Shore Coalition of Independent Therapists is a well established, unique community of psychotherapists, psychologists, and psychiatric medical providers on the South Shore

Use the simple search tools to find a therapist who fits your specific needs

# District of Pembroke Behavioral Health Professionals

## Pembroke High School

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## Pembroke Community Middle School

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## Hobomock Elementary School

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Amanda Carr, School Adjustment Counselor

**Because I take care  
of myself first,**



**I can take care of others even better.**

# Questions from Parents/Guardians/Caregivers



Thank you for joining us!