

# How to Help your Child in an Anxious Moment

**Breathe slowly and deeply together.** You can count slowly to five as you breathe in, and then five as you breathe out. If this is too much, try starting with shorter counts. If it works for them, gradually encourage your child to breathe out for one or two counts longer than they breathe in, as this can help their body relax.

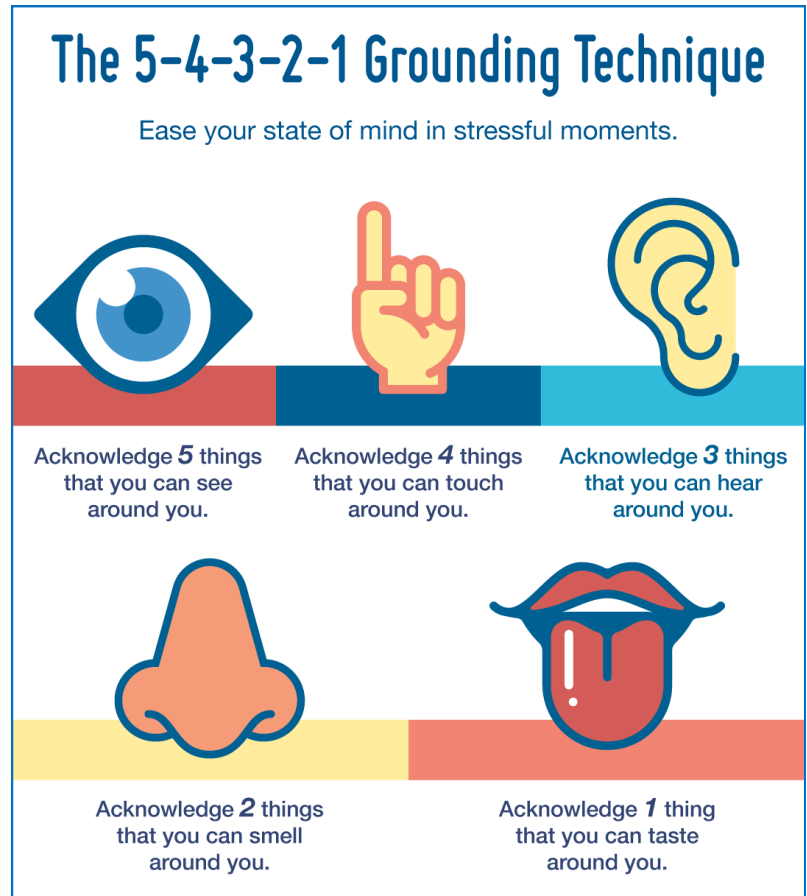
**Sit with them and offer calm physical reassurance.** Feeling you nearby, or holding your hand or having a cuddle if it's possible, can be soothing.

**Try using all five senses together.** Connecting with what they can see, touch, hear, smell and taste can bring them closer to the present moment and reduce the intensity of their anxiety. You might think together about five things they can see, four things they can touch, three things they can hear, two things they can smell and one thing they can taste.

**Reassure them that the anxiety will pass and that they will be okay.** It can be helpful to describe it as a wave that they can ride or surf until it peaks, breaks and gets smaller.

**Ask them to think of a safe and relaxing place or person in their mind.** If you haven't tried this before, agree with them when they're feeling calm what this place or person is. It could be their bedroom, a grandparent's house, a favorite place in nature or somewhere they've been on holiday. Sometimes holding a memento of a relaxing place, like a seashell or pebble, can help.

**Encourage them to do something that helps them to feel calmer.** This could be running, walking, listening to music, painting, drawing or coloring-in, writing in a journal, watching a favorite film or reading a favorite book.



# How to Help your Child Manage Anxiety

In a calmer moment, talk with your child about their anxiety. Think together about whether there's anything in particular that's making them feel anxious. Help your child to recognize the signs that tell them they're getting anxious.

Think together about the activities that help them to express themselves and reduce their anxiety. Try activities that help them to relax, such as mindfulness, stretching, or meditation. Make a worry box or self-soothe box.

Help them do the daily things we know are important for our mental health. Encourage them to cut out stimulants. Spend quality time together and talk about other things.

Seek professional help if you're worried about your child's mental health and things aren't getting better.

*Tips taken from: [www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/anxiety/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/anxiety/)*

**For more mental health resources, visit: [www.stirenaeus.org/mental-health/](http://www.stirenaeus.org/mental-health/)**

# What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear that is experienced as a combination of physical sensations, thoughts and feelings. All children and young people feel worried sometimes, and this is a normal part of growing up. At certain points, such as on their first day of school or before an exam, young people may become more worried, but will soon be able to calm down and feel better.

Anxiety can become a problem when a young person feels stuck in it, or when it feels like an overwhelming, distressing or unmanageable experience. If this kind of worrying goes on for a long time, it can leave a young person feeling exhausted and isolated, and limit the things they feel able to do. If your child is struggling with anxiety, there are things you can do to help them – including providing emotional support, working on practical strategies together and finding the right professional help if they need it.

## What makes young people anxious?

A young person may feel anxious for a number of different reasons, depending on the individual. If your child is feeling unmanageable amounts of worry and fear, this is often a sign that something in their life isn't right and they need support to work out what the problem is. The following kinds of things can make some children and young people feel more anxious:

- experiencing lots of change in a short space of time, such as moving house or school
- having responsibilities that are beyond their age and development, e.g, caring for other people in their family
- being around someone who is very anxious, such as a parent
- struggling at school, including feeling overwhelmed by work, exams or peer groups
- experiencing family stress around things like housing, money and debt
- going through distressing or traumatic experiences in which they do not feel safe, such as being bullied or witnessing or experiencing abuse.

## Symptoms of Anxiety

Anxiety tends to affect a young person's body, thoughts and feelings. They may also behave differently, including turning to certain coping behaviors to try to avoid or manage their anxiety.

### Physical symptoms:

- panic attacks, which can include having a racing heart, breathing very quickly, sweating or shaking
- shallow or quick breathing, or feeling unable to breathe
- feeling sick
- dry mouth
- sweating more than usual
- tense muscles
- wobbly legs
- irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), diarrhea or needing to pee more than usual
- getting very hot

### Thoughts and feelings:

- preoccupied by upsetting, scary or negative thoughts
- nervous, on edge, panicky or frightened
- overwhelmed or out of control
- full of dread or an impending sense of doom
- alert to noises, smells or sights
- worrying about being unable to cope with daily things like school, friendships and being in groups or social situations
- worrying so much that it is difficult to concentrate and/or sleep

### Coping behaviors:

- withdrawing or isolating themselves – including not wanting to go to school, be in social or group situations, be away from parents, or try new things
- repeating certain behaviors, actions or rituals (often called 'obsessive compulsive behaviours')
- eating more or less than usual
- self-harming

## Children With Anxiety May...



Appear more clingy than normal



Be restless and fidgety



Complain of stomachaches



Display changes in eating and sleeping habits



Express negative thoughts or worries



Get upset or angry more quickly



Have bouts of unexplained crying



Struggle to concentrate