

## **Parent Tips on Anxiety**

Anxiety is an emotion that everyone experiences and it is important to know how to deal with anxiety as it arises. It is a very common mental health concern that impacts many people. If you are a parent of an anxious child you are not alone. Anxiety can have a huge impact on someone's life but it can also cause motivation and productivity. Here is some information that has been taken from the ministry of education's document Supporting Minds and the GoZen program to provide parents with information on how to talk to their children about anxiety.

### **What is Anxiety?**

Many children and adolescent experience worries and fears from time to time and these can change as young people progress through different developmental stages. Anxiety can change from a typical adaptive response into a more exaggerated reaction that can interfere with the student's social, academic and or emotional functioning. Anxiety related problems exist on a continuum from mild to severe. Mild worries and fears are temporary and manageable it is when they become persistent and intense that they can have a serious impact on a child's learning potential, performance and social relationships.

### **Common Signs of Anxiety**

Although different signs of anxiety occur at different ages, in general, common signs include the following:

The student:

- Has frequent absences from school
- Asks to be excused from social situations or high pressure situations eg. Presenting in front of class
- Shows a decline in grades
- Is unable to work to expectations
- Refuses to join or participates in social activities
- Exhibits panicky crying or freezing tantrums and/or clingy behaviour before or after an activity or social situation
- Has physical complaints (e.g. stomach aches) that are not clearly attributable to a physical health condition
- Worries excessively about things
- Has frequent bouts of tears
- Is easily frustrated, is extremely quiet or shy
- Few new situations
- Has dysfunctional social behaviour

## How to Help Your Child with Anxiety

### When your child has a worry or fear try something called the I FEEL method:

**Freeze** — pause and take some deep breaths from the belly with your child. Deep breathing can help reverse the nervous system response.

- **Empathize** — anxiety is scary. Your child wants to know that you get it.
- **Evaluate** — once your child is calm, it's time to figure out possible solutions.
- **Let Go** - Let go of your guilt; you are an amazing parent giving your child the tools to manage their worry.

### Or you can try the three C's method:

- **Catch your thoughts:** Imagine every thought you have floats above your head in a bubble (like what you see in comic strips). Now, catch one of the worried thoughts like “No one at school likes me.”
- **Collect evidence:** Next, collect evidence to support or negate this thought. Teach your child not to make judgments about what to worry about based only on feelings. Feelings are not facts. (Supporting evidence: “I had a hard time finding someone to sit with at lunch yesterday.” Negating evidence: “Sherry and I do homework together—she’s a friend of mine.”)
- **Challenge your thoughts:** The best (and most entertaining) way to do this is to teach your children to have a debate within themselves.

**Help Them Work Through a Checklist**-Children who experience anxiety like structure and like to have a plan. Why not create a checklist so they have a step-by-step method to calm down? What do you want them to do when they first feel anxiety coming on? If breathing helps them, then the first step is to pause and breathe. Next, they can evaluate the situation. In the end, you can create a hard copy checklist for your child to refer to when they feel anxious.

**Practice Self-Compassion**-Watching your child suffer from anxiety can be very difficult. It is not uncommon for parents to wonder if they caused the anxiety. Anxiety is caused by a variety of factors, (i.e., genes, brain physiology, temperament, environmental factors, past traumatic events, etc.). Please remember, you did not cause your child's anxiety, but you can help them overcome it. You can be a role model for your children on communication and talking about emotions and how to deal with their emotions as they arise.

Compiled by Riley Keast Mental Health Lead



