

Supporting stress, worry and anxious behaviour



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Lots of children have worries, fears, upsets and can play out with anxious behaviour.

It is important to understand that worry, including fear and anxiety is a normal part of life. It has its origins in being a protective measure which allows us to check for danger and react accordingly.

Any new situation, or learned fearful situation can impact on children's behaviour. It is important to understand that normal worries and new worries (school, exams, work, money etc) can become, for some, extreme and more intrusive which can escalate behaviours and lead to arguments, tears, frustration etc.

There are ways we can support our child/ren at home.

We need to recognise that worry is different for everyone. Feelings are true to the person feeling them, try not to dismiss your child's worries, acknowledge them as their worries even if you don't understand why.

If we over-reassure in this quickly changing environment and tell child not to worry, dismiss their concern or tell them everything will be alright your child will continue struggle to work through their concerns, also they may blame you if things go wrong! Rather than over-reassure can we get our child to problem solve their fear, help them find solutions to their worry, tell them what you 'might do' rather than what to do, that way they still have to make a choice.

If we rescue, become too involved, sort their problems or tell children what to do they will never learn to problem solve and rescue themselves. Get them to problem solve their concerns by asking, '*What can you do about your worry?*' '*How can you keep contact with your friends?*' '*What do you understand about your schools expectations?*'? If they are unsure help but let them try to problem solve for themselves. If they start to get angry simply walk away and revisit when calm.

If we ridicule their worry, tell them 'don't be silly', 'it's nothing to worry about' 'stop going on about it' etc, could stop your child sharing their concerns with you, making them feel alone or shame around their worry. Long term this could impact on your child's mental health and self-esteem. Remember the emotions are real to the person feeling them, so we can acknowledge even if it is not our worry. For example '*I can hear/see you are worried about (add their worry) what can you do about that or how can I help?*'

Over-Reassurance, Rescuing and Ridicule do not lead to Resilience nor teach our children to problem solve.

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Helpline children problem solve:

Identify The Problem: Let your child identify their problem.

Focus: Try to get them to focus on the issue rather than emotions around this, but you can still recognise the emotion.

Listen: This is important in problem-solving skills. Give your child time to talk about their needs, worries, fears etc and remember try not to rescue, over-reassure or ridicule.

Solution: Get your child to think about and identify possible ways to solve the problem. Let them identify various solutions. Although some may be unrealistic you can still give them the opportunity try these out – don't discourage them, let them put their idea into practice. You could also get them to work out the pros and cons of each of the possible solution.

The Outcome: Where possible evaluate the outcome of the solution. It may be that they cannot solve problems in one attempt, did they have a backup plan? If not start again.

Using problem solving we can also help through the negative thought cycle:

We can get caught in a negative cycle, **THOUGHTS** that centre around some type of worry increases the **FEELINGS** of fear/worry which can impact on **BEHAVIOUR** such as avoiding, becoming angry or upset etc. which then reinforces the **THOUGHTS**.

A simple example:

- *Your child is scared of a spider, perhaps the thought is 'it will hurt them they are scary'*
- *These thoughts lead to feelings such as 'fear, horror, scared etc'*
- *These feelings lead to how we behave such as screaming, running away*
- *This behaviour then supports and reinforces our initial thoughts of 'it must be scar and it will hurt me'*



Using problem solving, asking questions, acknowledging their fear we can help our children through this cycle and support resilience.