

Supporting your anxious child

TIP SHEET

Relationships Australia WA's education team have developed a range of tips to help support you during difficult times. As a free resource, we encourage you to share this with your community.

We've all had to deal with some major changes to our lives and the world during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this has caused increased anxiety for a lot of people.

Your children may be anxious at this time too – they could be worried about people getting sick, what the future might hold, and whether it will affect them and their families. They may also be feeling anxious about everyday issues, such as friendships, school and fitting in.

Here are some suggestions to help you support your anxious child:

1. Manage your anxiety first

Experts suggest dealing with our own anxiety is one of the best ways we can help our children feel more secure. So, try to stay calm yourself. It's not easy for a parent when a child struggles with anxiety – their distress can trigger our distress, and how we respond as parents can make a big difference. Take some deep breaths and remind yourself that you can both get through this. Get some help to manage your own anxiety if necessary.

2. Remember your child's anxiety can show in a number of ways

Children don't always express anxiety in the same way as adults, and they may not even know that they are feeling anxious. Common signs of anxiety in children include stomach aches, getting cranky or easily irritated, sleeping problems, concentration issues and becoming clingier.

3. Help your child soothe themselves before you try talking to them about their anxiety

If your child is feeling very anxious, they may find it hard to talk about their feelings or look for solutions. Give them time to calm down, sit with them and calmly breathe, holding them if necessary.

When they are calm, acknowledge their anxiety – *"I can see you are feeling very worried/anxious/nervous right now"*. Give them space to talk about their fears if they are able to. Normalise their feelings – let them know it's ok to feel like this.

4. Don't be tempted to rescue your child from all anxiety-provoking situations

It is very difficult to watch a child struggle with anxiety, but the goal of the parent should be to help the child learn to cope with their feelings, not to remove all the potential triggers from their lives. The only way to learn to cope with anxiety is to walk through it, not to keep avoiding the anxiety-provoking situations. After you have acknowledged your child's feelings, let them know that you have confidence that they can get through this. Saying something like *"I can see you are feeling very anxious right now, but I know you can do this"* can be helpful.

5. Help your child learn some skills to manage their anxiety, at a time when they are not feeling anxious

Strategies like strong, steady breathing, understanding what anxiety is, and having a plan to calm anxiety through activities such as mindfulness can be very helpful. Support your child to develop these strategies when they are not feeling anxious, so they will be ready to use them if anxiety hits.

Apps like Smiling Mind have some great mindfulness and breathing activities for children of all ages. Making sure their schedule is not too full so they have plenty of time to relax can be helpful too, along with exercise and spending time outdoors.

As we journey through these challenging times, please reach out for support and connection amongst your community or if you'd like further support from Relationships Australia WA you can call us on 1300 364 277.

Our Education team are continuing to facilitate Relationship Australia WA's seminars, workshops and courses face-to-face and online.

If you'd like to register your interest in attending a course on [Supporting your anxious child](#) or any of our other courses, please email education@relationshipsaustralia.org.au or call 6164 0200.