

# Anxiety

*What is anxiety and when does it become a problem?*

Anxiety is a normal emotion that can be useful, keeps us safe and can enhance performance. It becomes a problem when it is more severe or frequent and interferes with everyday life or stops us taking part in things that we would like to try.

Anxiety affects as many as 1 in 6 young people and 1 in 3 individuals across the course of their life.



**There are 3 parts of anxiety...**

- Anxious thoughts
- Feelings in our body
- Anxious behaviour

*Three different ways that anxiety can affect us:*

- Social life: it can limit our social life and cause problems with friendships.
- Academic or work performance: it can affect our ability to perform in school work by reducing our ability to participate and limiting our concentration and memory.
- Mood: anxiety makes it more likely that we may experience difficulties with low mood and self-esteem.

*Causes of anxiety*

- Anxiety runs in families: it may be influenced by our genes and our upbringing.
- Adverse life events: which can affect us more if we are already prone to worry
- Learning by example: picking up fears from others
- Coping experiences: not having the opportunities to learn how to cope.

# Top Tips for Managing our Worries

## Tips for Children and Young People

### Talk About It

Even though it can be scary to talk about your worries, we know from other young people that once they have shared their worries it often makes them feel more manageable.

### Learning to Relax

As noted above, anxiety can have a big impact on our body, leading us to feel tense and panicky. Relaxation can help with this. This may include things that you do already such as reading a book, drawing, having a bath, or exercise. However, we know making time to practice different types of relaxation can be helpful. These may include breathing exercises, muscle relaxation exercises and using our imagination. Please see the links below for some ideas.

<http://www.anxietycoach.com/breathingexercise.html>

<http://www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/MuscleRelaxation.pdf>

### Set Small Goals

It can be tempting to avoid situations that make us feel anxious. While this might make us feel better at the time, in the long-run it can make it harder to face these situations in future. It can therefore be helpful to notice those situations we might be avoiding and take small steps towards them. For example, if you have worries about going to school, a first step may be to walk to school with a friend. You may find it helpful to ask others to help you.

### Look After Your Physical Health

We all know that we feel grumpy if we have had a bad night's sleep or we are feeling ill, but did you know that how we feel physically can have an impact on our anxiety too? For this reason, it is important to try to ensure we get a good night's sleep (around 7-8 hours) and try to eat a healthy and balanced diet. Exercise has also been shown to help children and young people overcome their difficulties with anxiety, so try to take time to do something active around 3 times per week. For more on this, see our 'diet and exercise' information sheet.

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## Tips for Parents

### Role Models

It's important for children to know that there are no wrong feelings or emotions - it's how we deal with those difficult feelings that is important. As parents we are our children's biggest role model and the way in which we model our emotions and feelings can affect how they deal with their own. For example, if you are sad, do you hide your emotions away or put a mask on, or do you allow your children to see you cry and verbalise why you are upset?

### Praise and Reward

As we know that anxiety can effect a person's self-esteem, it is important to regularly praise and reward your child, to help them to notice their achievements.

### Encouragement

Children with anxiety may attempt to manage their difficulties by avoiding certain situations. At these times it can be really helpful to support your child to have a go at facing the fearful situation by providing gentle encouragement.

### KEEP CALM!

Knowing that your child is struggling with anxiety can be hugely stressful for the whole family. It is important that you take steps to look after your own emotional wellbeing at this time by finding someone you can talk to and taking time out for you where possible.