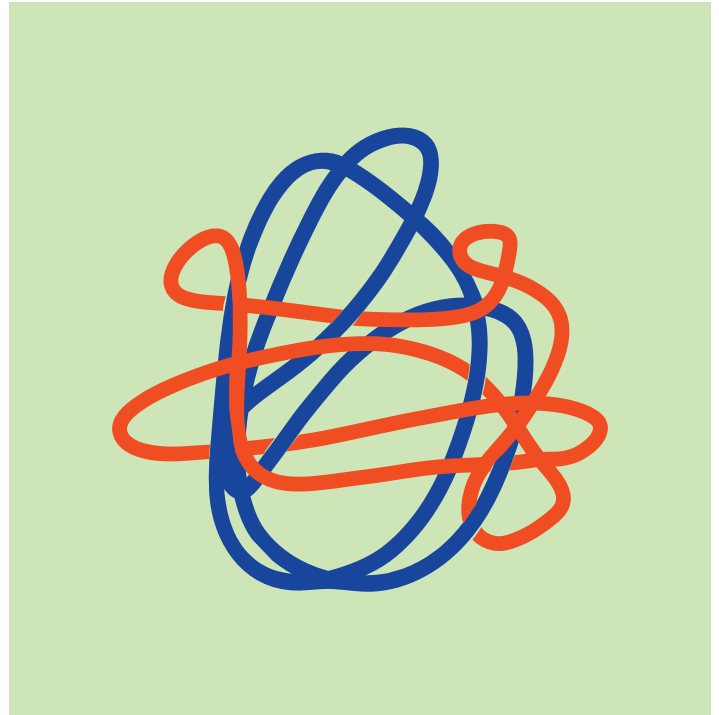


Anxiety



It's very common for preschoolers to experience varying levels of anxiety. At this age, children are afraid of all kinds of things, but typically lack the cognitive skills to fear the abstract (failure, rejection, etc.), and instead worry about concrete things like dogs, noises, and the weather.

What They're Anxious About

Babies and toddlers generally fear separation; loud noises; sensory overload; "stranger danger" when new people are around; people in costumes. The most common fears for preschoolers ages 3-4 are fantasy characters like monsters and witches, the dark, and new noises.

Even young children can experience the physical symptoms that come with anxiety: tummy aches, a racing heart, or even trembling. They can also stomp their feet, bite other kids, or throw a temper tantrum in the middle of the grocery store.

Though their fears may not be founded in reality ("There's a two-headed monster in my closet!"), what they're feeling is reality for your concrete-thinking preschooler. But experiencing a certain amount of stress is important for your preschooler to experience in order to develop the coping skills necessary to manage anxiety in the future.

Continued on next page 

Tips to Help Preschoolers Navigate Anxiety

Here are some tips to help your preschooler confront their fears while still protecting their trust in and relationship with you.

1. Help your preschooler confront their fears...slowly.

Pushing your preschooler to face their fears is a good way to help them overcome them—but we have to be careful not to push them too hard or too fast. Help your child get used to experiencing the things that give them anxiety in small, measured doses.

If your child experiences separation anxiety, try having a sitter come to your house for a small increment of time. Maybe even stay in the house, but not in the same room. Show your child that parents do come back, even if he or she can't see them for a short period of time.

2. Explain things...but use words they can understand.

Instead of giving in to your child's fears or becoming frustrated, try explaining a potentially fearful situation prior to your child encountering it. Even if they can't understand everything you're saying, they will pick up on the soothing tone of your voice and see that you're not worried or afraid.

SAY THINGS LIKE:

"I know the hand dryer is loud. That scares you a little, doesn't it? But did you know the hand dryer helps people keep their hands clean and dry? If you want to try it, you can. If not, maybe you can try it next time!"

"Mommy is going to have coffee with a friend. Miss Maria is going to come play with you. When Mommy

is done having coffee, I'm going to come home and you can tell me everything you did while I was gone!"

3. Give them tools to fight their fears.

The next time your preschooler expresses a fear or worry, help them redirect or replace their thoughts. For example, if your child expresses concern about a monster in their closet, avoid any follow-up actions that reinforce monsters exist. Instead help them redirect their thoughts.

SAY THINGS LIKE:

"Close your eyes. Imagine something really fun, like your last birthday party.
What were your favorite things about it?
How does it make you feel after thinking happy thoughts? Better, right?
You can choose what you think about—choose things that are way more fun to think about than monsters!"

Continued on next page 

Tips to Help Preschoolers Navigate Anxiety

4. Make it personal.

Our children are always watching us. They observe how we react in different situations—especially in situations where we're under a large amount of pressure and stress. It's important for you (as a parent and for your own well-being) to be intentional about caring for yourself when it comes to your own anxiety.

Make sure you have someone you can open up to honestly about your own fears and concerns. And, if necessary, consult the help of a ministry leader or professional.

5. Widen the circle.

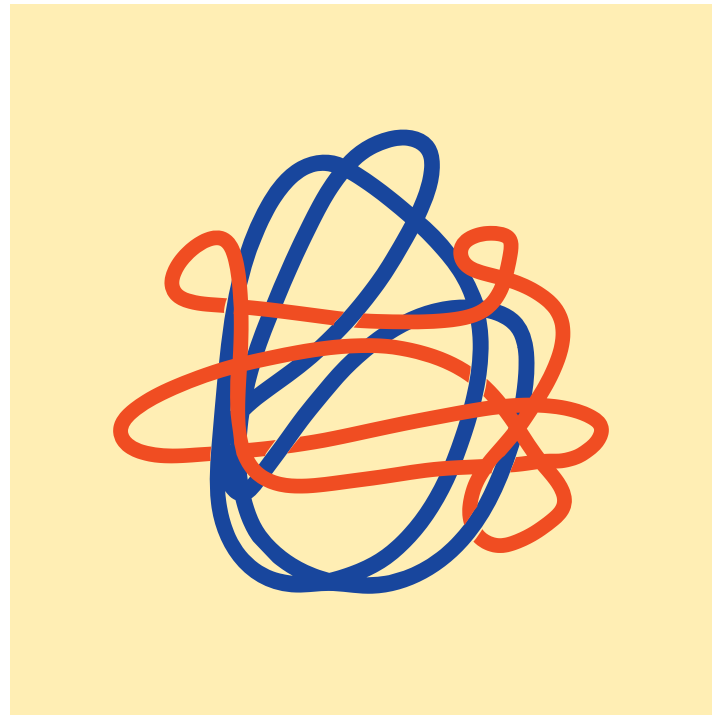
Only you know your child, but if he or she exhibits more serious behaviors, then it may be time to reach out to a professional. Keep in mind that some children are more prone to anxiety than others. If your child's anxiety is preventing them from having an overall happy life, if they're unable to leave the house or play with other children, consult with your pediatrician or a licensed counselor.

For more information on The Phase Project and other parent resources, visit theParentCue.org. ©2019 The reThink Group, Inc. All rights reserved.

Remember

Seeking professional help isn't a sign of failure as a parent. It makes you a good parent when you realize your child sometimes needs more than you are able to give.

Anxiety



Whether it's bad weather, sleeping away from home, or test-taking, it's very common for elementary schoolers to experience varying levels of anxiety.

What They're Anxious About

Up until about eight years old, many causes of anxiety carry over from preschool—with a focus on specific, identifiable events like new situations, animals, the dark, loud noises, etc.

But as a child develops, the source of their anxiety becomes more abstract. As they grow more self-aware (beginning around second to third grade), their anxieties become more socially-influenced. They worry about friends, acceptance, the future, and new challenges at school.

Generally speaking, there are three types of fears kids this age experience¹: separation anxiety, social anxiety, and a specific phobia.

And just like adults, elementary-aged kids can experience the physical symptoms that come with anxiety. They can complain of stomachaches or headaches, a racing heart, or trouble sleeping.

Continued on next page 

Tips to Help Elementary Schoolers Navigate Anxiety

When our kid's anxiety is heightened, it's common for us as parents to want to remove that discomfort. And while it's healthy for us to give our kids ways to cope, we shouldn't try to engineer a "worry-free" lifestyle for them. A moderate amount of stress and anxiety pushes kids to succeed at home and in school, as well as protects them from certain dangers.

So, how do you help your elementary schooler confront their fears and develop their own tools for managing anxiety?

1. Give their anxiety a name.

Asking kids to name the source of their anxiety helps them to personalize and externalize their fears.

FOR YOUNGER ELEMENTARY KIDS, ASK:

"Will you draw a picture of what's making you worried or upset?"

"Tell me about the picture. Is someone/something in the picture talking?"

"What are they/is it saying?"

FOR OLDER ELEMENTARY KIDS, ASK:

"Will you name the worry floating around in your brain?"

"What is the worry telling you?"

"Is the worry telling you the truth?"

2. Practice exposure.

Avoiding potentially stressful situations may ease anxiety temporarily, but is not a long-term solution (not to mention unrealistic). Gradually exposing your kids to the sources of their fears and anxieties can rewire the brain to prove to a child that they can survive anxious moments.

It can also teach a child that you are trustworthy, even when you push them to do things that initially make them nervous.

3. Give them tools to fight their fears on their own.

The emotional center of the brain takes time to sloooooow down once it's agitated. There are a few tools that will help your kid calm down enough so the thinking center of the brain can come back online to logic through the distress. Remember, you won't always be around to walk your kid through their anxious moments. It's important to help them develop coping skills they can practice on their own!

BREATHE

Practice deep-breathing with your kid. As breathing slows down, so do the thoughts racing around the brain. Read up on [Belly Breathing](#) and/or similar techniques.

GET ACTIVE

Getting up and moving around can help work out anxious energy. (Outside whenever possible.)

THINK HAPPY THOUGHTS

Teach your kid to redirect their thoughts by remembering something happy like a trip to the beach or a birthday party.

Continued on next page 

Tips to Help Elementary Schoolers Navigate Anxiety

4. Make it personal.

Our kids are always watching us. They observe how we react in different situations—especially in situations where we’re under a large amount of pressure and stress. It’s important for you (as a parent and for your own well-being) to be intentional about caring for yourself when it comes to your own anxiety. Make sure you have someone you can open up to honestly about your own fears and concerns.

5. Widen the circle.

Only you know your kid, but if your child exhibits more serious behaviors, then it may be time to reach out a professional. Keep in mind that some children are more prone to anxiety than others. If your kid’s anxiety is preventing them from having an overall happy life, if they’re unable to leave the house or play with other children, consult with your pediatrician or a licensed counselor.

¹ <https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/anxiety-in-children-2018081414532>

For more information on The Phase Project and other parent resources, visit theParentCue.org. ©2019 The reThink Group, Inc. All rights reserved.

Remember

Seeking professional help isn’t a sign of failure as a parent. It makes you a good parent when you realize your child sometimes needs more than you are able to give.