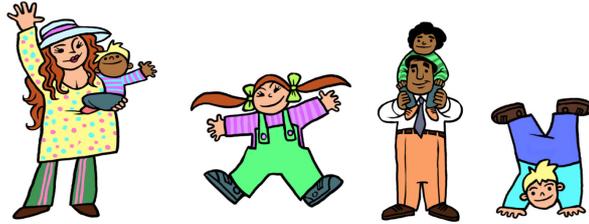


**Parent
Line**



1300 1300 52 (free counselling for parents and carers 24/7)

Anxious Children

The New Year can bring with it many anxieties for children and parents. It is normal for all of us to be uneasy with changes. For children there are many factors that can make them more anxious. It could be a new teacher, new classroom, different routines, a change of friends, a different playground, family changes....the list is endless.

The question that parents often ask is what is normal for children and when is a child experiencing anxiety.

It is very common for children to experience anxiety in childhood and even more so in adolescence. Anxiety is viewed by many as the most common psychological disorder in childhood. Some children experience anxiety and grow out of it whilst others continue to struggle with anxiety throughout their lives.

Anxiety in children occurs through a mixture of genes and personality, learning from the world around (how others deal with stress, messages from people around them) and life experiences.

Parents don't usually make children anxious but they are in a great position to help them learn some skills to deal with it.

Some symptoms you might notice are:

- Feeling scared when away from the parent
- Frequent crying
- Worrying about losing parents
- Extreme concern about doing something embarrassing in public
- Dislike of big gatherings or busy places
- Dislike of being the centre of attention
- Phobias (being scared of something so that they avoid the feared thing or get very upset)
- Physical sensations (heart racing, sweating, shaking, feeling sick)
- Worrying about many different things
- Sleeping difficulties
- Aches and Pains

Obviously symptoms are different with each child. This list is just a range of things a child might experience. If your child is experiencing these symptoms it might just be a reminder for you to get further information or help.

When considering these symptoms a parent might ask:

- Do these symptoms stop my child from doing what they want to do or what they need to do?
- Are these symptoms affecting family life?

If the answer is yes, parents can really benefit from professional help.

How Parents Can Help?

The best way that parents can help their child with anxiety is to provide a stable, safe and predictable home life. Our mental state is greatly affected by our life style. Parents can help by making sure that children have a healthy diet with regular meals and snacks, don't have too much caffeine, get enough sleep, have a reasonably consistent routine, do some exercise and keep busy with activities that are fun and interesting.

Parents can also help by developing their children's confidence. Here are seven confident thought boosters that are the building blocks to developing confidence.

- The world is a pretty safe place
- I can cope with most things
- Bad things don't usually happen to me
- Bad things don't usually pop up out of the blue
- I have some control over the things that happen to me
- People are pretty nice really
- Other people respect me

Parents might worry about how they can change their child's thinking. It is amazing how much influence parents actually have. Just think – which football team does your child follow? Most of the time it is the same one that you follow. Parents can influence the way a child thinks by just telling them. Other times we might have to try a bit harder. This is where you might call our counsellors for some ideas and tips.

Here are some simple steps that might help increase your child's confidence:

1. Spend some special time with your child (this means undivided attention every day and make it enjoyable)
2. Make sure you have some family time often (card game, special dinner, a trip, make a cake etc)
3. Develop good communication technique in your family (learn to listen to your children and manage your own emotions)
4. Work on strengths – focus on when your child does something well, has a good interaction with someone, tries something new for the first time – and tell them that you've noticed (children are never too old to hear what they do well). It's often good to be very specific about what the child has attempted.
5. Work on "yes" behaviours not "no" behaviours. Tell your child you'd like them to smile more when they are around people, look at people in the eye and say hello using their name rather than "don't be rude to people when you meet them". Children often don't actually know what is required of them.

(adapted from, Sam Cartwright-Hatton, "Coping With An Anxious or Depressed Child" 2007, Oneworld Publications, Oxford)

There are many other ways that you can help your child develop confidence and move away from anxiety. If you would like to discuss this issue or any other parenting issues or concerns, **Parent Line** Counsellors are available **24 hours a day, 7 days a week** to provide a **free, professional, confidential** service to all parents and carers of children across NSW. Phone **1300 1300 52**