

Reducing Anxiety in Your Kid

Everyone feels anxiety now and then. It is normal most of the time. But when it affects your child's ability to do well it becomes a real problem. As a parent, we want to teach our kids how to deal with stressful situations, especially if the worry is unwarranted or doesn't go away.

Here are some quick tips to help get rid of anxiety in your child:

- **Be a Cheerleader-** This is the most obvious but often the hardest to do. Some kids need very little praise and find a way to be successful. Anxious kids need a lot of praise (e.g., love, words of encouragement, hugs). Many professionals suggest four times the amount of praise to criticism. A great strategy is to keep a log of how many times you praise your child versus criticize.
- **Use Optimistic Language-** Kids pick up on what parents and other adults say about them. It is essential that you use positive language when your child is confronting their fears. Telling them that their reactions are "silly" or "stupid" will fracture your relationship. Instead, use supportive language such as "It sounds tough what you are going through" or "You always seem to figure it out in the end." These phrases will keep your connection strong while giving them independence to rise to the challenge.
- **Offense or Defense-** Kids who exhibit anxiety are often playing defense. That means that they are avoiding situations, trying to keep things the same, and, in general, dislike change. Unfortunately, life is not created that way. New opportunities arise, the weather changes, your favorite teachers leave in the middle of the school year, and our friends do unexpected mean things. Remind your child to expect the unexpected. Help them see avenues to pivot and play more of an offensive role in life. When kids are aware that they may need to "bob and weave" each day they can be more resilient, creative and rise to the challenge of new events.
- **Think in Terms of Probabilities-** Coach your child or adolescent to think about the possibilities of certain outcomes. Kids have all sorts of confusing thoughts in their heads, which make decision making harder. Asking your teacher for help on a challenging topic is highly likely to get a positive response. However, your adolescent might think that it is impossible. Help guide your child through their decisions in terms of likelihood for success.
- **Judge Your Child's Actions not Them-** It is really easy to blame your anxious child for their failures. In fact, you probably hear yourself or others making global statements about people. Calling someone "a jerk," "a loser," "a failure," creates a mindset in your child that they will always be this way. You don't want to create a "glass ceiling" for your child but instead create a mindset of limitless opportunity. Telling your worried child you are "fantastic" or "a rock star" while allowing them to fail is invaluable. We all make mistakes or fail; even Rock Stars!

- Let Them be the Hero- Everyone has a journey and you want to promote your child's journey. But the journey has ups and downs. The ups are easy; it is during the downs that you have to remind them that they are the heroes and that the failure is a bump along the way. Anxious children need to be reminded that they have a destiny. How you define your child sets the tone for their life path.
- Have Them Practice- Anxious kids want to avoid the situation that they perceive as distressful. Often, this will cause a fight between you and your child. You may find it hard to understand why they can't do the task or go to the situation. This conflict may be a sign of anxiety. So, don't yell at your child but instead help them along their hero's journey. Have them practice or imagine what they might say or do in the situation. Giving your child a script can really help them overcome their fear when they are exposed to it.
- Teach Them to Differentiate- Anxious people see things as unsafe especially the unknown. Obviously, jumping out of an airplane without a chute is deadly. However, flying in an airplane on a sunny day is extremely safe. In fact, it is much safer than driving a car. Teaching your apprehensive child about what is risky can help them understand the importance of tolerating their distress while in safe settings.

We hope these quick parenting tips will help guide you with your child in lowering their anxiety. There are many other skills to learn but these are a great starting point.