



## Helping Kids Manage Stress and Anxiety: A Parent's Guide

The connection between our mind and body is powerful! The activities below can help your child learn ways to balance stress levels and understand that it is okay to feel worried, frustrated or sad.

### Talking about Thoughts and Feelings

One of the most powerful strategies you have in your parent toolkit is listening. Provide your child with a safe space to talk where they can feel heard and loved.

- **Normalize** emotions and communicate that anxiety is a very normal response to stressful things like school, peer conflict or the pandemic
  - It's okay to feel worried. Sometimes I feel stressed too.
- **Validate** your child's thoughts and feelings by not judging their experience and using statements such as:
  - Thank you for sharing with me. It makes sense you feel \_\_\_\_.
  - I love you. What can I do to support you?
- **Reassure your child (NOT their anxiety)** by reminding them they are brave and skilled and that you are there to support them. Helping your child learn to live with uncertainty is an important skill! Remember, we can't guarantee safety or what the future will hold.
  - Child: What if you get coronavirus!?
  - Parent: I know the virus is very scary and that's why we are working hard to stay safe. Thank you for sharing your worry thoughts with me.

### Practice Activities

These tools can help your child learn to listen to their bodies and to slow down when emotions start getting hot. Practice during times of calm and the skills will be easier for your child to use when they feel stressed or anxious.

#### Take care of basic needs

Balanced meals, a consistent sleep routine, adherence to medication and regular exercise are great tools that you can teach your child and help them practice.

### **Connect with peers and family members**

With changes in the world, it is important to find creative ways to keep kids connected whether with video chats, social apps or texts and calls.

### **Pleasant activities**

Help your child build a life filled with joyful moments by encouraging play, hobbies and fun.

### **Deep belly breathing**

Breathe in through the nose, filling the belly like it's a balloon

Breathe out through the mouth, letting your belly deflate

Repeat 3-5 times

### **Progressive muscle relaxation**

Pretend you're making lemonade and you have two big lemons in your hands. Squeeze tight, tight, tight for a few moments and then release! Repeat 3 times.

### **Mindfulness**

Be present in this moment! Do an activity and give it all your attention like eating a snack or listening to a favorite song.

### **Exposures**

A natural urge when we feel nervous is to run away and avoid things that make us uncomfortable. Encourage your child to face their fears by planning for bravery missions that allow them to face their worry and learn that it is okay to feel fear.

- For example, if your child is afraid to play by themselves, set up a list of challenge tasks from least to most difficult so they can climb the ladder to achieve their goal.

### **Anxiety Resources**

- [med.stanford.edu/content/dam/sm/elspap/documents/WEBSITES.pdf](https://med.stanford.edu/content/dam/sm/elspap/documents/WEBSITES.pdf)
- [childmind.org/topics/concerns/anxiety/](https://childmind.org/topics/concerns/anxiety/)
- [www.worrywisekids.org/](https://www.worrywisekids.org/)
- [copingskillsforkids.com/calming-anxiety](https://copingskillsforkids.com/calming-anxiety)

### **What do I do if I'm Worried about my Child's Stress Levels?**

If you are worried about how your child is feeling or behaving, you can seek help and support in your community by contacting Children's National at 202-729-3300. Read more about warning signs on our website at [www.childrensnational.org/return-to-school](https://www.childrensnational.org/return-to-school).