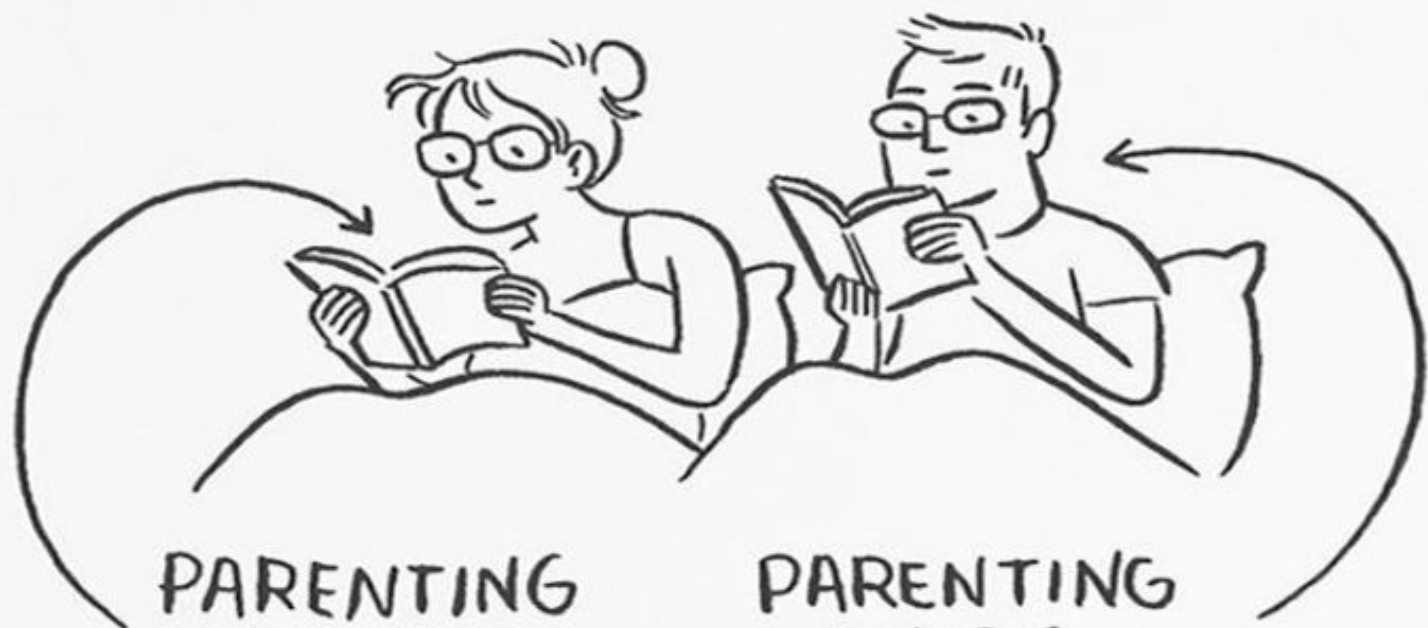


# **Helping Your Child Manage Anxiety: Building Confidence and Competence**



**Selwyn Elementary  
School Counselors  
Jenny Baer and Rebecca Manning  
School Psychologist  
Amy Wichman**



PARENTING  
ADVICE

PARENTING  
ADVICE  
THAT SAYS  
THE EXACT  
OPPOSITE

# RESULTS OF SCHOOL COUNSELING NEEDS ASSESSMENT

-We had 87 parent responses! Thank you!

-45% of respondents were interested in attending a Parent Coffee on anxiety, which was tied with interest in attending a Parent Coffee on peer relationships. Self esteem was the next most requested topic.

-54% of respondents stated they were concerned about helping their children manage their emotions.

-97-98% of respondents stated that their child feels safe at school, has a sense of belonging at school, has friends at school, and trusts that teachers/staff would help them with their problems.

-22% of parents are concerned about their child making friends.

-25% of parents are concerned about their child being bullied.

-21% are concerned about helping their child with homework.



# SELWYN SCHOOL SUPPORT SERVICES

## School Counselors

- Provide individual and small group counseling for academic, social, behavioral and emotional needs
- Teach classroom guidance lessons
- Section 504 Site Coordinators and MCV liaisons
- Consult with parents and teachers
- Coordinate Giving Tree Program and community referrals

## School Psychologist

- Conducts psycho-educational assessments
- Shared with Alexander Graham Middle School
- Assists parents and teachers in developing academic and behavioral interventions
- Provides counseling



# FAST FACTS ABOUT ANXIETY

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S. affecting 18% of the adult population every year. The prevalence is higher for females (23%) than for males (14%).

Anxiety disorders affect 13% of children. Anxiety disorders are highly treatable, but 80% of kids with a diagnosable anxiety disorder are not getting treatment.

Research shows that untreated children with anxiety disorders are at higher risk to perform poorly in school, miss out on important social experiences, and engage in substance abuse.

Anxiety disorders develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events.



# FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE



Anxiety is defined as “apprehension without apparent cause.” It’s a normal part of childhood, and every child goes through different phases over the course of their development. A phase is temporary and usually harmless.

Anxiety is experiencing a fight or flight response, which has been very effective in keeping us alive as a species. It’s helpful because it makes kids behave in a safe way and stay alert and focused.

When faced with a perceived threat/danger, the sympathetic nervous system produces a hormonal cascade that will allow us to fight or flee. The brain reacts quickly and bypasses rational thought, and adrenaline is pumped through our bodies. We can experience a racing heart, rapid breathing, tunnel vision, shaking, stop in digestion, loss of hearing, and increased blood pressure and muscle tension.

# HOW IT AFFECTS CHILDREN

Children with anxiety have an overactive fight or flight response. Their bodies experience this reaction even when there's not a real danger.

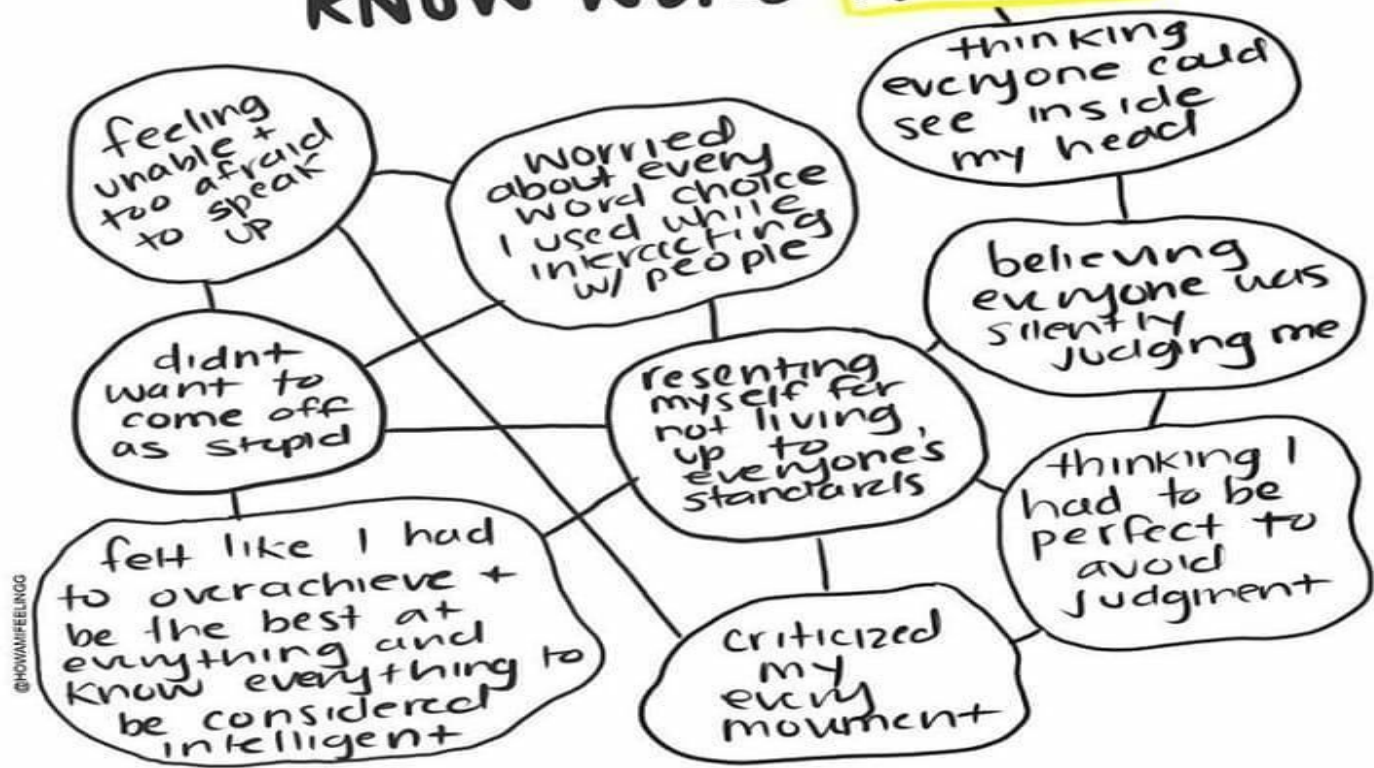
When our children say they have a stomach ache or headache when nervous, that's real. For persistent physical complaints, talk to your pediatrician to rule out another cause.

Anxiety can look clingy, hiding, and avoidant, but also as angry, controlling, or be misinterpreted as bad behavior.





# THINGS I DIDN'T KNOW WERE ANXIETY



@HOWIFEELING



# TYPICAL FEARS THROUGH DEVELOPMENT

Younger children (4-6): Fears often not based in reality. Afraid of the dark, monsters, separation from parents, scary tv shows, changes in weather, the doctor, or bugs/animals.

Older children: (8-11) Social situations and how they appear to their peers, bad guys, being home alone, sickness at school.

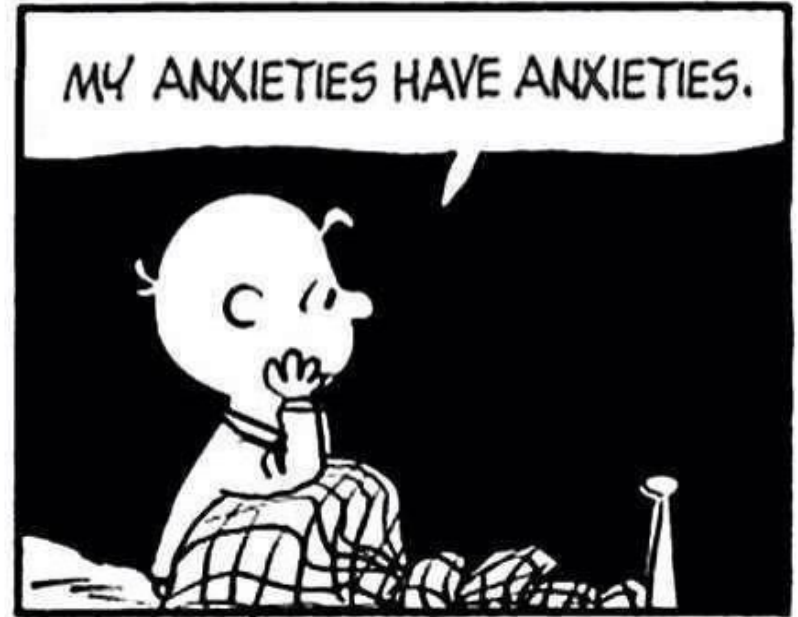


# WHEN SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT MY CHILD'S EMOTIONS?

Three main factors to consider when differentiating between normal anxiety and a cause for concern.

1. **Frequency:** Few times per month? Daily?
2. **Duration:** Minutes? Hours? Days?
3. **Impairment:** Is it getting in the way of your child's job? (To play, develop relationships, and engage at school)

Other good benchmarks: Changes in patterns of sleeping, eating, and behavior



# Overactive fire alarm metaphor

Typical child: Fire alarm goes off when there's a fire and it stops when danger is over

Anxious child: Fire alarm goes off from steam in the shower, it's hard to reset, endures after danger is over



# STRATEGIES

Anxiety is an opportunity for becoming closer with your child and teaching coping skills.

# THE WISE OLD OWL AND THE BARKING DOG

## Tip #1:

Explaining the brain to children and adolescents gives them  
language to discuss what's happening

GU Center for Child and Human Development

Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/109042767>

(Start :45)

# ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO EXPLAIN THE BRAIN TO CHILDREN

Script:

<https://imperfectfamilies.com/what-anxious-and-angry-kids-need-to-know-about-their-brain/>

Video for kids: Zen Den

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=so8QN9an3t8->

Infographic:

[https://www.huffpost.com/entry/understand-your-childs-anxiety\\_b\\_5977024](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/understand-your-childs-anxiety_b_5977024)



# TIP #2: BE CURIOUS (AT THE RIGHT TIME)



\*Come to the conversation with a spirit of openness. Don't presume what's going on. Do this at a relaxed time- no one can problem solve when anxious, tired, or hungry.

\*Empathetic listening: Get them to talk. Help them clarify. Validate their feelings (but not necessarily their behavior). They need to feel you really understand and are on their side.

\*Sounds like: "You look really worried when you're doing your homework. What's up?"

\*Doesn't sound like: "You shouldn't feel this way!" "There's nothing to be afraid of!" "Everything will be fine!" This is how kids learn to doubt their own judgment and lose confidence.

\*Goal: Be an emotional mentor, not a corrections officer.

\*Read: "How to Talk so Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk" by Faber and Mazlish

# TIP #3: TEACH KIDS TO FACE FEARS (GRADUATED EXPOSURE )

\*It's human nature to avoid situations that are unpleasant. Unfortunately, **avoiding** doesn't help people get over their fears. Withdrawing unintentionally reinforces the anxiety.

- 1. What's the source of the anxiety?**
- 2. Talk about facing the fear together.** “I know you're feeling scared of the dog. That's normal. Our neighbors have dogs and we have to be able to be near them. We're going to practice around dogs.”
- 3. Take baby steps** - “To start, you'll look at a picture of a dog and say one thing about it.” (You may need to adjust the pace and slow it down to avoid reinforcing the fear.) Progress to looking at dog from across the street and gradually to watching mom pet the dog and then petting the dog himself.

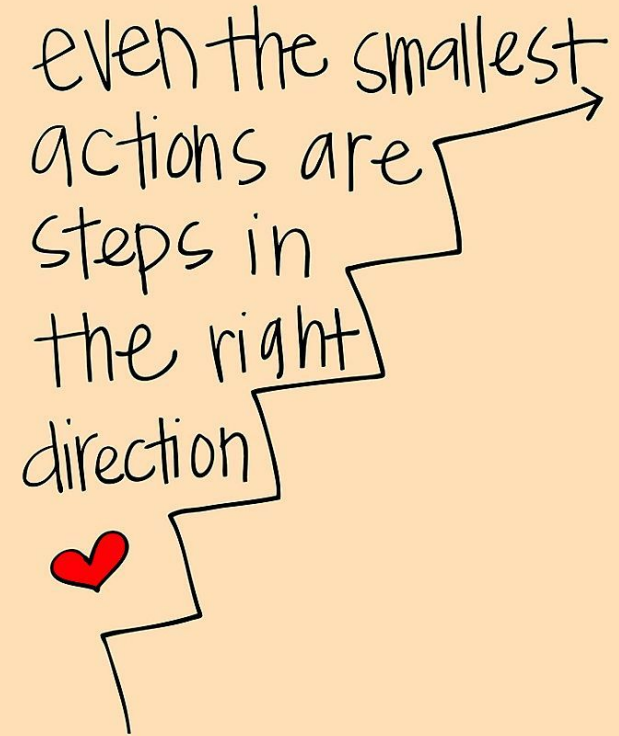
**4. Goal:** “You did it. You’re ok.” The child recognizes there is no harm and anticipation is alleviated.

**5. Motivate and reinforce** progress with labelled praise.

Younger child: “I’m so proud of you for staying with me when you saw the dog. Are you proud of yourself?” (This values feeling good about yourself, not overvaluing what others think about you.)

Older child: “I know that was really hard and I appreciate you working on it even though it’s challenging.

**6. Reward “bravery”**– extra book, dessert, screen time. You can gradually fade the reward as they become more competent.



even the smallest  
actions are  
steps in  
the right  
direction

# TIP #4: MODEL NON-ANXIOUS COPING



OR



# HOW TO DO IT!!!!

\*Role model stepping out of your comfort zone or talk through a situation when you've felt anxious and overcome a fear.

\*Include your feelings and the strategies you've used to get through it.

\*Self-care- It's more than a pedicure. Taking care of our hearts and minds will allow us to avoid pouring from an empty cup. Ask for help. Do what you love. Figure out how you best cope with stress. Seek help for your own anxiety.



# TIP #5: CREATE BRAVERY CHALLENGES

\*Make it a game! “How can we build our brave muscles today?”

\*It takes lots of repetitions!

\*Give kids opportunities to do risky activities in a controlled environment, like skiing, indoor climbing, and white water rafting. This takes them out of their comfort zone and allows them to overcome an obstacle.

\*This is a great tool for separation and social Anxiety.





# TIP #6: "WHO'S YOUR ROLE MODEL?"

\*Ask your child to think of a friend or character who exemplifies courage and bravery in the face of fear.

\*What does that person do?

\*What do they say?

\*Incorporate that positive self-talk daily! Focus on progress, not perfection.

\*Invoke family heritage and tell stories of how their ancestors overcame obstacles. "We come from a long line of people who stood up for justice."



# TIP #7: AVOID THE REASSURANCE TRAP



\*It's normal for children to ask questions about new situations.

\*We all recognize when we move past giving information into the land of reassurance seeking.

\*By repeating reassurances, we're not teaching that kids can sit with a level of uncertainty and manage it.

\*Remember that getting over fears takes a lot of practice and repetitions. Make a chart to remind both you and your child of the progress.



## ARE YOU A "FIX-IT" PARENT?

- \*The way you react determines the frame and direction of a conversation.
- \*It's natural for parents to go into protection mode when their child is experiencing anxiety. While you can slow down the daily pace to decrease overall stress, you can't protect your child from all anxiety.
- \*Goal: Help your child learn to manage anxiety and to not avoid their fears.

Raising children who are hopeful and who have the courage to be vulnerable means stepping back and letting them experience disappointment, deal with conflict, learn how to assert themselves, and have the opportunity to fail. If we're always following our children into the arena, hushing the critics, and assuring their victory, they'll never learn that they have the ability to dare greatly on their own.

Brene Brown

# TIP #8: SCHEDULE WORRY TIME

Give your child uninterrupted time with you to vent worries and brainstorm solutions together. If he starts to voice worries, remind him to save it for worry time.



# TIP #9: CONTROL ANXIOUS THOUGHTS (PRACTICE REFRAMING)

Reframing empowers your anxious child to take control over his anxious thoughts. Research shows that many of our thoughts are notoriously inaccurate—especially anxious thoughts. Anxious thoughts stink at being right.

1. Name a worry floating around in your brain right now.
2. What is the worry telling you?
3. Let's break it down and see if that worry is 100% right. Put on your detective hat and collect evidence. Write down your evidence that supports the thought and negates it.
4. How can we take that worry thought and change it to a more accurate or positive thought?





## EXAMPLE

Your child voices a fear that the kids in her class don't like her. Why do they think this? Because a boy in class laughed when she didn't know the answer, and now she's scared that her classmates think she's dumb. Help her break down the reality of their situation: "I answer questions in class every day. A friend always sits with me at lunch. I play with my friends at recess." Now reframe the situation: "It hurt my feelings when the boy laughed, but I have other good friends in my class."

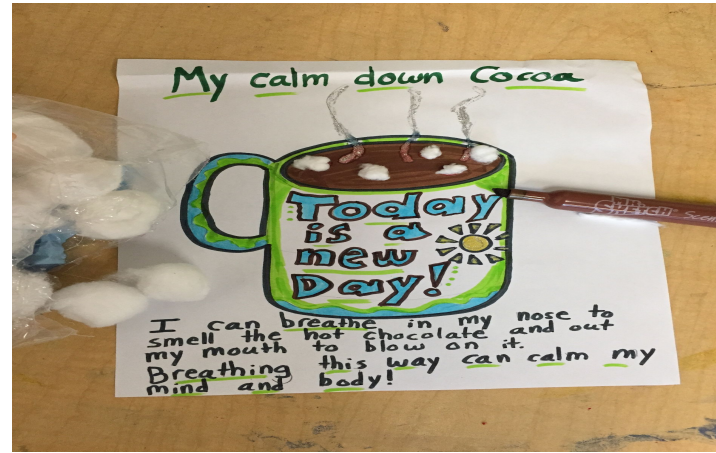


# TIP #10: BUILD A COPING KIT FOR A CALM DOWN SPOT



# Coping kit ideas

- Progressive muscle relaxation script/podcast
- Make a calm down jar with glitter
- Coping skills cue cards “When I feel \_\_\_\_, I will \_\_\_\_.”
- Stress ball
- Write it out and throw it out
- Get help from an adult
- Weighted blankets
- “Let’s write a new story.” Listen to your child’s worry and help him to create an alternate ending.
- Get back to basics: Sleep, healthy meals, downtime to decompress, outdoor free play, and daily exercise.
- Have a battle cry- “I am unstoppable!” “I am a warrior!” Do this at different volumes ten times. Have fun!
- Deep breathing- hot chocolate breathing. Start by practicing into your hands to give feedback. You can also use bubbles or pinwheels with younger children.
- “Let’s count \_\_\_\_ (cars, people wearing red).” “Let’s name animals alphabetically.” “What’s 7+8?” This interrupts the worry cycle and requires rational thought.
- Visualization- Pretend the anxious thought is a train that has stopped at the station above their head. In a few minutes, like all trains, the thought will move on to its next destination.
- “Remember when ...” Recall a time when they overcame anxiety. This increases confidence and perseverance.



# A TO Z OF COPING SKILLS

**A** ASK  
for help

**B** BREATHE  
deeply  
and slowly

**C** COUNT  
forwards  
or  
backwards

**D** DRINK  
some cold  
water

**E** EXERCISE  
run, jump,  
skip, kick a ball  
or walk fast

**F** FIND a  
safe place

**G** GO  
to your  
happy place

**H** HUG a  
friend or  
family  
member

**I** IGNORE  
people who  
are annoying  
you

**J** JOKES  
to help  
you laugh

**K** KIND  
hands. Keep  
them to  
yourself

**L** LISTEN  
to calming  
music

**M** MEDITATE  
use yoga or  
mindfulness

**N** NAME  
the emotion  
you are  
feeling

**O** OBSERVE  
Use  
mindfulness  
techniques

**P** PAINT  
your  
feelings

**Q** QUESTION  
your  
thoughts

**R** RUN as  
fast as  
you can

**S** SEPARATE  
yourself  
from the  
situation

**T** THOUGHTS  
negative to  
positive

**U** USE  
your safe  
place

**V** VOICE  
your  
concerns

**W** WRITE  
down your  
feelings

**X** EXHALE  
breathe  
out your  
feelings

**Y** YELL  
as loud as  
you can into  
a pillow

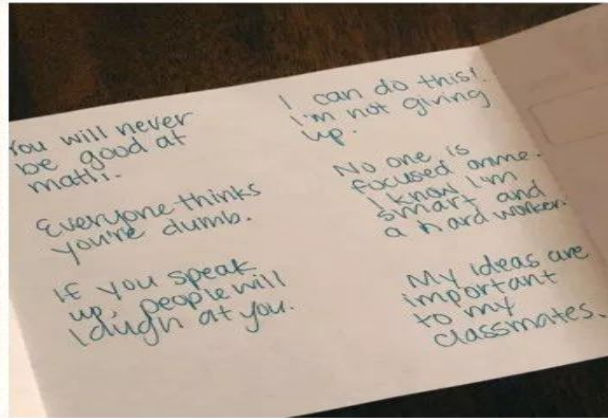
**Z** ZONE  
out and  
relax  
yourself



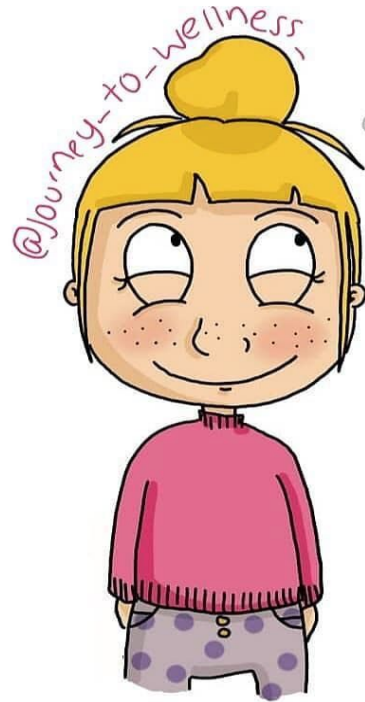


# TIP #11: GET CREATIVE

- “Can you draw/paint/mold your worry?” Many children need time to create it before they can talk about it.
- Turn your worry into a character or monster with a name. This makes it concrete and children can talk back to it and counter what the worry has to say.
- Make worry dolls- Share the Guatemalan legend. Tell your worry doll your troubles and put it under your pillow. The doll will figure out the problem while the child can rest peacefully.



Create a cartoon with your child that includes their coping statements. Anxiety is temporary and not dangerous, no matter how it feels.



- I AM ABLE TO OBSERVE THIS FEELING & ALLOW IT TO PASS.
- THIS SITUATION & FEELING WILL PASS.
- I AM MORE CAPABLE THAN I GIVE MYSELF CREDIT FOR.

# SEPARATION ANXIETY



# STRATEGIES FOR SEPARATION ANXIETY

- \*For younger children, read “The Kissing Hand” by Audrey Penn.
- \*Do not let them stay home from school. This reinforces and allows them to avoid their fears.
- \*Partner with your child’s teacher and request that the child have extra jobs and act as a “special helper.” Check if it’s possible for him to begin the day with a preferred activity.
- \*Give children “warm fuzzies” (pom poms) for their pocket. It’s like a hug from their parents and will be a reminder of their love.
- \*Consider changing which parent drops off the child to school.
- \*Treasure hunt- Hide a special object in the classroom for the child to find.
- \*Create a notecard with your child of drawings of his favorite things to look at throughout the day.
- \*Give your child a family photo to keep with her.



# SOCIAL ANXIETY



# SOCIAL ANXIETY

Usually manifests between the ages of 8 and 15

The person fears he will make a mistake, embarrass himself, and be *negatively evaluated* by others

Social situations are avoided, or the person may experience anxiety while in the situation

Can cause the child to not want to come to school

# STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH SOCIAL ANXIETY

- Let your child know it's normal to experience fear or anxiety in some social situations. Even the most popular self-assured kids have this feeling sometimes.
- Tell your child about a time when you experienced social anxiety, and what you did to overcome it.
- Encourage your child to take baby steps in confronting their fear. Try to talk (while in the social situation) or just smile and say a few words.
- Look at other children who you feel do well in social situations. What do they do? How do they respond?
- Smile at people. Do something nice for them. Do this for several days, then ask them to play with you at recess.
- Practice talking in front of a mirror or role play with your child.

# ACADEMIC ANXIETY



# STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC ANXIETY

\*Ask “What are the things that the grade on this test doesn’t measure for?” (Kindness, bravery, helpfulness, caring for others, friendliness, grit, patience, honesty, respect for others and self, gratitude, optimism)

\*We can take ownership of our mistakes while still seeing ourselves in a broader context.



# Homework Tips

Teach **homework** skills

- Getting Starting
- Homework Spot
- Problem Solving - What to do if....?
- Avoiding Distractions
- Setting a Timer
- Stop if on overload (email teacher)

Strategies to Make Homework Go More Smoothly.

<http://www.childmind.org/en/posts/articles/2013-8-13-strategies-make-homework-go-smoothly>



## Student Test-Taking & Study Skills

- Set realistic personal **GOALS**
- **PREPARATION** in advance is key
  - Communicate about the test
  - Plan for the experience
  - Study or practice a little every day
  - Build self-efficacy (i.e., confidence in abilities)
- Develop good **TIME MANAGEMENT** skills
- **THINK** about test format, plan for how to take the test, game plan for potential challenges
- **PRACTICE** similar test items, mimic the test process





# HOW TO HANDLE A MELT-DOWN

Teaching the skill of emotional regulation

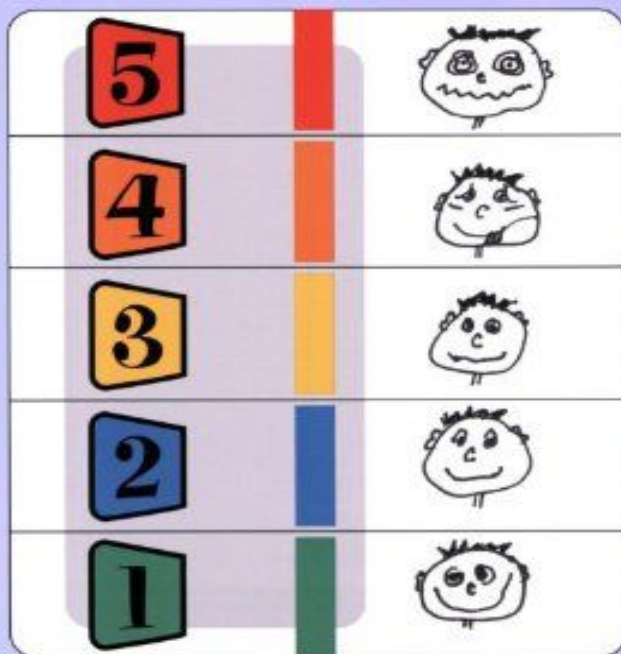




# The Incredible 5-Point Scale

Assisting students with autism spectrum disorders  
in understanding social interactions  
and controlling their emotional responses

Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis



# HARD TIMES BOARD

## Triggers: What Makes Me Mad—

1. When I have to stop listening to my ipod.
2. When it's time to do an assignment I don't like.
3. When my plans don't work out.



## "Can't Do's"

1. Hit Somebody
2. Break or Throw Anything



## When I'm Having a Hard Time, I Can

1. Talk to the teacher
2. Count to 10
3. Close my eyes and take a deep breath

# RESOURCES

for parents

-How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk (Faber and Mazlish)

-Helping Your Anxious Child- A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents (Rapee, Wignall, Spence, Cobham, Lyneham)

<https://lemonlimeadventures.com/how-to-respond-when-your-child-refuses-to-go-to-school/>

# RESOURCES

For children

-Wilma Jean the Worry  
Machine (Cook)

-Don't Feed the Worry Bug  
(Green)

-Wemberly Worried (Henkes)

-Scaredy Squirrel (Watt)

-Worry Says What?  
(Edwards)

-Cosmic Kids Zen Den on  
Youtube

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# RESOURCES

For children

## Breathing

-Rainbow breath on Go Noodle

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=029e4rRMrV4>

-Breathe2Relax app

## Sleeping Podcasts

-Tracks to Relax Guided Sleep

Meditations

-Meditation Oasis: Sleep Meditation for  
Children

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# QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

\*HOW HAVE YOU HELPED YOUR CHILD  
COPE WITH ANXIETY?

\*WHAT HELPS YOU WITH ANXIETY?