

Ten Tips for Helping Your Child Manage Anxiety by Sharon Selby www.mamacompass.com

- 1) When possible, **reduce/remove stressors from your child's life** such as exposure to marital conflict, discussion about financial stress/other stressful topics, raising one's voice.
- 2) **Create as much predictability and routine as possible.** Meal times, snacks, sleeping, should all be part of a regular routine; with sufficient sleep and food, stress is easier to manage. Use a calendar to show (with words, pictures, or colours) when activities are happening. The bed-time routine should be predictable – perhaps a warm bath, soft music, story-time and a cuddle (by both parents when possible).
- 3) **Do physical exercise together.** This helps to create endorphins and provides time for 1:1 connection.
- 4) **Model appropriate ways to handle stressful situations.** Since anxiety has a strong tendency to be genetic, be mindful of how you manage your own anxiety. Model and talk about how you feel nervous in some situations but face your fear and go ahead with the experience.
- 5) **Talk to your child about his/her temperament.** Children with anxiety often have a sensitive temperament, which means that they have a tendency to be very aware of others and their surroundings, be kind, empathetic and a good friend. These individuals often choose careers in the helping professions. Being sensitive involves many wonderful qualities.
- 6) **Believe in your child's strength.** Be careful not to provide too much reassurance which can result in a child feeling more insecure. Let your children know that you hear their concerns, and understand their feelings, but that you believe they have courage as well.
- 7) **Set limits.** Some children may exhibit challenging behaviours when they are anxious. It is important to **Support** them and tell them that you understand that they don't want to do something. Empathize with them by validating their feelings, and then put the limit in place by stating the **Truth**. This is called **SET communication**.
- 8) **Time-Management Plan.** Give yourselves enough time to get to school, activities, appointments etc. without the stress of rushing. For older students, help them plan for homework and big projects. Break homework into manageable chunks followed by some positive reinforcement (praise, snack, fun etc.). Provide enough down-time and not in front of a screen. Be careful not to over-program.

9) Monitor media. Read internet parent reviews about specific movies, video games etc. Filter the news that is shown on television. Keep the computer in an open area, such as the kitchen, so you can monitor what they view on You Tube etc. Ban screen time one hour before bed as the screen emits a light which stimulates the brain and interferes with the production of serotonin necessary for sleep.

10) Familiarize yourself with CBT and help your child to re-direct his/her brain. For example, re-framing – changing unhelpful thoughts to helpful thoughts, changing negative self-talk to positive self-talk, externalizing the worries as a “worry dragon” or “worry bugs” that need to be ignored or overpowered with positive thoughts, use logic to challenge negative thinking, use the expression “Don’t cross that bridge until you get to it” and for younger children, read Pete the Cat: I Love My White Shoes – a fun book helping children learn to not sweat the small stuff
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nUubMSfls-U>

Recommended Resources:

The Highly Sensitive Child by Elaine Aron

Raising Your Spirited Child by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka

Kids, Parents and Power Struggles by Mary Sheedy Kurcinka

Connected Parenting by Jennifer Kolari

www.anxietybc.com