



ANXIETY

a parents guide



MANAGING ANXIETY IN CHILDREN: A PARENT'S GUIDE

As a parent, it's natural to worry about your child's wellbeing and anxiety is a common concern for many families. It is one of the most common reasons for referral here at Mindstars.

Anxiety is a **normal and healthy human emotion** that helps us cope with stress and challenging situations. However, when anxiety becomes excessive and persistent, it can interfere with a child's daily functioning, academic performance, and social interactions.

Anxiety disorders are one of the **most common mental health problems** experienced by children and adolescents, affecting up to 20% of youth worldwide.

As parents, it is essential to recognise the **signs and symptoms** of anxiety in children and provide effective support and interventions.

This book aims to equip readers with the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and address anxiety in children.

Throughout the book, we will cover **what anxiety is, how it can manifest** in children, the **physical symptoms, triggers** and **strategies to manage** them to support your child's emotional well-being and build resilience.

We hope this guide will empower you to better understand your child's anxiety and equip you with the knowledge and tools to help your child take the right steps towards overcoming their anxiety and worries.

Remember, **you are not alone in this journey, and there is help available.**



WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is a natural and common human response to perceived danger or threat.

It's a feeling of fear or apprehension about what's to come, or about a situation that's happening in the present. Anxiety can be triggered by a variety of reasons, such as **social situations, health issues, financial problems, or traumatic events.**

While it's normal to feel anxious from time to time, anxiety can become a problem when it becomes excessive, persistent, and interferes with daily life.

Anxiety can become noticeable, appearing in various **physical, emotional, and behavioural** symptoms. Some common physical symptoms of anxiety include:

- rapid heartbeat
- sweating
- trembling
- shortness of breath
- headaches
- stomach aches
- muscle tension



Emotionally, anxiety can cause feelings of worry, fear, and restlessness.

People with anxiety may have difficulty concentrating or sleeping, and they may avoid certain situations or activities that trigger their anxiety.

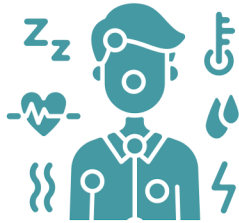
Anxiety is a common experience for children, just as it is for adults. However, because children are still developing emotionally and mentally, their experience of anxiety may be different from that of adults.

It's important for parents and caregivers to recognise the signs of anxiety in children, as **early intervention can help prevent the development of more severe anxiety disorders later in life.**



HOW ANXIETY MAY PRESENT IN YOUR CHILD

Anxiety can present in a variety of ways in children. Here are some common signs that your child may be experiencing anxiety:



Physical Symptoms

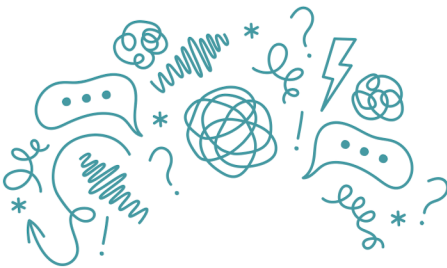
Children may experience physical symptoms of anxiety, such as headaches, stomach aches, nausea, and fatigue.

They may also complain of feeling dizzy or light-headed.



Behavioural Changes

Anxiety can also cause changes in behaviour. Children may become withdrawn, clingy or overly dependent on a caregiver. They may also exhibit a fear of being alone, refuse to go to school, or avoid social situations.



Excessive Worrying

Children with anxiety may worry excessively about everyday things. They may worry about things that are out of their control, such as natural disasters, getting sick, or being separated from their parents.



Irritability or Restlessness

Anxiety can also manifest as irritability or restlessness in children. They may have trouble sitting still, become easily frustrated or angry, or have trouble concentrating.



Sleep Problems

Children with anxiety may have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep. They may also experience nightmares or night terrors.

What signs do you display when anxious?

What signs does your child display?

THE PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

The **fight or flight response is a natural physiological reaction** that helps us respond to perceived threats.

When faced with a perceived threat, our body releases hormones such as **adrenaline** and **cortisol**, which prepare us to either **fight the threat or flee from it**. This response is controlled by the **sympathetic nervous system**, which is responsible for activating our body's "fight or flight" mode.

In children, the fight or flight response can be triggered by a variety of situations, such as **starting a new school, meeting new people, or experiencing a traumatic event**. When triggered, children may exhibit physical symptoms such as a rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, or an upset stomach. They may also display emotional symptoms such as anxiety, fear, or aggression.

As a parent, it's important to understand your child's fight or flight response and recognise when it is being triggered. By understanding your child's triggers and symptoms, you can help them learn to manage their response and cope with stressful situations in a healthy way. You can also provide them with a safe and supportive environment where they feel comfortable discussing their fears and concerns.

Teaching your child relaxation techniques such as deep breathing or mindfulness can also be helpful in managing their fight or flight response. By practicing these techniques regularly, children can learn to control their breathing and calm their body's response to stress. Additionally, engaging in regular physical activity and getting enough rest can help reduce stress levels and promote overall wellbeing.

Thoughts start racing

focusing on the threat and possible solutions to the threat.

Breathing faster

to take in more oxygen.

The body starts to sweat

attempting to cool itself from the excess blood pumping.

The heart starts to beat faster,

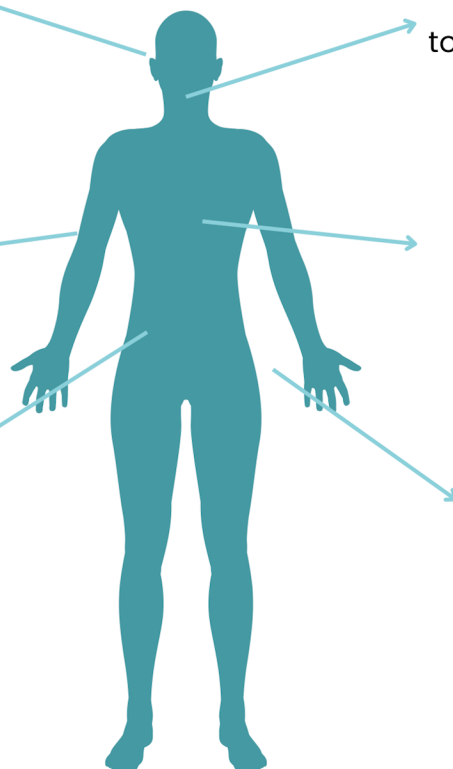
pumping blood to the muscles to ready them for action.

Stomach feels like it is churning

as the digestive system diverts all of its energy to the limbs.

The hands & body may start shaking

from taking in too much oxygen without burning it off.



IDENTIFYING ANXIETY TRIGGERS

It is normal to feel somewhat anxious in certain situations, such as when meeting new people or in a situation that is unfamiliar. It is important for children to learn how to manage their anxiety in a healthy way, but to do this we must first identify what the triggers are. Here are some ways to help you and your child identify their anxiety triggers.



Observation: Watch your child's behaviour closely and try to identify any patterns or situations that seem to trigger their anxiety. You may spot changes in their behaviour, mood or physical symptoms that appear in specific situations.



Talking: Ask your child about their fears and worries. Encourage them to express their feelings and emotions in a safe and supportive environment. This can help you to identify their triggers.



Diary: Keeping a diary or a record of your child's anxiety symptoms and any situations that may have triggered your child's anxiety.



Talk to your child's teachers: If your child is experiencing anxiety at school, talk to their teacher to see if they have noticed any specific triggers or situations that have cause anxiety for your child.



Consult with GP or mental health professionals.

Identifying anxiety triggers can take time and is an ongoing process which will require patience. Be patient and offer support and understanding, reassuring them that you are taking the right steps together to work through this together.

TIP: On the next page you will find a diary to help you keep track of and monitor your child's anxiety triggers.

This can help them identify patterns and triggers that are causing their anxiety and in turn help to find the best ways to manage this anxiety. Take a week or two observing and writing down information. If information will be key to helping your child manage their anxiety.

Use this diary as an exercise together to help you both gain a better understanding of their anxiety patterns. This information will be key to learning to manage specific thoughts, feelings and behaviours in the future.

Triggering Event	Physical Symptoms	Feelings/Emotions	Thoughts/Beliefs	Behaviours
e.g. late for school, crowded places, making a mistake and getting into trouble etc.	e.g. sweaty, heart racing, shortness of breath, shaky, tummy ache etc.	e.g. worried, overwhelmed, scared, sad, angry etc.	e.g. I'm a failure, No one likes me, Someone will get hurt etc.	e.g. Go quiet, avoid, going to panic, lash out, etc.

DIARY

Use this diary as an exercise together to help you both gain a better understanding of their anxiety patterns.

This information will be key to learning to manage specific thoughts, feelings and behaviours in the future.

Triggering Event e.g. late for school, crowded places, Making a mistake and getting into trouble etc.	Physical Symptoms e.g. sweaty, heart racing, shortness of breath, shaky, tummy ache etc.	Feelings/Emotions e.g. worried, overwhelmed, scared, sad, angry etc.	Thoughts/Beliefs e.g. I'm a failure, No one likes me, Someone will get hurt etc.	Behaviours e.g. Go quiet, avoid going to places, lash out, etc.

HOW TO MANAGE ANXIETY

Now that you've taken some time to identify the patterns of your child's behaviour let's look at the ways we can manage it.

Anxiety can be a challenging experience for children to navigate, and it can have a significant impact on their overall wellbeing.

As a parent or caregiver, it's essential to provide your child with the resources and support they need to manage their anxious thoughts and feelings effectively. In this part of the guide, we'll explore some resources that can help you and your child identify and learn to manage anxiety, including:

- **Challenging negative thoughts**
- **Teaching your child relaxation techniques**
- **Structured activities**
- **Creating a supportive environment**
- **Encouraging Healthy Habits**



CHALLENGING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

Thought challenging is a **cognitive behavioural technique** used to help children and adults identify and challenge negative thoughts and beliefs that contribute to anxiety, and other emotional difficulties. This technique is a powerful tool for parents to use when helping their child manage their anxiety.

Let's explore how to do thought challenging with your child with 4 steps:

1

Identify negative thoughts and beliefs

The first step in thought challenging is to help your child identify negative thoughts and beliefs. Ask your child to describe how they're feeling and what thoughts are going through their mind. Encourage them to be as specific as possible. Write down the negative thoughts and beliefs they identify.

2

Evaluate the evidence

Once your child has identified their negative thoughts and beliefs, help them evaluate the evidence for and against these thoughts. Ask them to think about the evidence that supports their negative thoughts and beliefs, and then ask them to consider the evidence that contradicts them. This can help your child see that their negative thoughts may not be entirely accurate.

3

Consider alternative explanations

Encourage your child to consider alternative explanations for the situation or event that is causing their anxiety. Help them brainstorm different perspectives and ways of looking at the situation. This can help your child see that there are multiple ways of interpreting events and that their negative thoughts may not be the only way of looking at things.

CHALLENGING NEGATIVE THOUGHTS

4

Generate balanced thoughts

The final step in thought challenging is to help your child generate balanced thoughts. Encourage your child to come up with more balanced and realistic thoughts that take into account the evidence and alternative explanations they've considered. Help them write down these balanced thoughts and encourage them to repeat them to themselves when they're feeling anxious.

For example, if your child is afraid of going to school because they're worried about being teased by their classmates, they may have the negative thought, "Everyone is going to make fun of me."

You could help them evaluate the evidence for and against this thought, such as: "Well, some kids might tease me, but others are my friends and will be nice to me."

Then, you could encourage your child to consider alternative explanations, such as: "Maybe the kids who tease me are having a bad day, or maybe they're just trying to get attention."

Finally, you could help your child generate more balanced thoughts, such as: "It's possible that some kids might tease me, but most kids are friendly and will treat me with respect."

By helping your child identify negative thoughts and beliefs, evaluate the evidence, consider alternative explanations, and generate balanced thoughts, you can help them develop more positive and realistic ways of thinking about the world around them.



TEACHING YOUR CHILD RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Teaching your child breathing and relaxation techniques can be an effective way to help them manage their anxiety. These techniques can help your child calm down when they feel anxious, stressed, or overwhelmed. Here are some techniques you can teach your child:

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple and effective technique that can help your child calm down and reduce anxiety. Encourage your child to take slow, deep breaths, inhaling through their nose and exhaling through their mouth. You can also have them place one hand on their belly and one hand on their chest to help them feel the breath moving through their body.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves tensing and relaxing different muscle groups in the body. Encourage your child to tense a muscle group (such as their fists, arms, or shoulders) for a few seconds, then release the tension and feel the muscles relax. Move through different muscle groups until your child feels relaxed and calm.

Visualisation

Visualisation is a technique that involves imagining a peaceful or calming scene. Encourage your child to close their eyes and imagine a place where they feel safe and calm, such as a beach or a forest. Have them visualise the sights, sounds, and smells of the scene and encourage them to focus on the details.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a technique that involves paying attention to the present moment without judgment. Encourage your child to focus on their breath, body sensations, or surroundings. Help them to notice their thoughts and feelings without trying to change them.

Yoga or Stretching

Yoga or stretching can help your child release tension and reduce anxiety. Encourage your child to try simple yoga poses or stretches, such as child's pose, downward dog, or butterfly pose. You can also do these exercises with your child to make it a fun activity.

Teaching your child these techniques can help them develop a toolbox of strategies to manage their anxiety. Encourage your child to practice these techniques regularly, even when they are not feeling anxious, so that they become familiar and comfortable with them. By helping your child learn how to manage their anxiety, you can empower them to feel more in control of their emotions and improve their overall well-being.

STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES

One effective way to help children manage anxiety is to encourage them to participate in structured activities. These activities can provide a sense of routine and structure that can help children feel more in control of their emotions.

Here are some examples of structured activities that can help children manage anxiety:

Exercise

Exercise is a great way to release tension and reduce anxiety. Encourage your child to engage in physical activity, such as running, dancing, or playing sports. Exercise can also help children feel more energised and confident, which can be helpful in managing anxiety.

Art Therapy

Art therapy can be an effective way to help children express their emotions and manage anxiety. Encourage your child to engage in creative activities, such as drawing, painting, or sculpting. Art therapy can help children process their emotions in a safe and supportive environment.

Journaling

Journaling is another effective way to help children manage anxiety. Encourage your child to write down their thoughts and feelings in a journal. This can help them identify triggers for their anxiety and develop coping strategies. Journaling can also provide a sense of release and catharsis, which can be helpful in managing anxiety.

Mindfulness Activities

Mindfulness activities, such as meditation or yoga, can help children focus on the present moment and reduce anxiety. Encourage your child to engage in mindfulness activities, such as deep breathing exercises or guided meditations. These activities can help children develop a sense of calm and relaxation.

By encouraging your child to participate in structured activities, you can help them develop healthy habits and coping strategies. It's important to find activities that your child enjoys and feels comfortable with, and to make these activities a regular part of their routine. By providing a sense of structure and routine, you can help your child feel more in control of their emotions and manage their anxiety effectively.



ROLEPLAY ACTIVITIES



Roleplaying is an effective tool for children to **learn how to manage their emotions and behaviours** as it provides a safe and controlled environment for them to practice and experiment with different social situations and scenarios.

Through roleplaying, children can **develop social and emotional skills** such as **empathy, communication, problem solving,** and **self-control**. They can learn how to express their emotions appropriately, deal with conflicts, and understand the perspectives and feelings of others.

Roleplaying allows children to take on different roles and experience different emotions and situations, which can help them understand how to handle similar situations in real life. It also provides an opportunity for children to **learn from their mistakes** in a safe and supportive environment, helping them develop resilience and confidence.

So now its time to brush up on your acting skills! We know you have them!

Below are some examples of role play activities that parents can do with their children to help with anxiety:

Superhero roleplay: Help your child to create a superhero character and play out scenarios where they use their powers to overcome anxious feelings or situations.

Restaurant roleplay: Set up a pretend restaurant and have your child be the server while you are the customer. This can help your child to practice social interactions and build confidence.

Social situations roleplay: Role play social situations that your child may find difficult, such as introducing themselves to new people or speaking up in class. This can help them to build confidence and reduce anxiety in real-life situations.

Problem solving roleplay: Play out scenarios where your child faces a problem or challenge and help them to find solutions. This can help your child to feel more in control and prepared for difficult situations.

Remember, the goal of these role play activities is to help your child develop coping strategies and build confidence in their ability to handle anxiety-provoking situations. It's important to create a safe and supportive environment where your child feels comfortable exploring different scenarios and emotions.



CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Anxiety can be a difficult experience for children, and it's important to create a supportive and understanding environment at home. Here are some tips for creating a safe and supportive environment:

Encourage Open Communication

Encourage your child to talk about their fears and anxieties. Listen to them without judgment and provide a safe space for them to express their emotions. This can help your child feel supported and understood, which can be helpful in managing anxiety.

Provide Reassurance and Support

It's important to provide your child with reassurance and support when they are feeling anxious. Let them know that their feelings are valid and that you are there to help them. Provide them with practical support, such as helping them to develop coping strategies or seeking professional help if necessary.

Normalise the Experience

Remind your child that anxiety is a common experience that many people face. Help them to understand that it's okay to feel anxious and that they are not alone. By normalising the experience, you can help your child feel more comfortable and confident in managing their anxiety.

Model Healthy Coping Strategies

Children learn by example, so it's important to model healthy coping strategies for your child. Show them how to manage stress and anxiety through healthy habits such as exercise, mindfulness, and self-care. This can help your child develop healthy habits and coping strategies that will serve them well throughout their lives.

Creating a supportive and understanding environment at home can be essential in helping children manage their anxiety. By encouraging open communication, providing reassurance and support, normalising the experience, and modelling healthy coping strategies, you can help your child feel more confident and empowered in managing their anxiety.



ENCOURAGING HEALTHY HABITS

Encouraging healthy habits can be an effective way to help children reduce anxiety and develop coping skills. Here are some healthy habits that can help reduce anxiety in children:

Healthy Eating

Encourage your child to eat a healthy and balanced diet. Foods that are high in sugar or processed can increase anxiety levels. Instead, encourage your child to eat a diet that is high in fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins. These foods can help to reduce inflammation and improve mood.

Quality Sleep

Getting enough quality sleep is important for reducing anxiety. Encourage your child to establish a regular sleep routine and avoid using electronic devices before bedtime. Quality sleep can help to reduce stress and improve mood.

Social Support

Encourage your child to develop strong social connections. Spending time with friends and family can help to reduce anxiety and improve mood. Encourage your child to participate in social activities that they enjoy.

By encouraging healthy habits, you can help your child reduce anxiety and develop coping skills. It's important to find activities that your child enjoys and feels comfortable with, and to make these activities a regular part of their routine.

By providing a healthy and supportive environment, you can help your child feel more confident and empowered to manage their anxiety.



SUPPORT FOR THE FAMILY

When a child is experiencing difficulties with anxiety, it can have a significant impact on the entire family. Parents may feel stressed and overwhelmed as they try to help their child manage their symptoms, while siblings may feel the pressure of the family's struggles and may feel helpless to do anything about it.

It's important for **families to come together and work as a team** to support their child and each other. One way to involve the whole family is to participate in activities that promote relaxation and mindfulness. **This could include:**



going for walks
or bike rides together



doing yoga or
meditation




or even just spending
time outdoors in nature

These **activities can help reduce stress and anxiety** for everyone in the family. It's also important for families to openly discuss the topic of mental health and wellbeing. Talking about feelings and emotions should be a normal part of everyday conversation, and parents can **encourage their children to express their thoughts and feelings** in a safe and non-judgmental environment. This can help children feel more comfortable talking about their anxiety and seeking support when they need it.

Maintaining a **positive family dynamic** is crucial in supporting a child with anxiety. This may involve making time for regular family activities or outings, like game nights or movie nights, to help strengthen family bonds. It can also mean setting clear expectations for behaviour and communication within the family, and working together to resolve conflicts in a healthy and constructive way.

Finally, parents can **seek outside support** if needed, whether it's from a therapist, support group in person or online platforms, or other supporting community organisations in your area. This can help parents feel more equipped to manage their child's anxiety and can also provide additional resources and support for the entire family.

Overall, managing a child's anxiety can be a challenging experience for families, but by working together, promoting open communication and wellbeing, and seeking support when needed, families can strengthen their bonds and provide the support their child needs to thrive.



Teaching our children
how to navigate their anxieties
is not about shielding them
from life's challenges, but about
empowering them to face them
with **courage and resilience.**

As parents, let us be the
steady anchor they need as they
learn to **weather life's storms.**

