

Helping a child experiencing anxiety

This leaflet has been created to help school staff to support a child experiencing anxiety. Working alongside the school's ROAR or Mental Health First Aid Champion, staff will be able to decide on the appropriate action to take.

What cause anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of fear or panic. We all get it from time to time when we try a new experience or things that are difficult. This feeling goes back to the neolithic time when humans were surrounded by dangers. Anxiety is the body's alarm system that sends adrenaline around the body and give people superhero-like boosts to allow them to run away from dangers. It's known as the FIGHT, FLIGHT (avoiding or running away) or FREEZE response. When children get the FLIGHT or FREEZE response they may find themselves staying away from activities and People. The longer they stay away, the harder it is to go back.

How might a child act?

A child might display or experience different behaviours, such as:

Feelings: Frightened, worried, angry, nervous, embarrassed or overwhelmed.

Behaviours: Avoiding situations, withdrawing from, social settings, biting nails, sleeping issues, tearful, struggling to concentrate, hyper-vigilant.

Thoughts: Worrying that nobody likes them, 'I can't do it', 'I must do this', catastrophising, negative thinking.

Physical signs: Frequent tummy aches, headaches, shaky hands, tense muscles or scratching.



Eight ideas to support a child.

1. It helps if you can prepare the child in advance, explain what is going to happen and why - using a calm tone of voice. Pay particular attention to situations the child may find overwhelming such as crowded spaces.

2. If the child is very young, regular routines around bedtime and getting ready for school can help with separation anxiety.

3. Check the child is eating healthy meals regularly to ensure balanced physical and mental energy levels.

4. Ask the child what they are thinking when they feel anxious. It can help to ask the child to draw a picture of themselves with a thought bubble above their heads to show this.

5. If the child is over the age of five, it might be helpful to talk about the child's worries to an understanding adult - this could be someone outside the immediate family.

6. Try to spot trigger points for the child's anxiety during the school day. Consider the class seating plan, use of toilets, changing and PE - all common triggers.

7. Help the child to control breathing when feeling particularly anxious by visualising blowing out a big bubble. The key is to encourage the child to blow out for longer than breathing in.

8. Re-focus the child's attention using music, exercise, creative activities, fidget toys or stress relief aids.

If the child is still giving you cause for concern, speak to your ROAR/MHFA member of staff for further advice.

Further information can be found at www.liverpoolcamhs.com/need-advice