

Children

Supporting children with anxiety or communication problems



Ten-year-old Adam as featured in BBC One documentary 'I Hate Mum'

From tantrum-throwing toddlers to stropky teenagers, it can be hard to get your head around your children's behaviour.

When should I be worried?

Everyone's life has its ups and downs, and we all deal with them in our own ways. Children are no different – some go quiet when they're stressed, while others will make sure everyone knows when they're not happy. Some children worry about every possible situation, while others simply seem to 'get on with it'. Part of this might be about how they've experienced life so far, but some of it is just down to personality and as long as they seem mostly happy there's no cause for concern.

But if you are worried that your child seems to be anxious all the time, lacks confidence or isn't able to talk to you about how they're feeling, it might be time to think about trying to help.

What should I look out for?

- Constant worrying that gets in the way of everyday life
- Feelings of sadness which go on for a long time
- Not wanting to go out or do things or try new experiences
- Feeling that they are not good at things or being down on themselves
- Difficulty explaining how they feel or expressing themselves
- Difficult behaviour or angry outbursts – these can be a way of signalling unhappiness or frustration instead of using words
- Eating, sleeping or friendship problems
- Long-term worries around school or homework

How can I help?

COMMUNICATE

While it can seem hard to find a good time, if you're worried about your child, it's very important to ask them how they are feeling or if anything in particular is bothering them. They might brush you off at first. If older children are not willing to open up, you could even try an email to get things started! Let them know that you're there for them when they're ready. With younger children, talking about feelings and emotions can really open their eyes, and giving a name to feelings they are experiencing, such as anxiety, sadness or jealousy, can be a great relief for them. Telling them that you had similar feelings when you were young can also be very reassuring.

Some children find writing a diary or keeping a 'feelings book' with pictures and words very helpful. Other children may feel comfort from hearing a story about a child with similar problems. These kinds of story books can help young children feel that they are not alone and often the books show the characters dealing with the situation in a positive way. You can find out about relevant books or useful websites by typing the topic into an internet search engine. (Books are available with different themes such as anger, anxiety, dealing with bullying etc.) Your local library will also have helpful story and reference books that deal with difficult dilemmas facing children and young people.

BE POSITIVE

If your child is worried about their schoolwork or abilities, reassure them that no-one's perfect at everything, but you love them just the same. If they are finding a regular situation difficult, you could help them think about what happened last time, how they got through it, or what could make the outcome better the next time. For younger children, star charts or stickers can really help them focus on the things they are having trouble with. Try to be as positive as possible and point out when they're behaving well or not being anxious. This can help them notice their own feelings and behaviour. They will enjoy the praise and hopefully try to repeat the behaviour.



Sixteen year old Ryan as featured in BBC One documentary 'I Hate Mum'



Ten-year-old Megan as featured in BBC One documentary 'My Child Won't Speak'

Children who have angry outbursts or behavioural difficulties may be experiencing low self-esteem, frustration or difficult emotional issues within the family. If your child gets angry, try to let them calm right down before addressing their behaviour. Talking to your child about what might be making them so angry and how they are feeling inside can help. Try to explain calmly what is and isn't acceptable and set boundaries,

with the child's help if possible. Clear consequences need to be spelled out and adhered to. If your child is of school age and having frequent angry outbursts, it is worth seeking help as they may be in need of support. There are helpful websites and parenting books that can offer useful tips on managing children's difficult behaviour – some examples are given at the end of this guide.

PLAY

Any game, whether it's hide-and-seek or Scrabble, will help your child to communicate while they're having fun. Even if it's just once a week, try and switch off the TV or computer and play with them. For younger children, skills like turn-taking and negotiation, which are crucial for school, home and the wider world, can be learned without them even noticing it. They will love the attention and thrive on the communication they are sharing with you. Physical exercise can lift their mood and give a sense of achievement, try to get outside with your child or do an activity.

SHARE YOUR WORRIES

It can be very helpful to talk to family and friends, your GP and your child's school. Talking things through will help you get your worries into perspective and help you think about what might be going on. Talking to teachers can be helpful as they might have noticed things about your child which the child hasn't told you or which do not happen at home. Teachers can also let you know how your child is doing in their schoolwork and if they have any areas they need help with. GPs can help you to decide whether your child's difficulties need specialist help. With children under five, you can also ask your Health Visitor for advice.

I think we need professional help – what can I do?

ASK FOR A REFERRAL TO A SPECIALIST

Your GP or Health Visitor can refer you to the right team. When you ask for the referral, it is really useful to take written notes about your concerns or a list of recent examples of worrying behaviour as it's easy to forget things.

For anxiety and low self-esteem, the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (often known as CAMHS for short) may be able to assess your child and decide what the best strategies for helping would be. Your child may be offered individual therapy or counselling, or you might be offered family therapy to help you support your child. It could be that the professional thinks you are already dealing well with the difficulty and will offer reassurance or some practical tips to improve the situation.

For young children, your local Children's Centre may be a very

valuable source of support. Parent classes may also be available.

For communication difficulties, you can request a referral to a speech and language therapist. They will be able to assess your child's language and look at what areas need help, and determine whether it is a delay in language development or a more complex problem.

(Do bear in mind that waiting lists in some areas can be significant and it is worth ringing to check where you are on the list.)

WHEN TO GET THE SCHOOL INVOLVED

If your child is having difficulties at school, you should speak to the class teacher and perhaps also to the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) who can assess if additional support is needed, such as a learning mentor or school counsellor. They can look at the areas your child is having trouble with and work out if the problems are to do with communication and social

skills or are mainly academic. Targets can be set with your child's teacher to help your child improve in those areas, and your child may be offered extra help in the classroom.

If problems persist, you could request (or the school may suggest) an assessment of your child by an educational psychologist. They will look at all areas of your child's learning and their behaviour within school. If necessary, they will suggest that your child is assessed by other professionals, and they may be given a statement of Special Educational Needs to make sure they get the support they need to learn.

USE ONLINE RESOURCES AND HELPLINES

There are a number of online resources and helplines which can help both you and your child – see the help section below or contact YoungMinds for further information.

Where can I go for further help?

I CAN

I CAN works to support the development of speech, language and communication skills in all children, with a special focus on those who find this hard: children with speech, language and communication needs.
0845 225 4073
info@ican.org.uk
www.ican.org.uk

Parentlineplus

Parentlineplus offers free and confidential help and support to anyone caring for children – parents, grandparents, step-parents, relatives – for families living together as well as apart.
0808 800 2222
www.parentlineplus.org.uk

Practical

Parenting Advice
Practical Parenting Advice is a free resource for parents and professionals wanting tips and support on child behaviour, development and family relationships.
www.practicalparent.org.uk

Anxiety UK

Anxiety UK works to relieve and support those living with anxiety disorders by providing information, support and understanding via an extensive range of services. Its website features a section on anxiety in young people.
08444 775 774
info@anxietyuk.org.uk
www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Young Minds

Parents Helpline
Young Minds Parents Helpline provides free and confidential support for anyone worried about the emotional problems or behaviour of a child or young person up to the age of 25. Young Minds also publish a range of free resources that can be downloaded from its website.
0808 802 5544
(free from landlines and mobiles)
parents@youngminds.org.uk
www.youngminds.org.uk

These parenting books look at positive ways to parent children and include many strategies for managing children's difficult behaviour:

- **The Incredible Years** by Carolyn Webster-Stratton (Ballantine Books)
- **The Secret of Happy Children** by Steve Biddulph (BCA books)

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