

Managing anxiety and performance pressure with children: a workshop for parents

25th May 2022





What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal, human response to stressful situations. It is part of our fight or flight response; it triggers our brain's in-built alarm bell system, which tells us something isn't right, and that we need to deal with it.

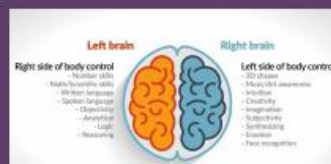
All children will most likely experience short-lived anxiety when faced with isolated stressful times, such as during exam time.

Prior to the pandemic, anxiety disorders are **estimated** to affect 5-19% of all children and adolescents. This means that in an average classroom there could be **up to five children** who are struggling with anxiety of some description.

The science behind Anxiety..

As humans the right and left side of our brains are responsible for different things, and develop at different times in our lives. Usually the left side begins to emerge around the age of 3. The Amygdala is responsible for processing and expressing emotion and can often 'hijack' our responses, leading to anxiety or stress.

Our role in managing the feelings of anxiety and stress is to help the child engage the left side of the brain with the overwhelming feelings of the right, validating but also introducing logic to those feelings.



Signs of Anxiety in children..



- Becoming socially withdrawn.
- Isolating themselves and avoiding spending time with their friends.
- Becoming clingy with caregivers and supporting adults.
- Seemingly nervous or 'on edge' a lot of the time.
- Lacking concentration in class.
- Lacking confidence.
- Suffering panic attacks or feeling overwhelmed.
- Being irritable, tearful, upset or angry.
- Reporting trouble sleeping, including having nightmares or bedwetting.
- Experiencing changes in appetite.
- Regularly complaining of stomach ache or nausea.
- Feeling faint, trembling or experiencing wobbly legs.
- Feeling hot or sweating more than usual.
- Having attendance issues.
- Challenging behaviour

Place
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Causes of Anxiety in children..

- frequently moving house or school
- Parental conflict - fighting or arguing
- the death of a close relative or friend
- becoming seriously ill or getting injured in an accident
- Separation anxiety
- Abuse or neglect
- Transitions (school, new sibling)
- school-related issues like exams or bullying

According to the NHS
Children with [attention deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#) and [autistic spectrum disorders](#) are more likely to have problems with anxiety.

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Performance related Anxiety..

Performance anxiety is a specific type of anxiety, or strong, excessive feeling of fear or worry, that is related to being able to accomplish something, or a fear of consequences of not being able to perform well.

In children this can often be seen around exam season, school plays/performances, and sporting events among many other occasions.

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What can you do as a parent?



“Name it, to tame it” - Noticing and naming emotions gives you child the chance to take a step back and make choices about what to do with them. Emotions are just a form of energy, forever seeking expression. By doing this you are also supporting your child to recognise the signs of anxiety in future and tackling them independently.

It is important to be mindful when naming your child's anxiety that you do not reinforce it. You can do this by acknowledging this feeling exists, respecting its validity and working alongside your child calmly to come to a more positive management strategy.

The goal is not to Eliminate anxiety but to Manage it.



More ways to get support..

For you

- [Mental Health Foundation: The Anxious Child – a booklet for parents and carers](#)
- [Royal College of Psychiatrists: worries and anxieties – helping children to cope](#)
- YoungMinds Parents Helpline – call 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4pm, free for mobiles and landlines)
- Place2Be top tips: <https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/services-for-schools/navigating-exam-season-free-resources/>

For your child

- [YoungMinds: anxiety](#)
- [Childline: managing your anxiety](#)
- GP



Natural parenting responses to anxious children – the 3 Ps:

- **Prevent** – since anxiety is a natural response, this is never going to work and the child eventually loses trust
- **Protect** – leads us to avoid or try to ‘make better’, prioritises comfort over coping
- **Prepare** – leads us to validate and be able to tolerate challenge, building coping skills over time

Anxiety = Uncertainty + Underestimation of our ability to cope

We cannot avoid uncertainty in life – but preparation can help us have stronger feeling of our ability to cope.

5 things to say when your child is anxious to start the conversation:

- *There is something about this that doesn’t feel good – I believe you.*
- *Being nervous doesn’t mean you’re not brave – you can be nervous and brave at the same time.*
- *It can be hard to when your brain gets busy thinking about things – tell me about it.*
- *When I was a kid, I used to have lots of worries. Have I ever told you about that?*
- *It’s ok to feel exactly as you do – we will get through this together.*

5 things to say to a deep feeling child – who hates it when you name their anxiety, takes a long time to process feelings and will try to reject support:

- *You’re a good kid having a hard time.*
- *I am not scared of your feelings. I won’t leave you alone when you feel like this. I love you.*
- *Do you know that no one is perfect at feelings? Feelings are tricky for everyone.*
- *It is never your fault when I don’t get it right. I am working at it and I am here for you.*
- *There is nothing you can say or do that will make me stop loving you – or trying to help.*

3 things to say when your child is hesitant:

To yourself: There is nothing wrong with my child.


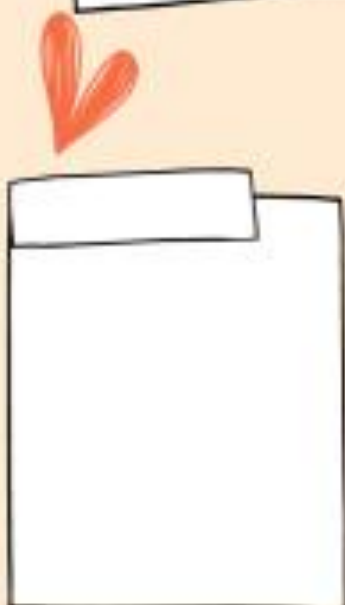

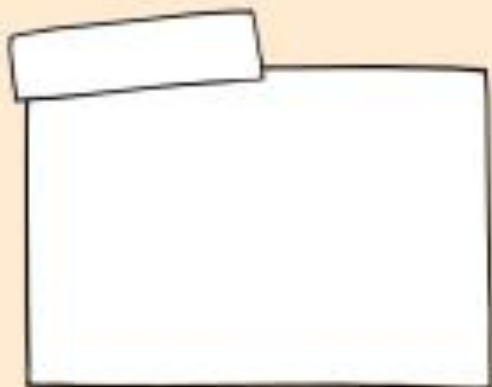
To your child: It’s ok to be exactly as you are. You will know when you are ready because you will feel ready.

*To other people who might be adding pressure: *** is listening to their feelings and body – they will know when they are ready.*



WHAT WILL YOU DO?

Fill each box with things
you will try when you
have big feelings



ELSA Support's 30 WAYS TO EXPRESS YOURSELF

www.elsa-support.co.uk

1 What makes you feel happy? Draw anything at all that expresses your happiness.	2 Create a collage of calm by cutting out pictures that are calming for you. Stick them to a piece of card and hang up in your room	3 Draw a large heart on a piece of paper and fill it with colour to represent how you are feeling right now	4 If you could choose an animal to turn into for one day. Which animal would you choose and why. Draw it	5 What is on your mind right now? Draw a huge speech bubble and fill it with drawings	6 Where do you feel the safest? Draw your safe place. It can be anywhere at all where you feel calm and relaxed
7 Draw a picture with your eyes closed. How does it feel to be free to draw anything from your imagination	8 Draw yourself as a superhero. What is your superpower? How does it feel being a superhero?	9 What scares you? Draw your biggest fear!	10 Draw some important memories for you!	11 What does your anger look like? Draw your anger	12 Draw something you are thankful for today
13 Draw around one of your hands and then decorate each finger with something you are good at	14 Draw a comic strip of a fun time that you have had. Who was there? What did you do?	15 Close your eyes and scribble on a piece of paper. Really enjoy feeling the freedom of just scribbling	16 Can you draw something just with the letters of your name today?	17 Draw a gift you would give to someone very special to you	18 What do your worries look like? Are they monsters or something else? Draw your worries today and talk to someone about them
19 Make some patterns today and then colour them all in to make a beautiful piece of art	20 Create some bunting for a celebration. What might you be celebrating today? It can be anything at all!	21 Create your own character for the emotion of happiness. What might it look like? Draw it!	22 Draw your favourite time of year. Is it your birthday? Christmas? Winter? Summer? You choose!	23 What do you dream about? Draw one of your dreams	24 Listen to some music at the same time as drawing. What is in your mind when listening to the music.
25 Smiling challenge. Draw a HUGE smiling face then write down all the reasons that make you smile or laugh	26 Draw a self portrait of you. Use a mirror to take in all the details of your beautiful face	27 Draw something in nature today. It could be an animal, bird, insect, flower or leaf. Anything that you choose	28 Draw a picture of someone you admire. Why do you admire them?	29 Draw a shape and make it into a character. Is your character happy, sad, angry, scared or something else?	30 Draw a picture of you being brave

ELSA support

How to Make Your Own Stress Ball



We can all feel stressed, worried and anxious at times. Learning to deal with your stress in a healthy way will help you to stay relaxed and be happier.

This is a fun craft idea to help you make your own stress ball. While you are making your stress ball, why don't you talk to the adult you are with about what makes you stressed and how you can manage that stress? Squeezing a stress ball is a great way of managing stress but what other ideas could you use as well?

To get started, you will need:

- A balloon
- Some flour
- An empty plastic bottle
- Wool or pipe cleaners
- Marker pen or felt tip



Instructions:

1. Pour some flour into an empty plastic bottle.
2. Stretch the neck of the balloon over the neck of the bottle then tip the bottle upside down to let the flour pour into the balloon.
3. Don't overfill the balloon.
4. Remove the balloon from the bottle and tie a knot in it.
5. Give your balloon some hair. You could wrap wool around the tie of the balloon or add pipe cleaners to create ears.
6. Decorate the balloon with a face. Try drawing eyes and a mouth or add some stick-on eyes. Be as creative as you want!

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visit twinkl.co.uk

My Worry Monster

If you sometimes worry about things like Milton, you may like to make your own worry monster.

Worry monsters are great because they read your worries and munch them up so you no longer need to worry about them!

Follow the instructions below, write down your worry on a piece of paper and put it in your worry monster.


You will need:

- A disposable drinking cup
- Coloured paper/felt
- Pipe cleaners
- Googly eyes
- Pom-poms
- Sticky tape
- Scissors
- Glue




Instructions


1. Take your drinking cup and cut some coloured paper or felt to fit around the outside of the cup. Use the glue to stick this down.
2. Stick googly eyes (or draw your own!) onto the front of the cup. It can look as crazy as you like!
3. You may wish to add pipe cleaner antennae, a monster mouth, a pom-pom nose or anything else you want.
4. Write any worries that you have on a piece of paper and feed it to your monster! If you want to, you could talk to a friend or a member of your family about the worry that you fed to your monster.



29 Simple Journaling Prompts for Anxiety



- 1 What was the most difficult experience you had before, and how were you able to overcome it?
- 2 List three things that scare you the most, and the reasons why.
- 3 Recall three positive things that happened to you today and write them down. Be as detailed as possible.
- 4 Reply to your inner critic's opinions about your actions and decisions.
- 5 How are you feeling right now? Describe how you feel in writing.
- 6 List down all of the things that you're worried about right now. Make the list as long as possible.
- 7 Write a letter to three of your greatest supporters.
- 8 What are the three things you'd love to be doing for the rest of your life?
- 9 Make a list of the compliments you've received from others.
- 10 What are five moments in your life when you can say you were truly happy?
- 11 Think back to a moment when you experienced failure. What lessons can you take from it?
- 12 Write a letter to yourself. Make it a love letter.
- 13 If you're prone to anxiety attacks, write down all the strategies you've used in the past that helped you cope with a flare up.
- 14 Is your anxiety trying to tell you something? What is it?
- 15 Describe the thing or situation that you look forward to every day.
- 16 List three of the greatest lessons you've been given by your anxiety.
- 17 List at least 10 activities you can do to take better care of yourself.
- 18 What values are important to you?
- 19 List down your anxiety triggers.
- 20 Think of someone who has caused you pain. Write him or her a letter of forgiveness.
- 21 List down the questions that are constantly running through your head right now, and then try to answer each one.
- 22 Write down your favorite inspiring quotes or song lyrics that motivate you.
- 23 List down the things that you are grateful for. Make the list as long as you can.
- 24 What is it that you need to let go of? Write your reasons for holding on to it.
- 25 Write a letter to one or both of your parents. You don't have to give the letter to them.
- 26 Write two long-term goals. Brainstorm and write down your ideas for achieving them.
- 27 Visualize that you are free from anxiety. Write down the details of this kind of life.
- 28 List 10 things that make you smile.
- 29 List down three affirmations you can say to yourself today.



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Dealing with school based performance pressure.

When a child says: I'm the only one in my class that can't read/ spell/do their times tables.

Instead of saying: Oh I doubt that is true! You're doing great.

Try: Your noticing that lots of the children in your class are reading now/ getting a good spelling result/ know their tables ... and you're still working on it. I get why that could feel bad. Tell me more.

Then: Once you know more – you may be able to suggest something that you could try together.

Other strategies to consider:

- *Encourage your child to compare themselves to their own performance – not to someone else's.*
- *Before a stressful activity – discuss what success will look like.*
- *Remind your child of past times that things have felt difficult – but turned out well.*
- *Talk about sources of support that your child can draw on at school.*
- *Rehearse strategies that will help manage the situation.*
- *Build relaxation techniques into every day experience so that it something your child can use when they feel they need to.*

And acknowledge that sometimes the best thing to do is to distract your child!

As a parent, you can do things to feel pro-active and access support:

- *Share concerns with the class teacher*
- *Place2Be is available for parents to talk through an issue and get specific advice – there is also an online resource with advice for parents*
- *You can self – refer to Harrow Horizons if you think some therapeutic support would be helpful*
- *Talk with your GP*