

An Article shared with you by the School Psychologist, Karen Cicatiello

This is an excerpt from an article, *How to spot and treat anxiety in your child*, written by a parent contributor, *Ginny Graves*. For the full article, go to: <http://www.scholastic.com/parents/resources/article/social-emotional-skills/how-to-spot-and-treat-anxiety-children>

Anxious Behavior: What's Normal and What's Not

It's perfectly okay when kids . . .

- worry about an upcoming test
- want to be tucked in at night
- hang back for the first half-hour of a party
- keep an eye out for bees or dogs

It's a red flag when they . . .

- vomit, lose sleep, or cry from stress
- wind up in your bed every night
- refuse to go to parties or leave your side
- need to be coaxed outside because they're afraid of being stung or attacked

Helping Your Child Cope

These long-term strategies teach kids that things aren't as scary as they seem.

1. **Keep calm.** Overreacting spooks kids even more, so take the long view: "If you don't give kids the chance to confront their fears, they'll be anxious every time there's a challenge," says Stephen Whiteside, Ph.D., of the Mayo Clinic.
2. **Be empathetic.** Explain that anxiety is normal, and share your story: "When I was a kid, I was terrified of tests. But I learned that the best way to get rid of my fear was to face it." Then, help him do it. Say, "I see you're scared about going to school. I'll hold you, then walk into class with you," says Lawrence Cohen, Ph.D., author of *The Opposite of Worry*.
3. **Take small steps.** Break down challenges so they're more manageable. "If your child is afraid to sleep alone, check in every few minutes before she nods off, slowly extending the time between check-ins over days or weeks," advises Whiteside. This method, known as gradual supportive exposure, is one of the best ways to extinguish a specific fear.

6 Anxiety Soothers to Try Now

1. Have your kid tense and relax each muscle group, working up from the toes.
Why it works: Your child releases tension, and when the body relaxes, the brain does, too.
2. Tell your child to pay attention to the noises around him until he hears five different sounds. **Why it works:** Focusing his thoughts helps your child stay in the moment rather than worry about the future.
3. Grade-schoolers can write down (or dictate) their fears and stash them in a shoebox.
Why it works: Writing worries helps minimize them and gives kids permission to let 'em go.
4. Tell your child to remember a time he faced a scary situation and overcame it or learned something hard. **Why it works:** Picturing a previous success makes anyone feel more confident.
5. Tell your kid to pretend she's holding a slice of pizza. Have her inhale the aroma by breathing in deeply through the nose and cool the pizza by blowing out through the mouth.
Why it works: Focused breathing sends the brain a message that it's time to relax.
6. Download some anti-anxiety apps. Try the **Meditation Jar** (iTunes, free). Set the timer, shake the phone, and watch the particles settle. **Why it works:** This app gives kids something to gaze at as they quiet down (or breathe).