

HOW TO HELP AN ANXIOUS CHILD

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WHAT IS STRESS/ANXIETY

- *A reasonable reaction – for parents and children - in these times when life has been turned upside down and no one has real answers*



WHY DO WE HAVE STRESS AND ANXIETY

- Stress- the physiological response to perception of danger.
 - Stimulus to DO SOMETHING to escape from danger.

Our brain sends signals to get ready for action by increasing heart rate and breathing and sending fuel to our muscles so we can move quickly. It shuts down systems that are not needed for this action response- like thinking and problem solving

YIKES!



ANXIETY

- Anxiety- Psychological experience of these changes in our bodies. It includes:
 - A feeling of dread in the face of uncertainty
 - A fear you may not be able to manage what's facing you

YOUR BRAIN ON ANXIETY

- Too much anxiety shuts down rational thinking, planning and language.
- This child can't think about how to do his homework.
- Any language would be only an incoherent "AHHH!"



ANXIETY TAKES DIFFERENT FORMS

- Each children is likely to respond in his/her own way.
 - **Fight, Flight or Freeze**



ANXIETY CAN CAUSE VERY DIFFERENT BEHAVIORS

- Hyperactive behavior: bouncing, jiggling, talking
- Distractibility or “Spaciness”
- Sadness
- Anger or irritability
- Shut down
- Problems getting/staying asleep and nightmares
- New difficulties with eating- too much, too little, fussiness
- Emergence or escalation of repetitive behaviors like rocking, pacing, humming.

HOW TO HELP –FIRST STEP IS YOU

- Emotions are contagious
 - If you're anxious or worried, your child can sense it and it will make him/her more anxious.



TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST



BE KIND TO YOURSELF

- You are not a superhero.
- You can't be a perfect breadwinner, parent AND teacher.



HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD FEEL LESS STRESSED/ANXIOUS? IT'S SIMPLE (SORT OF)

- **TAKE A DEEP BREATH!**
- “Turns off” the Stress System
- Gives you some time to think about what you want to say before you open your mouth...
- Teach your kids to do it, too.

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD FEEL LESS STRESSED/ANXIOUS?

- The way to reduce children's feelings of stress/anxiety is to **help them feel safe and able to take care of themselves.**

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD FEEL LESS STRESSED/ANXIOUS?

1. Validate feelings- you don't have to agree, but letting your child know you appreciate what it is like for them makes them feel that someone understands (“Wow, you are really having a hard time with those fractions”)
2. Do something with them or for them to help them feel calm and connected (“How about a cup of hot chocolate?”/ “How about taking a break and playing a quick game of ---- ”)
3. Help them learn a skill (“I'll help you do the first two problems”)

You can do these in any order, but it usually works best if you start with 1. or 2.

FIND WAYS TO PLAY TOGETHER

- You can't feel anxious when you're laughing!
- Fun times together builds feelings of safety and connection
- Ask the school team what games they play



KEEP UP ROUTINES (AS BEST YOU CAN)

- Routines provide a sense of stability within all the change.
 - Eat meals together
 - Stick with regular bedtimes and wake up times
 - Have regular times for
 - chores,
 - outside time,
 - reading and TV time,
 - Tele chats with extended family and friends



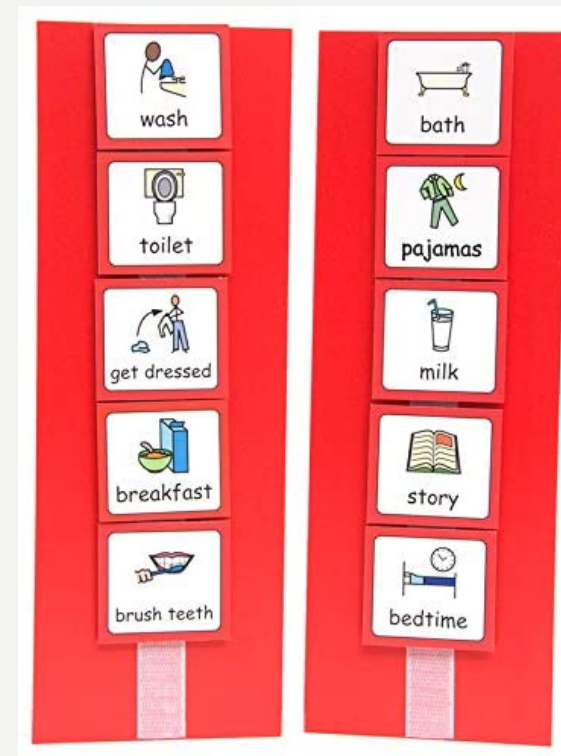
MAKE A SCHEDULE (BUT STAY FLEXIBLE)

Ask your teacher if s/he can send a copy of the classroom schedule

Or look for pictures on line and make your own

For younger children, schools often use visual schedules.

But don't get rigid. Adapt to your child's attentional capacity, stress level and mood



PRACTICE GRATITUDE

- Spend a few minutes each day remembering what you are grateful for.
- Find a way to give back to those in need.
 - Donate to a food pantry,
 - Help out an elderly neighbor,
 - Make a cheerful sign for a window.



ADVICE FROM TEACHERS

April 17, 2020

Dear Parents,

Don't stress about schoolwork. In September, I will get your children back on track. I am a teacher and that's my superpower. What I can't fix is social-emotional trauma that prevents the brain from learning. So right now, I just need you to share your calm, share your strength, and share your laughter with your children. No kids are ahead. No kids are behind. Your children are exactly where they need to be.

With love,
All the teachers on planet Earth

THE SCHOOL'S RESPONSIBILITY

- You are entitled to supports.
 - If your child is on an IEP, they should be having some contact with their special educators and therapies.
 - Feel free to ask for on line time with a favorite teacher or therapist

School staff are trying to figure this out too so be patient

BUT document what is and isn't happening.

Keep track of the amount of time your child is able to do work

Keep track of your child's emotional state

Keep track of what supports and services are being provided

WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH YOUR SCHOOL TEAM

- Access the resources of your team- the people who have been working with your child and know what works.
 - A behavior specialist can provide you with a behavior plan to help your child get through homework.
 - A speech therapist can provide you with a social story to help your child manage a new situation
 - An occupational therapist can help with strategies for self regulation
- Strategies should be individualized to your child.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

- Reach out for help if you need it.

Online parent support groups.

- Parents Helping Parents (www.parentshelpingparents.org) daily online support groups and 24/7 parental stress hotline
 - virtual support groups through First Connections (www.jri.org).
 - Virtual support groups for teens or parents affected by Autism at AANE.org
- Neighbor to neighbor supports. **Nextdoor.**
 - Many therapists are offering free or reduced price sessions **www.Helppro.org**
 - If you feel desperate: **Suicidepreventionlifeline.org.**

QUESTIONS?

- Stay in Touch!
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