

# 5 WAYS TO BETTER UNDERSTAND & HELP YOUR ANXIOUS CHILD

**FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS**

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# WELCOME!

If you are here, I am guessing that your child is familiar with feeling anxious. Rest assured, you and your child are certainly not alone! Anxiety is very common, especially in today's landscape.

The truth is though, we have all experienced it at some point in our lives. Sometimes it feels like intense worry. Other times we feel it more somatically like complaining of a stomachache or difficulty staying still.

Anxiety can present in all of us, and certainly does not discriminate based on age. Children often feel anxious and are unable to communicate the feeling in a way that adults understand.

This guide aims to provide some education around what anxiety is and how you can help your child navigate it. I hope these pages provide you with some tools to help your child begin to build their coping skills toolbox, while simultaneously reminding you that you are not alone.

Thanks for reading,

*Erica Zisman, LCSW*

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# UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY:

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by intense worry, overwhelm, and/or tension. It is the way your body reacts to stress.



## SIGNS OF ANXIETY

- Regressing in learned skills
- Increase in tantrums or panic
- Tears or crying spells
- Wanting more attention
- Somatic symptoms
- Withdrawing
- Sleep disturbances
- Feelings of tension or worry
- Negative self-talk



# LEARNING ABOUT TYPES OF ANXIETY DIAGNOSES

## **GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER:**

Persistent, excessive, and unrealistic worries that are focused on various objects & situations (i.e. school, friends, family relationships, etc.).

## **SEPARATION ANXIETY DISORDER:**

Intense fear and distress about being away from home and/or caregivers.

## **OBSESSIVE-COMPULSIVE DISORDER:**

Categorized by intrusive and unwanted thoughts, as well as, performing compulsions, rituals, etc.

## **ADJUSTMENT DISORDER WITH ANXIETY:**

An unhealthy emotional reaction to a stressful event or a life change.

## **SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER:**

Categorized by intense fear of participating in social settings, such as in school; difficulty trusting self in social environments.

## **PANIC DISORDER:**

Reoccurring panic attacks and fear/worry of having more panic attacks.

## **SPECIFIC PHOBIA:**

Intense fear and worry around a specific object or situation outside of the realm of childhood fears.

## **SELECTIVE MUTISM:**

Refusal to speak in certain social situations; despite, being talkative when comfortable.

# TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR ANXIETY

## STEP 1: ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO BE OPEN ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS

- Teach your child to give you all their worries when it starts to feel overwhelming.
- The trick here is to develop language around letting things go for the moment.
- Ask your child to share their feelings & process with you whenever possible.
- Make sure your child knows that processing their feelings is important and safe.

## STEP 2: HELP YOUR CHILD RECOGNIZE THEIR OWN ANXIETY

- Practice identifying physical symptoms and anxious thoughts through conversation and play.
- Have your child draw a picture of their bodies and identify where they feel certain sensations and feelings; this further connects the mind and body. This gives your child more control, when they are able to observe themselves from an outside perspective.
- Talk about relevant anxious experiences to help foster more knowledge and comprehension.

# COPING SKILLS

(THAT YOU CAN TEACH TO YOUR CHILD)

Coping skills that soothe aim to actively regulate our nervous systems

## WAYS TO SOOTHE

- Utilizing a stress ball or a fidget toy
- Practicing deep breathing exercises
- Safe touch or asking for a hug
- Cuddle with comfy blankets or a weighted blanket
- Ground in nature
- Talk out loud + identify the anxiety
- Be open to feeling emotion, including crying
- Engage in nourishing activities

## IS YOUR CHILD A SOOTHER OR A DISTRACTOR?

Coping skills that distract give us time to focus on something else, until we feel less activated by the stressor & can process

## WAYS TO DISTRACT

- Listen to feel-good music
- Watch a movie or a television show
- Have a conversation with a loved one
- Do some chores or be productive
- Engage in a creative activity, such as art or building
- Read or write
- Go for a walk or exercise
- Do a brain teaser or a crossword puzzle

# ANXIETY SCRIPTS TO UTILIZE:

**WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS:**

"This is too hard. I can't do this."

**YOU CAN SAY:**

"What feels hard about it? I'm here for support if you need."

**WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS:**

"What if I don't fit in?"

**YOU CAN SAY:**

"That sounds tough. Would you like to talk about it together?"

**WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS:**

"I don't feel good."

**YOU CAN SAY:**

"Is it something a doctor could help with or do you just need me?"

**WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS:**

"I don't want to go."

**YOU CAN SAY:**

"That's always really hard! How about we make a plan together?"

**WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS:**

"But- then what?"

**YOU CAN SAY:**

"Hmm. Can you tell me what it is that you're worried about?"

**WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS:**

"I feel (afraid, unsafe, etc.)."

**YOU CAN SAY:**

"Great job identifying how you feel. What would you like to do next?"

**WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS:**

"Don't leave me."

**YOU CAN SAY:**

"I wish I could stay, but I promise I'll be back. Hold on to \*this\* for me."

**WHEN YOUR CHILD SAYS:**

"I hate school."

**YOU CAN SAY:**

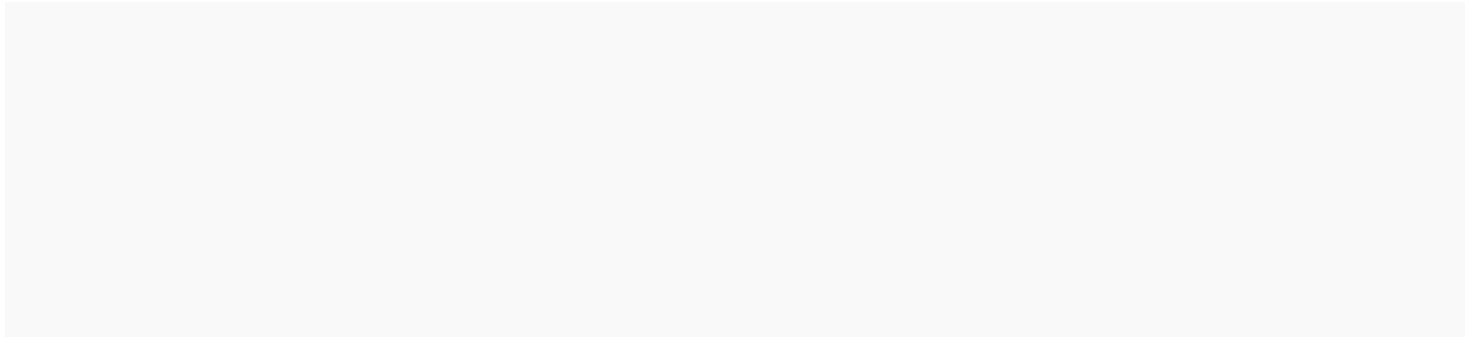
"Oh wow, that's a big statement! Why do you think that is?"



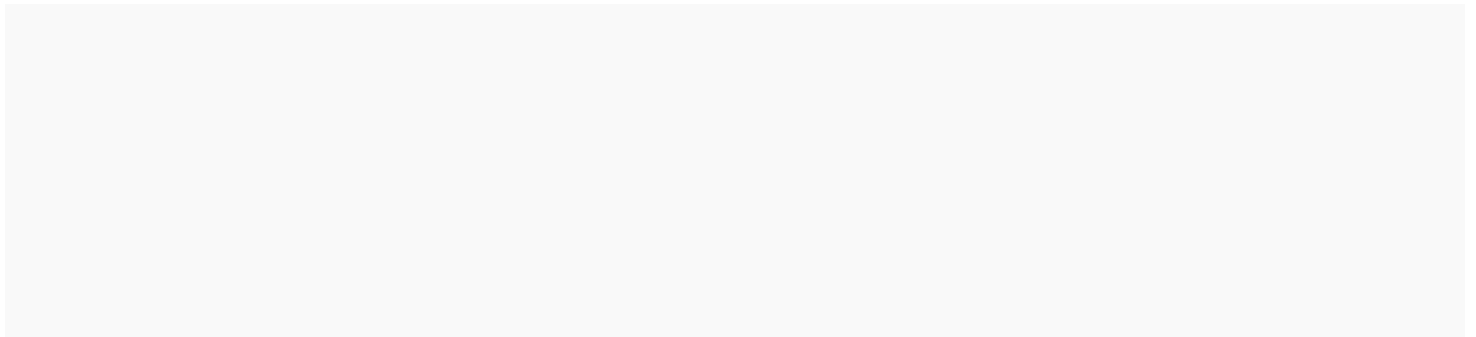
# JOURNAL PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION

Take some time to reflect and  
journal with your child:

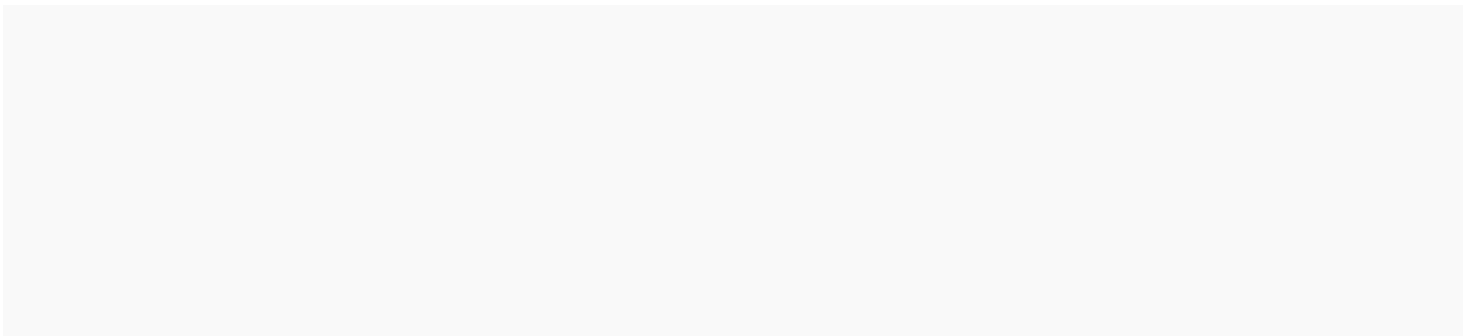
What situations or circumstances trigger your child's anxiety?



What is something your child wants to remember when anxious?



What are three things that help lessen your child's anxiety?



# JOURNAL PROMPTS FOR REFLECTION

Take some time to reflect and  
journal with your child:

In what ways does your child notice that they are feeling  
anxious?

What emotions and behaviors come up for your child when anxious?

How would your child like you to react when they are feeling anxious?

# FINAL THOUGHTS

I hope this guide provides you with a better understanding of what your anxious child is going through. I also hope it normalizes anxiety for you and your family.

**While I know you will find some takeaways in this guide, this is only the tip of the iceberg! I've created an entire virtual course called *Anxious Kids 101* for parents and caregivers just like you.**

**[Learn more here.](#)**

If you are looking for 1:1 support, send me an email at [erica@therapywithericaz.com](mailto:erica@therapywithericaz.com)

## LEAVING YOU WITH REMINDERS TO SHARE WITH YOUR CHILD WHEN THEY ARE FEELING ANXIOUS:

- Your anxiety is not in control of you
- You are safe
- It is okay to feel your emotions
- Take it one step at a time
- You are not alone
- The feeling is temporary

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