



Supporting children and young people experiencing anxiety

Anxiety can be difficult to spot because it presents in many ways. The important point is to notice that there's a concern and seek further advice and assistance.

How educators can help

As an educator it's not your role to diagnose a mental health issue – what you can do is notice those children or young people who might be experiencing anxiety, and act appropriately.

For children and young people whose anxiety is less severe, social and emotional learning (SEL) programs that build resilience and coping strategies can be very helpful. These can be embedded as part of a whole-learning community approach. Read more about common signs and symptoms of [anxiety](#) in children and young people.

On an individual level, there are also many helpful ways you can support children and young people experiencing anxiety, depending on their developmental stage. Here are some ideas:

- Give young children the language to label how they're feeling, so they can learn to identify their emotions (for example, say, "It looks like you might be feeling a bit worried. Sometimes when I feel worried, my tummy feels wobbly").
- Give notice prior to [transitions](#) like starting or stopping activities or moving rooms to help children and young people prepare for change.
- Support families to develop consistent 'goodbye' routines for younger children at drop-off, to create a sense of predictability.
- Help children and young people understand that being anxious, particularly when confronting new situations, is normal, but also that there are strategies for managing anxious feelings.
- Help individuals recognise their own internal cues that they're becoming anxious (for example, if they have a racing heart or are unable to think, identify and practice strategies that help them to manage their anxiety and calm down).
- Use a step-by-step approach. Break tasks down into small manageable chunks, moving up a step when an individual can cope without anxiety (for example, presenting a project to an educator, presenting a project to an educator and two friends, presenting a project to a small group, and so on).

- Help children and young people recall situations where they've succeeded despite being anxious, to strengthen their self-belief they can cope with and manage their anxiety.
- Help them understand that avoiding those things that make them anxious, while useful as a short-term fix, is likely to make things harder in the future.
- Encourage children and young people to have a go at things that are new and to understand that it takes time to learn new skills or behaviours.
- Help them to recognise their own self-talk when approaching new situations and to develop some positive coping statements to stop the self-defeating talk.
- Set realistic expectations for challenges and assist children and young people to manage stress associated with tasks.
- Talk about effective and helpful strategies that you use to manage anxiety or stress (for example, talking to friends, positive self-talk, exercise and other relaxation strategies).
- Enlist the support of important people in their lives such as family members, peers and other educators.

Support from health professionals

If further support is needed, work with your colleagues and the family to refer the child or young person to a health professional.

A range of health professionals and services offer information, treatment and support for anxiety conditions, as well as self-help strategies. Effective treatment helps children and young people learn how to control their anxiety, so it doesn't control them. The type of treatment will depend on the type of anxiety they're experiencing.

Psychological treatment

Psychological treatment can help a person change their thinking patterns so they're able to keep their anxiety under control and reduce irrational worries. Treatment typically involves reducing avoidance and using effective coping skills, such as relaxation and learning how to replace unhelpful thoughts with positive self-talk. In younger children, support may focus more on behavioural and parental approaches

(for example, helping families respond helpfully to anxious behaviours).

Delivery options include one on one, group, or online therapies. Learn more about [online mental health supports](#).

Medical treatments

Research shows that psychological therapies are the most effective treatment option for people with anxiety. However, if symptoms are severe, some medical treatments may be helpful. For instance, some types of antidepressant medication can help people to manage anxiety, even if they're not experiencing symptoms of depression. When people have an anxiety condition, specific changes occur in their brain's chemicals. Antidepressant medication is designed to correct the imbalance of chemical messages between nerve cells (neurones) in the brain.

Be You Professional Learning

Check out content on social and emotional learning and teaching for resilience in the [Learning Resilience](#) domain.

References

James, A., James, G., Cowdrey, F., Soler, A., & Choke, A. (2013). Cognitive behavioural therapy for anxiety disorders in children and adolescents. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2013, 6, CD004690.

External links

Beyond Blue – [Treatments for anxiety](#)

headspace – [What is anxiety & the effects on mental health](#)

Orygen – [Anxiety and young people](#)

Raising Children Network – [Anxiety: the stepladder approach](#)