

Supporting a Young Person with Anxiety

Anxiety can be described as a feeling of fear, worry or unease. We all experience anxiety from time to time and this is normal. Anxiety can be diagnosed as a mental illness when it is persistent, severe and stops us from doing things we want and need to do.

Statistics:

Anxiety disorders are one of the most common mental illnesses. They are thought to occur in around 10-11% of children and young people (NHS Education Scotland).

10 TOP TIPS for supporting a young person with anxiety

- 1 Understand why we experience anxiety.** Help the young person understand that anxiety is a normal response to something that seems threatening or scary, we all experience it from time to time.
- 2 Recognise anxiety.** Anxiety can impact our behaviour, thoughts and feelings. Learn to recognise anxiety and help young people to identify anxiety in themselves.
- 3 Listen.** You don't need to know the answers, sometimes listening is enough. By summarising, clarifying and asking questions you can explore what might help together.
- 4 Focus on one step at a time.** Help the young person break problems into smaller parts and focus on one thing at a time. Try to be patient and understanding. Praise effort and success.
- 5 Consider general wellbeing.** Sleeping well, a healthy diet, exercising and spending time with others benefits our mental health. Explore if the young person can improve on these.
- 6 Identify triggers.** Help the young person work out where and when they experience anxiety. If they are struggling asking them to keep a diary might help.
- 7 Challenge automatic thoughts.** Help them consider negative and self-critical thoughts in more helpful perspectives. It might help to ask what they would say to a friend.
- 8 Help reduce avoidance.** Avoiding situations stops us learning we can cope. Support the young person to face their fears, help them to pick an easier situation to start.
- 9 Build on strengths and explore what helps.** Explore what the young person enjoys and build a toolbox of things to help, this might include mindfulness, relaxation and/or distraction activities.
- 10 Look after yourself.** Supporting others is hard work, try to look after yourself too. Support the young person to also talk to their family, GP and/or school. If you are concerned seek additional help.

Self-help links:

- www.anxietyuk.org.uk/
- www.handsonscotland.co.uk/anxiety/
- www.youth.anxietycanada.com/ - also see Mindshift app
- www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/mildmoderate/Anxiety.asp
- www.moodcafe.co.uk/
- www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/
- www.stressandanxietyinteenagers.com/
- www.ocdyouth.org/

