

## What can anxiety look like in my child?

Anxiety and fear are often thought of as too much worry. Worrying and fear are mental tasks that can be invisible to an outside observer. Despite this, when individuals worry they can change their behavior and this may be obvious to friends and family. Keep in mind that “anxiety behaviors” are usually a change from your child’s normal functioning and are decisions made based on fear/worry compared to your child’s preference.

What are some examples of these behaviors? You can use this checklist as a guide to think about any behavior change in your child.

<b>social anxiety</b>	<b>excessive worry</b>	<b>panic attacks</b>	<b>intrusive thoughts/OCD type behavior</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• increase in isolative behavior</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• excessive planning ahead</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• sensitive to physical symptoms associated with anxiety</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• avoidance of previously normal behaviors</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• requests for parent to interact with others on their behalf</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• excessive requests for reassurance about future</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• reduction in caffeine or sugar due to fear of panic</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• increase in a behavior w/o explanation (hand washing, counting)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• decrease time spent with peers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• difficulty with decision making</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• avoidant and fearful of places b/c of association with panic</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• excessive planning ahead</li></ul>

## What can anxiety look like in my child?

- difficulty initiating interactions with peers

- appearing “on edge” and “stressed”

- excessive focus on exits and escape routes from buildings

- excessive planning ahead

- excessive reassurance about appearance

- avoidance of new situations or experiences

- avoidance of food before leaving house

- excessive planning ahead

- refusal to eat in public

- significant difficulty with uncertainty

- reduction in physical activity for fear of setting “off” the panic

- excessive planning ahead

- school avoidance

- difficulty falling asleep

- safe person to accompany them when leaving the house

- excessive planning ahead

- avoidance of any perceived conflict

- appears distracted and aloof

- change in rigidity about how things “should” be done.

- excessive planning ahead

- avoidance of writing in public

- procrastination

- reduced tolerance for distress

# Building Tolerance

Remember when you taught your child to read, ride a bike, or learn any new behavior? You likely did so in small achievable steps.

Helping them tolerate feeling anxious can work very much the same way. For now, think about your child's emotional regulation skills (emotional tolerance) as a muscle. If we want that "muscle" to strengthen we have to provide it opportunities for increasingly heavier weights. If we don't ever offer heavier weights we can expect that their "muscle" will become quite use to only lifting lighter weights. Moreover, they may start believing they'll never be able to lift anything heavier.

Below, choose a behavior or expectation you'd like your child to be able to accomplish while tolerating feeling anxious and then list 10 smaller and incremental behaviors that would build one another in order to meet the desired behavior.

Desired behavior:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

**TIP: be creative**

# Effective Listening

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## Steps to help more empathic

- Plan time, place, emotional tolerance, & distractibility
- Anticipate what you may hear AND prepare to be surprised
- Fight the urge to talk (this is typically where sympathy falls in)
- Keep your opinions to yourself...(for now)
- Summarize what you heard...did you get it right? If not, try again
- Express appreciation that someone shared something with you (its not easy)
- If appropriate, request permission to share opinion/advice

**"When you talk, you are only repeating what you already know. But if you listen, you may learn something new."** - Dalai Lama

## Steps to problem solve together

- Start with a neutral observation (e.g., "Hey, i've noticed....")
- Listen and empathize to the response
- Identify the problem (part of empathy...repeat back what you heard)
- Offer your perspective or problem
- Invite your child to suggest a possible solution
- Offer help and possible solutions

# Setting Expectations

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Having a child who suffers with anxiety is NOT an excuse for being rude, disrespectful, being mean, or self-destructive. You can, and should set some expectations for them.

But first....ask yourself these questions:

- Why do I have this expectation(s)?
- What is my concern?
- Is it reasonable?
- Is it fair?
- Do I agree with my partner on this expectation?
- Am I consistent with this expectation?
- Are they rigid or am I open to alternatives?

Setting the expectation

- Be assertive and direct
- Be clear
- No sugar coating! It never comes out better
- Be able to explain why you have this expectation..but only ONCE.
- Do not get caught into a "why" argument
- Practice your delivery
- Time, place, emotional tolerance & distractibility matter
- One at a time