



We've all felt nervous or worried from time to time and our kids are no exception. Did you know that avoiding anxiety may make it stronger? It might surprise you, but the goal is not to eliminate anxious feelings completely but to help kids learn how to identify and navigate their worries to thrive each day.

Things you can do to help a child with anxious feelings

Encouraging kids to talk about their feelings is an important step in helping them cope with moments of emotional discomfort. Set time aside to hear them out, and during these talks, be sure to support their feelings, even if you can't relate. Use the table of recommendations below to guide your conversations:

Avoid...

"You don't have anything to be scared about!"
(Dismisses feeling)

"There's no way you'll get hurt."
(Promises of safety)

"Are you worried you can't get your project done and turned in tomorrow?"
(Leads to anxiety)

Instead try...

"It's understandable that you're worried about trying out for the school play. I get nervous when I have to speak in front of people too. You can be brave and do your best."

"It seems like you're scared to put your face in the water at the pool. I'm right here with you as you learn how."

"How are you feeling about your school project?"

How to identify anxious feelings in the body

Did you know that everyone feels anxiety differently? Many times, children aren't aware of their emotions and how they feel in their body. By helping them identify how anxiety feels, they can be more aware when they need to practice deep breathing or other relaxation exercises.

How My Body Feels When I'm Anxious

When you're feeling worried or anxious, you can draw how your body is feeling inside. Maybe you feel like there are bees buzzing in your stomach! Or is there a tornado of worries swirling in your head? Talk to a trusted adult as you draw your feelings in the outline below.



ON OUR SLEEVES

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Need help getting started? Download our [How My Body Feels When I'm Anxious](#) (available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)) and go over it with your child.

Help them think through how this feeling affects their thoughts and their bodies. Do they clench their fists when they're worried? Chew on their fingernails? Breathe faster?

When do we need more help?

Feelings of nervousness, worry and anxiety are common in children. However, it can become an anxiety disorder if it's stopping them from doing their normal daily activities.

Watch for:

- Feelings that seem much more extreme than the situation (uncontrolled crying/tantrums, frequent hopelessness or dread)
- Symptoms in their body that keep them from normal activities, including recurring headaches, sweating, nail biting, skin picking, or stomach aches.
- Avoidance of common activities or refusing to take part in social activities.
- Sleep problems that continue over time, including refusing to sleep alone or nightmares.
- Repeatedly having to offer reassurance and comfort to them in common situations.

If you see these kinds of behaviors repeatedly, you may want to speak to your pediatrician, your child's teacher, school counselor, or contact a mental health professional.

Don't forget to share how you're using *On Our Sleeves* resources. Hit the **reply button** to tell us your *On Our Sleeves* story.

Sincerely,
Wolfson Children's Hospital

The mission of *On Our Sleeves* is to provide every community in America access to free, evidence-informed educational resources necessary for breaking stigmas about child mental health and educating families and advocates. **For more information, visit OnOurSleeves.org.**

To access educational resources and revisit the mission of *On Our Sleeves*®, visit WolfsonChildrens.com/OnOurSleeves.

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