

INSIGHTS

Managing anxiety before it becomes a problem



The president of Australian Primary Principals Association (APPA) recently highlighted the enormity of the anxiety problem that children are facing. A survey of primary schools across Australia conducted by the APPA showed that 80% of school leaders regard anxiety as a significant issue for children.

Research shows that childhood anxiety left unmanaged will almost certainly re emerge, highlighting the importance of early detection and management of anxiety. Parents, as first responders, play an important role by minimising the impact of stressful moments before they lead to full-blown anxiety. Here's how they can help.

Recognise anxiety triggers

Recognising the events that trigger anxiety is the first step in helping a child to manage their stress. Rapid or unpredictable change, new social situations, unfamiliar events and difficult experiences are the most common anxiety stressors for kids.

Know how it shows

Stress and anxiety show in many ways however most children display anxiety behaviours that are unique to them. Typically, anxiety shows through physical signs such as chest pains, nausea and headaches. Anxiety can be observed through behavioural clues such as avoidance of activities, aggression, concentration difficulties and constant fiddling and movement. Worrying, overthinking and catastrophising are also common in children who experience anxiety. Knowing how anxiety shows in your child will alert you to respond appropriately with support and understanding.

Give kids tools to manage their states

Once anxiety is experienced it never truly disappears. It's always there in the background. Anxiety needs managing so kids can get on with their lives rather than become overwhelmed by stress and worry. Providing children with tools to manage their thinking, emotional and physical states prevents anxiety from becoming debilitating. Management tools such as deep breathing, mindfulness and exercise as well as techniques to help kids distance themselves from their anxiety-inducing thoughts help them minimise the impact of stress.

Help them understand how anxiety works

Children who understand what happens in their brains and bodies when they are stressed are better able to manage their anxious states. Providing children with a thorough knowledge of how anxiety works and how it shows empowers them to push their worries into the background while they get on with their lives. Managing anxiety takes practice, but it's absolutely essential if children are to flourish rather than become overwhelmed by stress and worry.

In closing

Stress and anxiety have accelerated with the impact of the pandemic. The growing rate of anxiety is no one's fault, however it does mean that parents need to become more knowledgeable about how anxiety works, how it shows and how you can help your children.



Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.