

TIPS TO MANAGE
ANXIETY
FOR YOUTH
— TOOLKIT —



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Anxiety is that sense of worry, fear or dread you feel that takes over your body when you feel like something bad is going to happen. Anxiety is quite common, and, in certain situations, it's considered a completely normal response that will diminish on its own. However, leaving anxiety unchecked and untreated can cause emotional, cognitive, and physical consequences, even in youth.

With that in mind, in this toolkit you'll learn healthy and productive ways to help your child cope with their anxiety and optimize their mental health, emotional health, and overall well-being. In fact, some of these tips might help you if you suffer from anxiety as well.

Symptoms of Anxiety

Some common symptoms of anxiety include:



Irritability/Agitation



Muscle Tension



Fatigue



Panic attacks



Feeling nervous,
tense, or on edge



"Butterflies" in
the stomach



Changes in
mood



Feeling down
or depressed



Sleeping
issues



Headaches, nausea,
or stomach pain



Fast or irregular
heartbeat



Feeling like something
bad is going to happen
to you or loved ones

What Does **Anxiety** Look Like in Youth?

To put it simply, anxiety in youth looks a lot like anxiety in adulthood. Children and adolescents experience the same feelings of anxiety as adults do. It's easy for adults to think that children can't possibly have things in their lives causing anxiety, but they do. Simply being a child comes with its own stressors - stressors you may have long forgotten about or blocked out from your own youth. From worrying about grades in school, making friends, and performing well in activities, youth today commonly experience anxiety.

Your child may feel immense pressure to be the very best in our competitive society. This is especially true with the uprising of social media usage, and this pressure can overflow quickly.

Children of all ages have also been through quite traumatic experiences in recent years due to COVID-19. The pandemic changed many aspects of our everyday lives, and this can be harder to manage for youth. Many kids have experienced a disruption in their usual academic schedules, extracurricular activities, and have likely missed out on a lot of fun over the last few years.

Anxiety disorders are among the most common diagnosed mental health disorders for children and adolescents. Untreated childhood anxiety can lead to complications such as decreased academic performance, depression, behavioral issues and more.

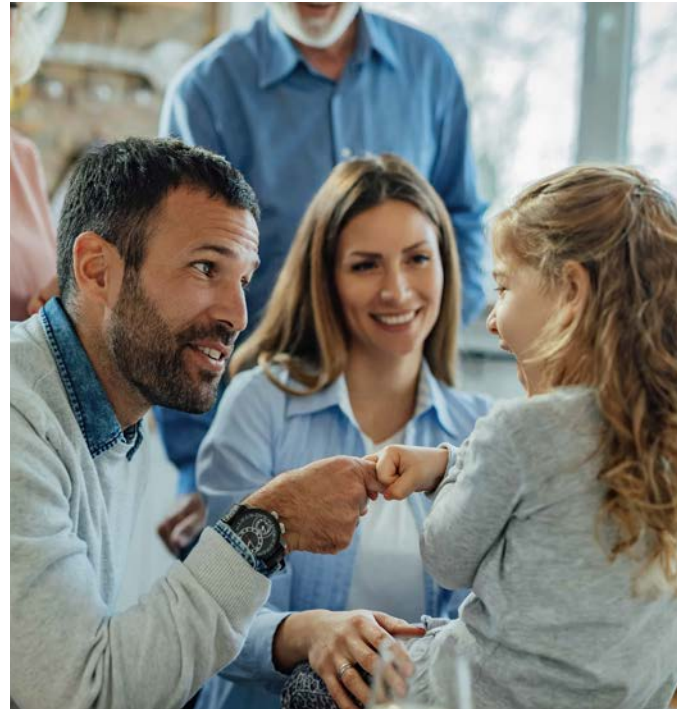


How To Help With Youth Anxiety

Talk With Your Child

It may sound simple, but talking with your child about their anxieties, worries, and fears can go a long way. You want to validate your child's experience and their feelings instead of making them feel like something is wrong with them. Open communication is incredibly important, and you want your child to feel like they can come to you with their feelings.

Avoid using threatening or aggressive statements when talking with your child about their anxiety. You want your child to feel safe, accepted and loved as they are. This will help boost their self-esteem, your relationship with your child, and their ability to deal with their feelings. Knowing they have a safe adult to speak to about their feelings and stressors will help them feel more secure at home.



Make a To-Do List With Your Child

Organization decreases anxiety. Children and adolescents can have trouble in managing their time and schedules, so working with your child to create a realistic, goal-oriented to-do list is one way to help lower their stress levels. You can ask your child to make a list of tasks they need to complete and work with them to help determine what should be at the top of their list. It's good practice to have your child include leisure activities and rest into their schedules, as these are essential to a healthy mind.

Motivate Your Child

You should regularly practice motivating your child to increase their self-esteem and show them that they have someone rooting for them. Dealing with anxiety is tough, and it's nice to know someone is cheering you on from the sidelines. Motivate your child to reach their goals and then celebrate their success with them!



Practice Relaxation Techniques Together

Teaching your child healthy relaxation techniques can be a huge game changer to their anxiety, and yours! As we know, anxiety affects more than just our minds, so being able to relax the body and regulate the nervous system can lessen anxiety immensely. Some simple ways to relax your mind and body include:



Practice breathing techniques



Practice being mindful (being in the present moment)



Light exercise such as yoga, stretching or dancing



Meditation

Connect With Nature

Experiencing nature is one sure way to ease anxiety. The warmth of sunlight, breathing in fresh air, hearing birds chirping, and smelling grass or flowers helps regulate our nervous system. Take your child outside for walks, playtime, or exercise to help relieve their anxiety.





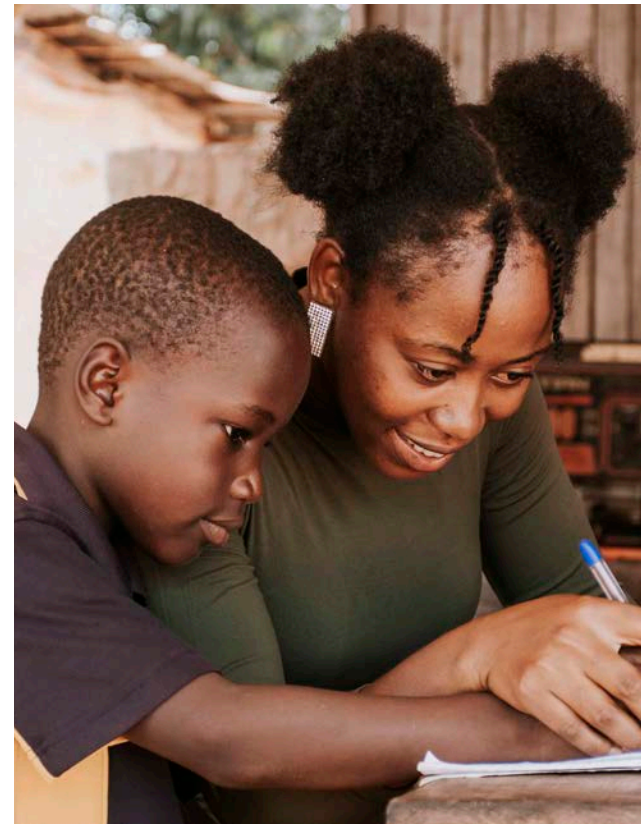
Exercise With Your Child

Exercise is a productive and healthy way to cope with anxiety. When we exercise, we increase neurochemicals in our brain that assist in calming anxiousness and worry. Don't worry, exercise does not have to be intense to be effective. Walking, stretching and mindful body movements count as exercise. Not only does exercise help lower anxiety, but it also promotes general well-being for your child.

Teach Your Child the Importance of Self-Talk

Self-talk is what drives our moods, actions, and behaviors, whether we realize it or not. Our brains produce two types of self-talk: positive and healthy vs. negative and irrational. Negative self-talk looks like "I am not good enough" or "I don't deserve love."

Work with your child to help them identify and recognize negative self-talk and teach them how to replace those undesirable thoughts with more positive, loving thoughts. Challenging our negative self-talk, or in other words, disproving the talk, allows us to replace those thoughts with loving ones. Examples of healthy, positive self-talk include "I didn't perform as well on that test as I wanted to, but that's okay because I tried my best and will learn from this experience" or "I did some bad things before, but that's okay because I have grown and learned from my mistakes."



Living with anxiety is tough, but with the right coping mechanisms, it is manageable. By incorporating the above tips into your child's life, you can help them live a more healthy, calm, and relaxing life.

Please note however, if you suspect your child is suffering from an anxiety disorder that doesn't seem to be swaying with time or these coping mechanisms addressed in this toolkit, you might want to seek professional help for them. While we want to be heroes for our children, sometimes we aren't equipped to handle their needs on our own.

About Dr. Hammond

Dr. Nekeshia Hammond is an author, international speaker, psychologist, and an expert in children's mental health. She is the founder of Hammond Psychology & Associates, and the former President of the Florida Psychological Association.

Dr. Hammond speaks to various groups to help increase public education about mental health issues. She has been featured on ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, as well as various magazines and radio shows throughout the globe. She is the host of Mental Health Moment with Dr. Hammond and author of the books **ADHD Explained: What Every Parent Needs to Know** and **The Practical Guide to Raising Emotionally Healthy Children**.



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