

TIPS FOR EASING ANXIETY

- **Empathize:** Let your child know *“I hear what you are saying and understand that you are feeling worried right now.”* *“Can you tell me more about your worries?”* Some children need to have time to process through their thoughts. Do not offer solutions or try to fix it. Children sometimes do better with a set amount of time: *“Let’s talk about your worries for 3 minutes, I will set my phone timer.”* Use a silly ring tone (e.g., Duck) to transition (see interrupt worries below).
- **Give Worry a Name:** When your child is afraid or worrying, their brain sends a message that it’s time to panic. These messages may be true or false. Create a word or name to describe their worry such as “worry brain,” “worry bug,” “Fear-a-saurus Rex,” or simply “anxiety”.
- **Calm Down Tools:** Fear is more than an emotion; it can be a whole-body experience. Teaching your child to take a few deep breathes, visualize a special place they like to go that makes them happy, or tensing and relaxing their muscles is a huge key to feeling calm. Create a list of “tools” that can help them when they start to worry or create a “worry box” filled with tangible tools to distract their brains from their worrisome thoughts.
- **Get Them Busy & Interrupt the Worry:** Instead of looking for solutions to the problem right away, ask your child, “What do you want to do instead of worry?” It could be draw/color, help with a task around the house, take a walk, get a drink, crumple paper, sing a song, play a game, or read a book. Focusing on an alternative gives your child a sense of power, and also interrupts the anxious thoughts.
- **“Can you draw it?”:** Instead of talking, encourage them to draw or create their worries on paper. When they are finished, make observations, and give them a chance to explain the significance of their work.
- **“Let’s change the ending.”:** Anxious children often feel stuck in the same pattern without a way out. Help them see different options by telling their story verbally or in writing, but leaving off the ending. Then, create a few new, funny and silly endings. Focus on your child conquering their fears with confidence and a positive ending.
- **Encourage:** Give your child some feedback, *“Great job controlling your worries today.”* Do this especially when the child is having good days.
- **Seek Support:** Anxiety is sneaky. It causes us to overestimate the risks and underestimate our ability to cope. As a parent, is it exceptionally difficult to watch a child suffer from worry or fear. If you are unsure how to help your child, or if you feel that your own anxiety is getting in the way, contact a Professional Mental Health Counselor.
 - Please contact Mr. Resh (mike_resh@hempfieldsd.org or 717-898-5519) for a list of local mental health resources or contact your child’s pediatrician for a referral.
 - LPC also has a great resource in school-based counseling through Community Service Group (CSG). Students can receive therapy once a week during their school day by trained therapists from CSG. Please contact Mr. Resh for a school-based counseling referral and/or additional information about school-based counseling.

Anxiety and Worry looks different for every child. Not every one of these strategies will work for your kids. You are the expert on your child. If you try something and it makes their worries worse, don't panic. Just pick something else from the list to try next time. Eventually, you will find a few phrases that are effective for sending a calm, encouraging and empowering message to your child.

Things to Say: Calming an Anxious Child:

*Rather than telling your child "You'll be fine," or "Don't worry about it," try one of these phrases the next time your child is feeling worried:

"I am here for you"

"Tell me about your worry"

"Can you draw your worry instead of talking about it?"

"What has helped you feel better in the past when you felt worried?"

"I know you are scared but you are safe."

"What is something you need right now to feel better."

"Your worried feelings will go away soon."