

TIPS FOR PARENTS WHEN REACTING TO SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

Looking Past the Behaviour

We need to remember that anxious or disruptive behaviour may be the noticeable symptom, but may disguise the real problem. We react to the symptom and miss the problem. Our assumptions might lead us further away from helping than we realize.

- ✓ Say what you see “you look frustrated” “you look worried”
- ✓ Let the person tell you the worries while you listen quietly. You may need to tell them when you can sit together to do this.
- ✓ Listen. Don't judge or jump to conclusions.
- ✓ Acknowledge. (“That sounds like it's really bothering you”) Help separate the worry from the child. (“That worry is really picking on you!”)
- ✓ It may be appropriate to ask what could help; the solution might not be possible, but could provide insight into their perspective.
- ✓ If they are unable to tell you, be a detective and observe for changes in behaviour.
- ✓ Provide general reassurance:
 - “You'll be okay”
 - Do what can be done to help calm in the moment
 - Help break things into small steps
 - Only do the smallest steps first “We can start small”

Response Strategies for Lower Level Agitation

- ✓ Briefly say what you see emotionally from the person “You look upset”
- ✓ Use only short requests to redirect to a calmer area, such as “sit down” or “have a drink” or “take off your coat”
- ✓ Do not try to solve or dismiss the problem
- ✓ You may need to redirect verbal behaviours such as repeated questions with “this sounds important, let's talk when you've been sitting calmly”
- ✓ Stay away from vague words like “when you're good”
- ✓ Don't argue. You are not arguing with the child, you are arguing with Anxiety. You'll never win an argument with Anxiety.
- ✓ Use visuals. They are longer lasting than speech. They can represent the compromise already discussed.

Personal Safety is Key!

When a young person is upset, behavioural outbursts are possible. There could be yelling, name calling, threats, destructive behaviour or aggressive behaviour. Safety first! Personal safety trumps all other interventions. You may need to make choices you would not usually make to keep everyone safe. You might need to remove yourself or others from that person. Keep verbal engagement to an absolute minimum. Model the calm you seek in that person. This is easier said than done. If the situation is unsafe, you might need to call for help, including the police or take a child to the hospital.