

Anxiety

It is normal for us all to have some anxiety, however when it begins to interfere with your child's everyday functioning at home, and at school, steps need to be taken to help them.

With separation anxiety parents here are some ideas:

*It is helpful to talk about what will happen before it happens.

(I'm going to walk you to the line, we'll do our goodbye, and I will leave for grocery shopping while you get to stay and have fun at school.)

*Kiss them goodbye and send them on. Sometimes it takes a gentle nudge to get them into the classroom. Please leave immediately. Do not linger!

*Be brave and hide the tears. Once you are out of sight of your child you can cry! If you are upset and anxious, your child will be too.

*No matter what make sure that your child does come to school everyday! Staying home only makes your child's anxiety worse the next day that they are to come to school.

*If the separation anxiety has not resolved after a week or so parents you might want to start an incentive plan with your child. Ex If you go to school without any problems you can earn _____. This could be as simple as playing a game at night with you or going to the park after school. It does not have to, or need to cost a lot of money.

*If the separation anxiety continues you should talk to your child's teacher about possible interventions. Interventions to consider are implementing an incentive plan at school, maybe setting up a job they can do in the morning upon arrival at school, or having a fun project they can work on before school.

With generalized anxiety here are some helpful ideas:

- *Listen to your child. Respect and validate their feelings. Anxiety is real!
- *Try to get them to tell you what they are thinking. Hopefully this will get them to tell you scary thoughts that build up in their minds.
- *Then to get them to challenge their anxious thinking, ask them “How likely is (that thing you are afraid of) to happen?”
- *Try to get them to problem solve ways that might help them in dealing with the underlying anxiety.
- *Give lots of positive reinforcement for even the smallest of steps forward in dealing with their anxiety.
- *Don’t allow excessive checking in. This just keeps the anxiety going. Set some time limits of when the next check in will be.
- *Parents it is important that you do not offer more reassurance than needed. This just stirs up the anxious feelings when you bring it up and makes the anxious feeling become even bigger than it is.

Other helpful strategies to deal with any type of anxiety-

3-4 Deep breathes

Positive self-talk (I can do this)

Encourage “feeling good” activities

Help child to identify comforting thoughts

Role play situations ahead of time.

Books for kids:

I don’t want to go to School, Helping kids cope with Separation Anxiety

By Nancy Pando, LICSW

Mustang, the Little Dog Who Was Afraid to Go to School

By Jill Goodman, MA

Wemberly Worried

By Kevin Henkes

The Bear Who Lost His Sleep, A story about Worrying Too Much

By Jessica Lamb-Shapiro

What to do when you are scared and worried (for older elementary age)

By James J Crist PhD