

Dealing with Anxiety in young people, how you as parents can support them. (Extracts from slides on support strategies)

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1. Support Strategies

Relaxation techniques (breathing, yoga, meditation)
Have realistic expectations: reward effort, not outcome
Consistent, daily routines
Play soothing music during downtime
Incorporate exercise, stretching
Sleep hygiene and eating habits
Encourage connection with others
Help find a hobby/outlet
Challenge them to think about what they can and cannot control

2. Breathing technique:

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Focus on your breathing. 5-7-9. Tried and tested method for relieving anxiety. Breathe in for 5, hold for 7, breathe out for 9

3. Parent Do's

Encourage communication
Listen and be available
Collaborate together to develop solutions
Validate their experience
Don't minimise - Make it important
Be mindful of actions when dealing with your own stress

4. 5-4-3-2-1 Technique

Find something to focus on. Say to yourself "I see" and name 5 things you see. Then say "I feel" and name 4 things you feel. Then "I hear..." and name 3 things you can hear. Then "I smell..." and name 2 things you can smell. Then "I taste" and name 1 thing you can taste.

This is just a way for the young person to focus their awareness for a couple of minutes on things that don't cause them any anxiety. It gives them a chance to burn off the anxiety hormones they have accumulated. This can be used anytime they feel anxiety building up.

5. 3 instantly calming CBT techniques that focus on the thinking & behaving part of the young person to help them take back control when they are feeling anxious.

1. Focus on how the feelings will change. Remind the young person that feelings are fluid and inevitably change. So even if they are still anxious I want the young person to think about what their feelings will be like once they start to feel better again, specifically focusing on that expected change. Might help to write these down.

"I'm feeling nervous about this exam tomorrow. When these feelings change I expect to feel relaxed and calm again" So they've given themselves a blueprint/a template for what to expect.

On top of this ask them to imagine what the very first sign might be that those alterations in their emotions and feelings are starting to happen because they will inevitably happen. So they might say that they might find their breathing has slowed down etc

Feelings ALWAYS shift and just remembering this is really helpful/useful. This idea and the writing down how they might expect their feelings to improve takes that concept to the next level.

2. The next technique is more behavioural than cognitive. "Chew it over and act normal". Anxiety is not an illusion, it's a survival response. But it's a response that can go wrong sometimes to the point that it hinders rather than helps (a bit like the guard dog who bites the postman etc). A response kicks in because it senses a threat even though that perceived threat may not actually be a real threat at all. One way to train anxiety to be selective and behave itself is to give it feedback, to let it know "Thanks, but you're not needed right now". Because anxiety takes its lead from what the anxious person does - if the young person acts in ways that they wouldn't act in a real emergency, the anxiety fades away, for eg, during an emergency we wouldn't

talk softly and calmly,

smile,

salivate,

breathe deeply, have an open body posture

So if the young person purposefully adopts some of these behaviours (or even 1) when they are anxious, they are altering the feedback loop. They are sending the feedback to their sympathetic nervous system that it's not needed, all is fine, good and well.

Even the most anxious young person can chew gum or even imagine they are - which will help them salivate. This is something you wouldn't be doing during a real threat. Chewing gum produces saliva so very quickly this switches off the cascade of anxiety.

Encouraging the young person to act normal in anxious times will quickly change the feedback loop and switch off anxiety.

Knowing they can do this can give the young person confidence and a sense of control – anxiety takes away people’s sense of control.

Anxiety is all about expectation which tends to be catastrophic so let’s bring some thought to that next.

3. “Catch the underlying assumption and chase down logical conclusions”

If someone feels anxious about something it’s because they have a fear of some consequence. So what is that consequence?

For eg the young person is afraid to attend a party. S/he asks themselves “What consequence am I afraid of?” They might say “I’m afraid of meeting new people” So what’s the consequence of that? They might say “They might not like me”. What’s the consequence of that? “I’ll feel upset”. What’s the consequence of that? “I’ll feel that I’m unlikeable” . They can go on and on with that.

But how to deal with it?

“I’ll remember people who DO like me”

“I’ll soon forget about the party, it will be in the past”

“I’ll remember that I can be wrong when assuming that people don’t like me”

What the young person is doing here is finding contradictions to the ultimate conclusion of the fear.

They begin to see it’s not a catastrophe. It’s often a step along the path to something else.