



## Supporting An Anxious Child

### What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, fear or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. It is often associated with feelings of an escalating loss of control, worst-case scenario thinking and uncertainty.

### Signs and Symptoms

<b>Physical Symptoms</b>	<b>Thoughts and Feelings</b>	<b>Coping Behaviours</b>
Panic Attacks (racing heart, rapid/shallow breath)	Upsetting, scary and/or negative thoughts	Avoidance
Sweating	Nervousness	Pacing
Tense Muscles	Overwhelm	Social Withdrawal
Irritable Bowel Syndrome	Feelings of dread	Changes in Eating Patterns
Difficulty Concentrating	Believing in an inability to cope with daily routines	Easily Flustered

## Supportive Strategies

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, fear or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. It is often associated with feelings of an escalating loss of control, worst-case scenario thinking and uncertainty.

- **Creating a Safe Space for Conversation**

Setting aside an appropriate time to connect with your child allows you both to engage in a meaningful conversation as well as afford your child an opportunity to express their anxiety and what may be causing it. Often children find it easier to talk while engaging in another activity, such as colouring in or going for a walk.

- **Empathize and Validate**

We often want to reassure, resolve or provide solutions to make children feel better. However, this sometimes means that we don't always take the time to listen, ask questions and learn about their experience. Simply identifying and acknowledging their emotion, as well as the source of their emotion ("It sounds like you are feeling really nervous about your upcoming tests"), allows your child to feel recognized, understood and accepted.

- **Avoid Accommodating Anxiety**

Often, in order to cope with anxiety, children will try to avoid that which makes them anxious. In an attempt to lessen their anxiety, we often respond through means of accommodation. For example, a child may feel anxious about their caregiver getting flu and being unable to fetch them from school. Rather than telling the child that their caregiver rarely gets flu or that it is unlikely to happen, a caregiver can say "I'm not sick but if I ever got sick, I'd work very hard to get well. And if I can't pick you up, your aunt will collect you". Here, instead of unintentionally enabling the child to avoid facing their anxiety, you encourage them to face, and overcome, their fear. Remember, while avoidance will make your child feel less vulnerable in the short run, it will never make them less afraid.

- **Senses Exercise**

Grounding techniques, such as the senses exercise is a helpful strategy to try when your child is feeling anxious or overwhelmed. Here, you go through what you can see, hear, feel, smell and taste. For example, you can ask your child “can you see that airplane in the sky?” or “can you list all the things you can hear?”. This technique helps decrease the intensity of almost any emotion as well as allow your child to take a step back from any negative thoughts.

- **Hand Breathing**

Using the hand breathing technique is an invaluable strategy that will slow down a pacing mind, calm the nervous system and decrease stress in one’s body. With one hand out in front of you, you use your other hand to slowly trace around each finger of the extended hand. As you slowly trace up the side of a finger, you breath in, as you trace down the side of a finger, you breathe out. Remember to exaggerate your breath as a means of encouraging your child.