



## Home and Family Strategies: Anxiety

*This Quick Fact Sheet contains strategies designed to address potential symptoms of child anxiety and should be used in consultation and collaboration with mental health personnel or as part of a larger intervention approach. These pages contain only a portion of many possible strategies available to address symptoms of anxiety. Strategies should always be individualized and implemented with careful consideration of the differences of each child and the context of their individual circumstances. Additionally, this information should never be used to formulate a diagnosis. Mental health diagnoses should be made only by a trained mental health professional after a thorough evaluation.*

**If you notice a significant change in mood in your child that lasts for more than a week, share your observations with your child's pediatrician and/or school's mental health support team.**

### Strategies for Feelings of Excessive Worry, Fear or Stress

- Validate your child's feelings and understand that his/her worries/fears are real to him/her
- Teach and model appropriate responses to stress
- Teach specific steps the child can take to relax (i.e. taking deep breaths, tensing muscles and then relaxing muscles, etc.)
- Allow the child to have a small object (such as stress ball or smooth stone) in his/her pocket during family gatherings/outings that would be appropriate to use and would not disturb others
- Allow choices in order to help the child feel more in control
- Minimize the emphasis on competition
- Allow the child to engage in calming activities, such as drawing, silent reading or listening to music, when worried or stressed
- Reduce unnecessary stress within home/family environment
- Where feasible, avoid bringing up topics that are sensitive to the child such as recent loss, housing instability, a family member's substance issues, incarceration, etc.
- Identify individual (i.e. aunt/uncle, grandparent, older sibling, family friend, mentor, school staffperson) your child may talk to and provide built-in opportunities during the week for child to talk with this person

### Strategies for Irritability, Restlessness, or Feeling Keyed Up

- Identify one family member or friend to act as the child's check-in person and as a point person for family communication
- Identify a natural support (i.e. aunt/uncle, grandparent, older sibling, family friend, etc) your child may talk to about irritability and provide built-in opportunities during the week for your child to talk with this person
- Validate your child's experiences and feelings ("I know that things are really hard for you right now.")
- Teach your child to recognize his/her mood patterns and appropriate ways to communicate anger, frustration, sadness, etc.
- Provide your child opportunities for "self time out" to regroup when feeling agitated or overwhelmed
- Provide opportunities for your child to engage in mild exercise when s/he is feeling restless or keyed up, such as walking up/down stairs, delivering something to a neighbor, etc.
- Allow your child to have a small object (such as stress ball or smooth stone) in his/her pocket that would be appropriate to use during family gatherings/outings and would not disturb others
- Use a predetermined signal when the student is exhibiting irritable or restless behavior
- Provide opportunities for your child to work with a similar-age family member or peer who is calm and able to focus for an extended period of time
- Teach specific steps your child can take to relax (i.e. taking deep breaths, tensing muscles and then relaxing muscles, etc.)
- Help your child to identify automatic negative thoughts and strategies for reframing these negative thoughts; encourage positive self-talk



### Strategies for Sleep Difficulties, Fatigue or Loss of Energy

- Identify your child's interests and preferred activities and try to incorporate them into his/her daily schedule
- Encourage outdoor activities where children can benefit from the effects of sunlight and exercise
- Provide your child with sensory-stimulating tools such as a smooth stone or a stress or yoga ball
- Integrate frequent motor breaks within your family's routine/routines
- Allow your child to self-select a household chore/role of high interest (i.e. helping with errands, computer tasks, baking or cooking)
- Allow your child more time to respond to family conversations and activities
- Identify individuals who may support your child with the issues underlying his/her fatigue and energy loss (i.e. community therapist, school counselor, social worker, school nurse, etc.).
- Provide your child with supported study/homework time each day to help him or her stay organized and to demonstrate support
- Provide the child specific "rest" times throughout the week to avoid sleeping during inappropriate times
- If fatigue is due to sleep difficulties, collaborate with your child's pediatrician, psychiatrist, and/or therapist to try to address the issue at home. For example, develop a daily schedule that includes structured time for activities before bedtime (i.e. homework, chores, etc.) so the child develops a healthy, daily sleep routine.
- Coordinate with your child's pediatrician, the school nurse, and your child's teachers to allow healthy grazing on foods that may increase your child's energy
- If developmentally appropriate, provide assistance during morning and bedtime routines to accommodate your child's sleep-wake cycle

### Strategies for Difficulty Concentrating or Mind Going Blank

- Prompt your child to use a daily planner to keep track of assignments
- Provide support at home each night to make sure the child understands assignments and has all necessary materials
- Check regularly for work completion to avoid having your child get significantly far behind
- Help your child organize projects and break down projects/assignments into manageable parts
- Allow your child to work with a similar-age family member or peer who is calm and capable of concentrating for extended periods of time
- Provide discrete assistance in helping your child to stay focused on his or her task at hand
- Provide positive feedback when your child is able to focus and concentrate, and encouragement when your child loses focus
- Provide your child with tangible coping tools like music or a journal in order to re-engage

### Strategies for Somatic Complaints

- Determine that the physical complaint is not the result of a medical condition
- Coordinate interventions with your child's physician, counselor or therapist, and child's school team
- Validate your child's feelings and understand that these feelings are real to him/her
- Teach specific steps your child can use to relax (i.e. taking deep breaths, tensing muscles and then relaxing muscles, etc.)
- Allow choices in order to help child feel more in control
- Structure your home/family time so child does not have time to dwell on real or imagined physical complaints
- Provide additional household responsibilities (i.e. errands, caring for a pet, etc.) to keep child's mind off his/her physical discomfort, real or imagined
- Identify an individual (i.e. aunt/uncle, grandparent, older sibling, family friend, mentor, school staffperson) your child can talk to and provide built in opportunities during the week for child to talk with this person