

How to support my child when they are feeling anxious

Consider your child's behaviours as communications

Screaming, shouting, not responding and being withdrawn can be signs that your child is trying to communicate to you that they are struggling emotionally but are not able to express themselves verbally. The following model helps us understand what may upset your child and how they may respond emotionally.

- **Antecedent:** what happened before your child behaved unexpectedly?
- **Behaviours:** what behaviours did your child present?
- **Consequences:** what happened after? How did your child calm down?

If you feel your child needs support in emotional regulation, keeping an ABC journal can help you anticipate what may be emotionally challenging for your child and what tools help regulate them. You can then put preventative measures in place in the future.

When do I talk with my child?

Talk to your child when you feel calm and able to support them emotionally. Some children prefer to speak alone with a parent instead of sharing their feelings with the whole family. Creating regular opportunities where your child can spend time with you alone, such as having a walk in the evening or having a chat as you drive home from school, can encourage your child to share their feelings with you without feeling pressured.

In addition, talking about what makes us anxious can feel exposing, especially for young people. Having a task to focus on, such as beading, doing puzzles, may help regulate your child as you speak.

How do I speak with my child?

If you notice that your child is feeling anxious or stressed, you can start a conversation in a private space by sharing your curiosity around their change in behaviour or demeanour in a non-judgemental way. This can sound like 'I noticed, I wonder if you are having a difficult time recently.'

It is helpful to us to state that feeling sad, angry or worried are normal, and that there is nothing wrong with experiencing these feelings. If your child is not able to name their feelings, you can model it by using phrases like 'If I were you, I would feel' or 'I can imagine that must feel ...'

Sometimes, your child might feel much better just by sharing what they found challenging with you. Other times, they may need more support. In which case, you can ask 'is there anything I can do to help you?'

Need more support?

Shooting Star's Family Support Line is run by our family support workers. We can offer advice and guidance, make a referral to our therapy or counselling team, and signpost you to other relevant services when needed.

Mon-Fri, 9am-5pm

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