

How to Handle Fear and Anxiety with Kids

- **First and foremost, take care of yourself and manage your own emotions, especially fear and anxiety.** Children take their cue from you as their primary role model and if you are excessively worried, they will be as well.
- **Teach children to communicate and talk through their feelings.** Recognize body language that may indicate concerns. Listen to and validate their emotions but provide reassurance that there will eventually be a resolution of the problem and life will return to normal.
- **Continue to live a healthy lifestyle.** Eat healthy food. Exercise. Get enough sleep. Sure you may have to be creative but there are many options available to make sure you continue healthy practices.
- **Limit time on social media and the news:** Stay informed but steer clear of over consumption. It is especially important to protect young children from reports that they don't understand and from developing anxiety over the current situation. Focus instead on the positive reports and the practical ways you can make a difference.
- **Teach children to recognize the difference between things they can change and things that they have no control over.** They can't control school closures but they can maintain good study habits at home. Help children develop critical thinking skills to evaluate different situations and the best response to each.
- **Stick to routines and schedules:** Keep a regular time to wake up and a bedtime. Schedule school time, exercise and play time during the day. Schedules and routines give all of us a sense of security during troubled times.
- **Maintain a [gratitude journal](#):** There is so much negativity and uncertainty in the world and our brain is naturally attracted to it. Now is the time to train your child's brain to think differently. Allocate as much or more time to the positive side of things as you do to the negative. Designate a regular time around the dinner table or before bedtime to share what each is grateful for.
- **Get outside:** There is something very relaxing and reassuring about getting away from our technology infused indoors and noticing that despite all the conflict, tragedy and drama, the world is going on as usual. Spring is around the corner, the sun comes up every morning and the stars come out every night, just like always.
- **Learn something new:** We live in an amazing and magical time where the ability to learn something new is at our fingertips. Kids can listen to or read a book, watch a webinar, research and try something new that they've been curious about. It's really a luxury that they might not have again in the future.
- **Teach children that there is often a lesson learned or even an opportunity in difficult times.** As a teacher or parent you can share a time of hardship that you endured but in the end you got an opportunity or learned something that from the experience. Ask the child to imagine "What are you learning from this experience? How might that be helpful in the future?"

While the world is currently coping with a health crisis, know that it is a situation that will eventually be resolved. Reassure children of this and use this time to help them develop tools for handling not only the current situation but difficulties and hardship in the future.

Here's how to teach kids to challenge and change feelings:

- **Become an observer--** Take the time to evaluate a situation where the response is anxiety or fear. Ask the questions:
 - What happened? "The teacher announced a test on Friday."
 - What did you tell yourself about the situation? "I don't understand the material. I always do badly on tests. I'm not ready. I'll probably fail..."
 - How did you feel? "Worried, nervous, afraid, anxious..."
- **Challenge your thoughts-** argue with them, make them prove themselves, be the devils' advocate, don't accept thoughts as the truth
 - "I understand a lot of the material and I can learn the rest by Friday."
 - "I don't always do badly on tests. I have made some really good grades on tests."
 - "I'm not ready... yet. I know how to study and prepare for a test and I can do it. I have the time and the ability."
 - "I won't fail if I put forth enough effort."
- **Create a plan--** don't just change your thoughts, change your actions based on your thoughts. Plan to do what is necessary to be your best self and put forth your best effort.
 - "I'll study 30 minutes every night"
 - "I'll finish reading the assignment and doing the extra work."
 - "I'll ask for help on the things I don't understand."
- **Be vigilant and stay in control of your thoughts and your actions in order to stay in control of your feelings--** It's hard to stay anxious when we are occupied with other things. Stay on track with the plan. Keep working on it and reminding yourself that you are in charge of your thoughts.
- **Be patient and give yourself time--**The thoughts that create anxiety have had a lot of practice and repetition. It will take some time to replace them but eventually the new way of thinking will become the new habit.



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