

Three Great Activities

To Help a Young Child with Anxiety

At some point in their lives, all children will feel anxious or fearful of something; it might be that they are overly shy, worried about starting a new school or new class, or just have a general feeling of anxiety with no specific trigger. Anxiety and fear can have a real impact on a child's ability to socialise and feel comfortable in school. It can also have a significant impact on their physical well-being and develop into physical illness. Here are three really good activities to support children who are feeling anxious:

Bubble Fun!

One of the physical side-effects of anxiety or fear is shallowness of breath. Deep breathing is a great way to manage anxiety; it activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which makes us feel calm.

Purchase a bubble kit from any toy shop or supermarket and ask the child to focus on blowing lots of small bubbles. Then, get them to try and blow one large bubble by breathing deeply and then slowly releasing it. You may need to show them what to do first! Keep trying until you have used all the bubble mix! Whilst you are doing so, ask the child to tell you about their breathing and how a deeper and slower breath makes them feel. Once they recognise how to do it, they will be able to start to do deep breathing without the bubbles!

Worry Tin

Older children often keep what's worrying them bottled up, so here is a fun way of getting them to try to tell you what they are worried or anxious about.

Find a box or a tin with a lid. Give the child some stationery and ask them to cover it and label it with something like 'Worry Tin'. Let them choose the name; it will help them clarify what the problem might be. Ask them to write, draw or take a photograph of what they'd like to put in the tin and then put this (or the object itself, if available) inside. Sometimes, it is enough for the child just to put what they are feeling away, but you can always get the worries out one at a time and discuss what the problem is.

Calm Me Down Box

As we get older, we learn ways to keep calm and to manage stress. Children struggle with this, so we need to show them ways of managing their anxiety.

Get a large box and ask the child to decorate it. Explain that is their box and that they can use it any time. In the box, put different stress management tools, like: a stress ball, bubbles, a CD with soothing music, their favourite DVD, or anything that makes them feel good! Put the box where they can find it and encourage them to use it whenever they feel anxious.