



15 Strategies for Parenting Kids with Anxiety

Every child feels anxious sometimes, but when worry starts affecting their daily life—whether it’s trouble sleeping, avoiding activities, or constant “what if” questions—it’s a sign they need extra support. No matter how big or small their anxiety seems, helping them feel safe, understood, and equipped with coping tools can make a huge difference. These evidence-based strategies can be adapted for any age so that you can help your child self-regulate, ease their worries, and build confidence to thrive socially and emotionally.

1. "Name It to Tame It" (Labeling Feelings)


- Encourage your child to name their anxiety to make it feel less overwhelming.
- Use a feelings chart to help them identify and express emotions.

 **Tool:** Print or create a "Feelings wheel".

2. Grounding Techniques (5-4-3-2-1)


For moments of high anxiety, help your child focus on the present with this grounding exercise where they name:

- 5 things they see
- 4 things they feel
- 3 things they hear
- 2 things they smell
- 1 thing they taste

 **Tool:** Use "Calm" or "Headspace for Kids" for guided grounding exercises.


3. Worry Time

- Set a "worry time" (e.g., 10 minutes per day) where your child can write or talk about their worries.
- If they bring up worries outside that time, remind them, "Let's save this for worry time."

 **Tool:** A "worry jar" (write worries on paper, drop them in, and revisit during worry time).


4. Visualizing a “Calm Place”

- Guide your child to picture a safe, peaceful place (beach, cozy fort, grandma’s house).
- Have them describe it in detail: What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel?

 **Tool:** Use "Calm" or "Headspace for Kids" for guided grounding exercises.

5. Body-Based Strategies

- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** Tense and relax muscles from head to toe.
- **Blowing Bubbles:** Helps regulate breathing in a playful way.
- **Butterfly Hug:** Cross arms and tap shoulders slowly to calm the nervous system.


 **Tool:** YouTube has free guided Progressive Muscle Relaxation videos for kids.

6. “What If” Thought Flip

When your child spirals into "what if" thoughts ("What if I fail my test?"), help them flip it:

 "What if I mess up?"

 "What if I do great?"

 **Tool:** Keep a "What If?" journal where they write anxious thoughts & a positive alternative.

7. Create a “Calm Down Kit”

Fill a small box or bag with items that help soothe your child, such as:

- A fidget toy or stress ball
- A favorite stuffed animal
- A small bottle of essential oil (lavender, peppermint)
- A glitter jar (shake it & watch until the glitter settles)
- A coloring book & crayons



Tool: Let your child decorate their own calm-down kit

8. Normalize Imperfection

- Model making mistakes without stress (e.g., "Oops! I forgot my keys. No big deal!").
- Praise effort, not just success (e.g., "I'm proud of how hard you worked!" instead of "You're so smart!").



Tool: For young kids, watch the Bluey episode called “Perfect” and discuss it.

9. Regulate Your Anxiety First (Co-Regulation)

- Kids mirror your emotional state. Stay calm, slow, and steady in anxious moments.
- Use a soft voice and slower movements when they're panicking.



Tool: Try box breathing together: Inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4.

10. Movement Breaks to Reset the Nervous System

Fill a small box or bag with items that help soothe your child, such as:

- Jumping jacks
- Dance party
- Animal walks (crab walk, bear crawl)
- Yoga (child's pose, downward dog, ragdoll shake-out)



Tool: Apps like GoNoodle or Cosmic Kids Yoga make movement fun.

11. Visual Schedule

- Use a visual daily routine chart to help your child know what's coming next.
- Add transition cues ("After breakfast, we'll do X") to prevent surprise-induced stress.



Tool: Use a simple magnet board for young children or a shared calendar for older kids.

12. Role-Play Social Situations


- Practice anxiety-inducing scenarios (e.g., ordering at a restaurant, talking to a new friend).



Tool: If you have a young child, role-play with dolls or stuffies.


13. Teach “It’s Just Anxiety”

- Teach your child that anxiety is like an alarm system that sometimes overreacts.
- Use the metaphor: "Your brain is like a smoke detector—sometimes it goes off when there’s no real fire!"

 **Tool:** "Hey Warrior" (Karen Young) or "Ruby Finds A Worry" (Tom Percival) are great kid-friendly books about anxiety.


14. Sleep Routine to Reduce Anxiety

- No screens 1 hour before bed
- Use a weighted blanket for deep pressure calming
- Listen to white noise or a bedtime story

 **Tool:** Use the Moshi app or a Yoto player for sleep stories & calming sounds..

15. Encourage “Brave Moments”

- Instead of saying, "Don't be scared," say, "It's okay to feel nervous, and I know you can do it!"
- Reward small brave steps (e.g., trying something new).

 **Tool:** Make a Bravery Jar—every time your child does something brave, they add a bead/marble.

Bonus tip: Find a therapist who specializes in child or teen anxiety to get personalized strategies based on your child's age, goals, & unique needs.