

# Learning With Anxiety

## Anxiety is A Feeling

of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.

# 1 in 8

**children have high levels of anxiety**

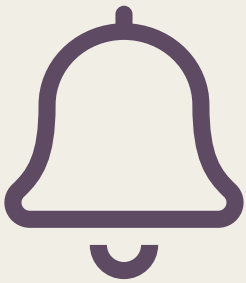
Anxiety itself is not dangerous, but it can become a problem when anxieties are unmanaged during a child's early years.

## Anxiety is Normal

Everyone is born with a certain amount of anxiety. It keeps us alive through fight or flight responses to real or perceived danger.

## Students with anxiety are working with an overly sensitive Alarm System

A typical response to dealing with anxiety is to ensure that the alarm system never goes off by avoiding triggers. However, the only real treatment for anxiety is to teach our children how to reset their alarm.



Too little anxiety is dangerous, as it makes us unable to protect ourselves from danger.



The right amount of anxiety allows us to react to dangerous situations while coping with situations that are not harmful.



Too much anxiety is a problem because it makes us perceive danger where there isn't any.

# Anxiety affects physiology, behaviour, cognition, and level of dependence.



## Physiological

How anxiety is felt in the body

- stomachache/headache
- trembling/light headed
- sweating/rapid heart rate
- difficulty breathing or swallowing
- needing to go to the washroom
- feeling hot/cold

If many of these symptoms happen at the same time, it might be considered a panic attack.

## Thinking

What anxious thoughts sound like

- I am going to fail.
- That dog is going to bite me.
- I am going to get hurt.
- The kids are going to laugh at me.
- My teacher is going to be mad at me.

Students with high levels of anxiety tend to have more frequent anxious thoughts, and are excessive and extreme in their generalizations.



## Behavioural

What anxiety might look like

- not talking to the teacher
- school avoidance
- not engaging in social activities
- not going to appointments
- avoiding the feared stimulus (e.g., dogs, snakes)

When children avoid tasks that do not have a real danger, that avoidance prevents them from learning to cope and will actually increase the anxiety over time.

## Dependence

When anxiety increases dependence

- require reassurance and help in non-threatening situations
- demand assistance "just in case"
- asking the same questions over and over
- refuse to talk to their teacher, have parents be the contact



# How To Help

## Step 1

### **Teach children about their brain.**

The brain controls our thinking, feeling and behaviours. We can almost always control our brain.

“Healthy Mind, Healthy Body”

“What Happens in Your Brain and Body During Anxiety”

## Step 2

### **Teach children about anxiety.**

What it is, what it feels like, and what we can do about it.

Ideas and Activities

Naming Your Anxiety

## Step 3

### **Teach children skills to “control” and “reset” their brain through mindfulness.**

Teach these skills when children are not anxious so that they can use it when they are. Start small and work your way up.

These are skills that need to be developed over time.

Calm Breathing

Grounding Exercises

## Step 4

### **Be sensitive to, but do not reinforce anxiety.**

Work to decrease long-term anxiety through small, safe, and increasing goals. Create an awareness of the anxiety and construct a safe and empathetic environment that allows children the opportunities to develop control over their anxiety.

Mindshift CBT

# Resources

<https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/>

<http://teenmentalhealth.org/>

<http://www.lynnlyonsnh.com/>

<https://resourcebank.ca/hubs/student-support>