

## Children and Anxiety: What's normal and what's not?

According to the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, all children experience anxiety, and it is expected and normal at specific times in development. For example, from early on and through the preschool years, healthy children may show intense distress (anxiety) at times of separation from their parents or other persons with whom they are close. Younger children may have fears that are more short-lived (i.e. storms, animals, strangers, etc.) If these anxieties become more severe and begin to interfere with daily activities at home, daycare, or school, it is perhaps a good idea to consult counselling services for an assessment.

According to author, Dr. Michele Borba, "...you can help control the amount of anxiety in your kid's life. Be sure your dreams and expectations stimulate and inspire, rather than overwhelm and defeat her. Also, be sure that bullying, school violence, or tragic world events are not diminishing your child's sense of well-being."

Stress is not just experienced by adults; kids have stress, too! The big question parents should ask themselves is, "Does stress stimulate or paralyze her?" Dr. Borba identifies four steps to reduce anxiety in children:

1. Identify Potential Anxiety Triggers (what's causing it)
2. Eliminate Those Stressors That You Can. Cutting out just one thing can have tremendous positive impact.
3. Deal With Stressors You Can't Eliminate
4. Teach Healthy Ways to Deal With Inevitable Anxiety.
  - Self-talk ("I can do this", "Stay calm and breathe slowly")
  - Elevator breathing
  - Stress melting
  - Visualize a calm place

Dr. Borba also suggests the following as a "behavior makeover plan":

1. Watch your child a bit closer over the next few days for anxiety.
2. Notice what kinds of situations create the most anxiety for your child.
3. What can you do to reduce his anxiety?
4. Cut out one activity.
5. Review step four and decide which one you think will work best with your child.
6. Continue to keep a close watch on your child's stress level.

From the book "No More Misbehavin'"

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