



PARENT GUIDE : ANXIETY

NOT A STOP SIGN, A CROSSWALK

Your child heard this in Kids Quest today:
Anxiety isn't a stop sign telling them they can't move forward. It's a crosswalk sign; it just wants them to slow down (*wait...wait...*), look around (*before they cross the street*), and figure out what's going on before they keep going (*walk*).

Watching your child struggle with invisible fears can be heartbreaking for any parent. Knowing how to explain anxiety to a child is an effective first step toward addressing their fears and worries!

Anxiety doesn't disappear, but with the right tools, it can actually help kids succeed instead of just feeling scary. Here's the same framework, plus a few ways you can help at home.

PUT ON YOUR OWN OXYGEN MASK FIRST.

You know the safety line on every flight: *put on your own oxygen mask before helping the person next to you.*

Anxiety and mental health work the same way. If you haven't taken a minute to notice what you're feeling and process your own stress, it's hard to help your child do the same.

Before you walk through this with your child, ask yourself what's been weighing on you lately, and whether you might be carrying some anxiety of your own without realizing it. Kids learn how to handle hard feelings mostly by watching how we handle ours, so your own honesty is one of the best things you can offer them.

ANXIETY IS A SIGNAL, NOT AN EMERGENCY

Anxiety is your child's built-in alarm system. Sometimes it goes off loudly even when there's no real danger, and that's normal; everyone's brain does this. A little anxiety is helpful; it's what makes them study for a test or practice before a game. It's only a problem when the alarm gets distorted.

WE'RE MADE OF FIVE CONNECTED PARTS

Physical, Spiritual, Mental, Emotional, and Relational.

MARK 12: 30-31

"Love the Lord your God with all your **heart** and with all your **soul** and with all your **mind** and with all your **strength**. The second is this: '**Love your neighbor** as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these."

Heart= emotional.

Soul= spiritual.

Mind= mental.

Strength= physical.

Love your neighbor = relationships

These are the big five parts that make up our whole self. You can't pull them apart; they're all connected. Anxiety rarely stays in one place; it might show up as a stomachache and a racing mind and a worry about friends, all from one thing..

WHAT YOU CAN CONTROL, WHAT YOU CAN'T

Anxiety gets loudest when we're not sure what to do with something, and one way to help is to sort it into two piles

Things I can't control:

what other people do or think, whether something hard happens, what happens tomorrow

Things I can control:

my effort, how I treat others, whether I ask for help, my own choices

When your child is anxious about something, help them by asking which pile it belongs in. If it's something they can control, help them take one small step. If it's not, they don't have to carry it alone; they can talk to God about it, and they have you too.



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WATCH FOR

- Constant worry or a lot of "what if" questions
- Trouble focusing, or seeming distracted
- Irritable, restless, or on edge
- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Headaches, stomachaches, or nausea with no clear cause
- Racing heart, muscle tension, trembling

It becomes worth extra support when it lasts several weeks, or starts getting in the way of school, friends, or things they usually enjoy.

SIMPLE WAYS TO CALM THE ALARM

- **Deep Breathing:** Take slow, deep breaths to tell your body it is safe.
- **Box Breathing:** In for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4
- **The 3-3-3 Rule:** Look at three things, listen for three sounds, and move three body parts.
- **Talk It Out:** Share your worries with a trusted adult like a parent or teacher.
- **Practice Gratitude**
- **Pray**
- **Listen to music**
- **Draw and create**
- **Be kind to yourself**
- **Hug someone you love**
- **Count to 10 slowly**
- **Eat a healthy snack**
- **Play with a pet**
- **Take a nap**
- **Walk in nature**
- **Drink some water.**

WHAT TO SAY

- I hear what you're worried about.
- It makes sense that something new feels scary.
- I can see you might be scared right now. That's okay; we can figure it out together.

TRY TO AVOID

- Don't worry, or you'll be fine; even said kindly, it can feel like the worry is being dismissed.

Acknowledge the feeling first, then help them look at the facts together.

One sentence is enough. When they're anxious, their thinking brain is a little offline, so lead with one line of comfort and one small next step, not a long explanation. I see you're nervous. Let's take three deep breaths together.

FAMILY TALK

Find a calm moment, not the middle of a meltdown.

Ask one question, then stop talking and let your child actually answer.

A few questions to try:

- What's something you're nervous about right now that you're not sure what to do with yet?
- What does anxious feel like in your body?
- Is there something going on that's out of your control that you need to let go of?
- What's one thing you can control this week?
- What's something that happened today that felt heavy?

Open-ended questions give them room to think instead of just answering yes or no. If they don't respond right away, that's okay; sit in the quiet with them instead of filling it or getting frustrated. Silence usually just means they're figuring out what they feel, not that something's wrong.

RESOURCES

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline: call or text 988, available 24/7, free and confidential, for you or your child.

WholeHearted, our church's mental health ministry: more info and resources at

www.churchanywhere.us/wholehearted

Questions or want to talk more? Reach out to Megan Carter at megan@churchanywhere.us