

Chapter 3

Helping your Anxious Child: What Your Child Needs From You

When your child struggles with anxiety and doesn't know how to cope with the world, who will they come to? You. Their parents. The people who love them unconditionally, and will stick by them no matter what.

As parents of an anxious child, we always want our children to be happy. We want them to feel secure in their environment and be able to deal with whatever comes their way. We want the world for them, but it's not enough unless we know exactly what to do.

What do Children with Anxiety Disorder Need from You?

Having a child with anxiety disorder means dealing with someone who hasn't quite figured out how to deal with the world. Even the simplest things worry them to the point where they can't really function properly.

As painful as it is to admit, these children really, really need your help.

There are, actually, several ways that you can help your child deal with anxiety. Whether they seem overwhelmed by something, they're having an anxiety attack, or if they are troubled by something they don't understand properly, parents can help a lot simply by being there and doing the right things.

Remember, the wrong approach can make things worse, and make your anxious child even more so. If you find your child in doubt and difficulty, you must say the right things at the right moment.

To explain this better, here's a list of ways that you can approach your anxious child with.

1. Stay Calm and Reasonable the Whole Time

No matter how anxious your child is feeling, you cannot react. Even when you feel wretched and helpless on the inside, you must maintain a calm and serene facade on the outside. It is crucial for you to do so if you want your child to also calm down eventually.

So the moment that you feel your child is heading toward an anxiety attack or if they seem overwhelmed about something, fix your own reaction to the event. Force yourself to appear calm even though it's miles away from what you're feeling on the inside. It will give your child the courage to face up to the situation, and give you the patience to deal with it,

2. Acknowledge their Anxiety

Even when you can't see the reason behind it, your child's worries are real. What they're feeling inside is real, and they need you to acknowledge it. When you're absolutely sure nothing bad is going to happen in the future, it is still important that you listen to your child's fear about it, and acknowledge how they're feeling about it. Sometimes, that's all they need from you.

What good is acknowledgment when you can't help them with something? The warmth, compassion, and acceptance that your child will hear in your voice when you're agreeing with them over their fears will give them the strength they need.

When Alice, my 9-year-old, started panicking about one of her teachers getting replaced for the term, we tried listening to her whenever she was in a mood to vent. We didn't offer her our wisdom ("changes are a big part of our life") or hope ("maybe the new teacher would be even better") because we felt that she needed to make sense of the situation herself. We listened and nodded, and we acknowledged that, yes, this is 'very hurtful that her teacher can simply leave one day'.

Slowly, after she was done venting, Alice came to terms with the problem herself. She started to like her new teacher and gradually forgot the entire problem. We didn't have to do much in this regard except listen to her and acknowledge her problem, because that was all she needed from us at the moment.