

01 873 3500



Supportive Parenting for Children & Adolescents Experiencing Anxiety



Anxiety

- Anxiety alerts us to danger helping us avoid harm. It is a necessary and healthy component of our mental life
- The anxiety response can be triggered by excessive worry, obsessive thoughts or panic attacks even when there is no external trigger
- Responding to anxiety is normal
- Parents are hardwired to respond to their child's distress ie: responding is what caring parents do
- How can we respond in helpful ways when our child chronically signals their distress?

What Parents Can Do

- Parents do not cause anxiety, parents & their child are not the problem. The problem is the anxiety
- Blaming yourself is a waste of time and energy
- Focus on lessening the anxiety overall and helping your anxious child suffer less
- Changing our responses is the only behaviour we can change
- Children may need parents to take steps that they may not yet be capable of
- We can look at our response to anxiety in three areas

Notice what is happening

Physical

What is happening	What we can do
Sweating	Step Back
Heart racing	Breathe
Laboured breathing	Press the pause button
Dizzy	Try relaxing muscles
Tense muscles	Notice your environment

Thinking/ Cognitive

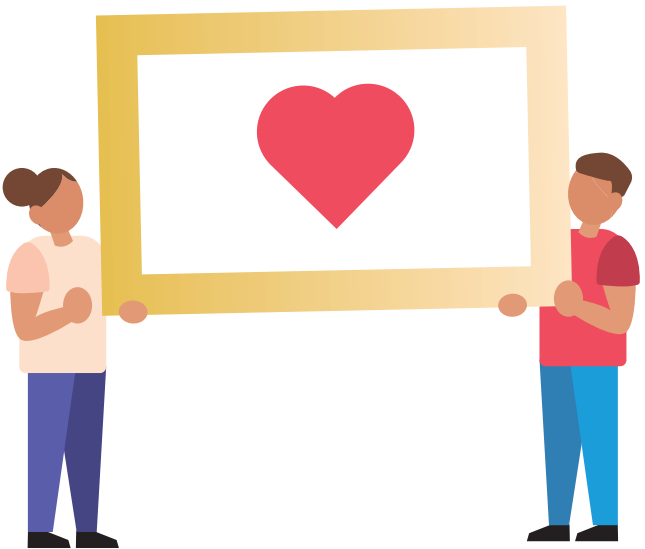
What we may be thinking	What we can think instead
Blame/criticizing ourselves	Catch yourself 'blaming'
Catastrophising	Use positive self-talk
Empathy	Less Catastrophising
I must fix this	Connection not Correction
I can't believe this is happening	

Behaviour

What is happening	What you can do instead
Crying	Notice and accept your emotional reaction
Yelling	Lower your voice
Violence	De-escalate - press the pause button
Withdrawing	Increase parental presence
Avoiding	Aim for a considered response

Parental Responses to Anxiety

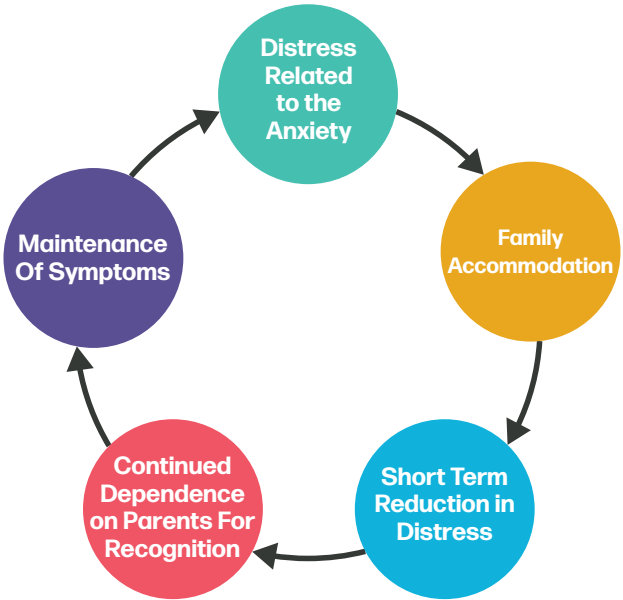
- Parents are often torn on the one hand to reassure their child and ease their distress and on the other hand to promote their child's self-sufficiency by setting boundaries.
- Parents can bounce back and forth between overprotection and overdemanding behaviours
- It is very common for families to make ACCOMMODATIONS ie: changing usual behaviours to help their Child avoid or lesson feelings of anxiety
- Accommodation solves the problem in the short term but child & parent become convinced that the this is the only way the child can cope with a stressful situation. The next time a similar situation arises – and it generally will- the child will seek accommodation and the parent is likely to provide it



The Accommodation Cycle

Examples of Accommodation

- Speaking in place of a Child with social anxiety
- Answering questions relating to a Child's persistent worry
- Not inviting Guests to the home
- Driving particular routes
- Providing the Child with information ie: Parent's schedules



Interrupting The Accommodation Cycle

Acceptance + Confidence = Support

- You are being supportive when you respond to your child's anxiety by showing that you understand that they are feeling anxious and you don't judge them for it (acceptance) and also showing them you have confidence that they will be able to cope with some anxiety and you know they can be OK despite feeling anxious (confidence)
- "I know it's hard and that you feel you need my help but I believe in you"
- "I am not going to abandon you but I know that you can cope with more responsibility/challenges"
- "It's hard for you but I know you can learn to manage it"
- Being supportive is challenging if you yourself are feeling overwhelmed or unsupported. Build and connect with a support network and think self-care first. Apply the same consideration to yourself that you are trying to show your child
- Teaching your child not to fear anxiety and to take it in their stride is one of the biggest gifts you can give your anxious child



**Anxiety
is a normal
emotion**

- Anxiety may be a recurring aspect of child's life - waxing and waning, makes it all the more important for them to learn they are capable of **COPING** with Anxiety
- Spend a week or two showing your Child a lot of support by making as many supportive statements as possible
- When your Child sees that you are willing for her/him to feel anxious some of the time, he/she will be able to become less afraid of being anxious
- How you respond and the attitudes you hold matter a great deal
- Change is possible
- If you are currently in crisis, put your resources into dealing with the crisis. Consider returning to supportive parenting at a later stage



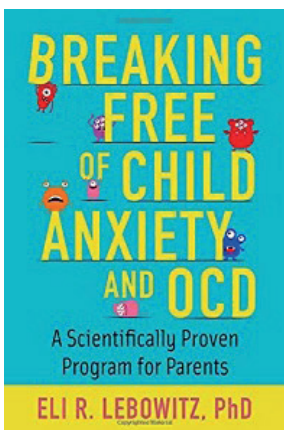
**Use Supportive
Language**

For those who would like to hear more



NVR2018 - Eli Leibowitz - Parent-based treatment for childhood anxiety and OCD: the SPACE program

Parent-based treatment for childhood anxiety and OCD: the SPACE program



The first and only book to provide a completely parent-based treatment program for child and adolescent anxiety

For ongoing support Parentline is available
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