

# How to help if your child is experiencing anxiety



## What causes anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of fear or panic. We all get it from time to time when we try a new experience or things that are difficult. This feeling goes back to the neolithic time when humans were surrounded by dangers. Anxiety is the body's alarm system that sends adrenaline around the body and gives people superhero-like boosts to allow them to run away from dangers. It's known as the FIGHT, FLIGHT (avoiding or running away) or FREEZE response. When children get the FLIGHT or FREEZE response they may find themselves staying away from activities and people. The longer they stay away, the harder it is to go back.

## What you might see in your child

Your child might display or experience different behaviours, such as:

Feelings: frightened, worried, angry, nervous, embarrassed or overwhelmed.

Behaviours: avoiding situations, withdrawing from social settings, biting nails, sleeping issues, tearful, struggling to concentrate, hyper-vigilant.

Thoughts: worrying that nobody likes them, 'I can't do it', 'I must do this', catastrophising, negative thinking.

Physical signs: frequent tummy aches, headaches, shaky hands, tense muscles or scratching.

## How you can support your child

1. If your child is very young, regular routines around bedtime and getting ready for school can help with separation anxiety.
2. It helps if you can prepare your child in advance, explain what is going to happen and why - using a calm tone of voice. Pay particular attention to situations your child may find overwhelming such as crowded spaces.
3. Check your child is eating healthy meals regularly to ensure balanced physical and mental energy levels.
4. Ask your child what they are thinking when they feel anxious. It can help to ask your child to draw a picture of him/herself with a thought bubble above his/her head to show this.
5. If your child is over the age of five, it might be helpful to talk about his/her worries to an understanding adult - this could be someone outside the immediate family.
6. Help your child to control breathing when feeling particularly anxious by visualising blowing out a big bubble. The key is to encourage the child to blow out for longer than breathing in.
7. Re-focus the child's attention using music, exercise, creative activities, fidget toys or stress relief aids.

If your child is still giving you cause for concern, you may wish to discuss with your school or your GP.  
Or, visit [www.liverpoolcamhs.com/need-advice](http://www.liverpoolcamhs.com/need-advice)