

# By your side

A support guide for parents and carers who have a young person with feelings of anxiety. We hope that this will enable you to respond effectively to your child's needs.



# Everyone feels anxious sometimes

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**For some people anxious feelings are related to a specific event or situation. For others it may relate to a combination of factors or underlying issues and it may be helpful to address these first.**

**Feelings of anxiety are normal. It is an appropriate response to a stressful or threatening situation.**

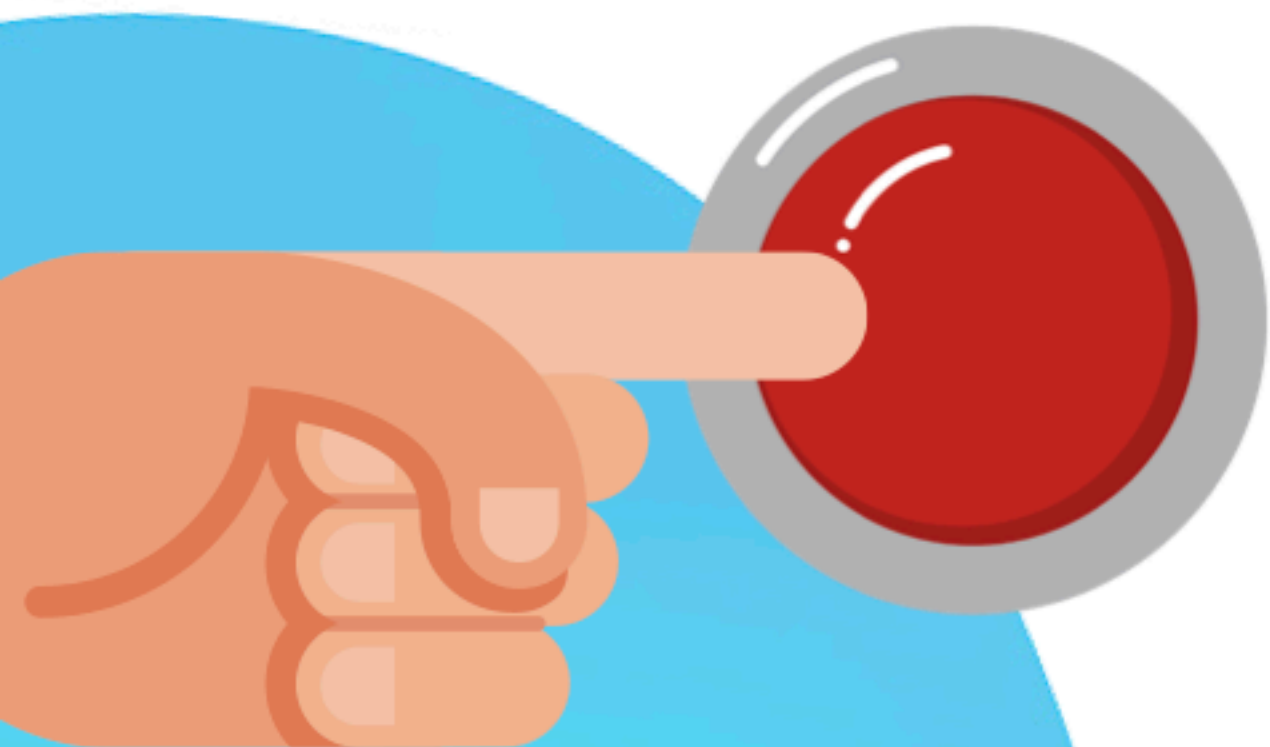
You may have heard this referred to as the fight-or-flight response. It means we are prepared to cope with a threat. Anxiety only becomes a problem when we overestimate the threat or underestimate our ability to cope with the situation. When this happens on a regular basis it can have a negative effect on our health and well-being. Finding an effective coping strategy when feeling anxious is key because we often have limited control over the situations that provoke anxious feelings.

Take comfort from knowing that your teenager's behaviour towards you isn't personal, and that their ability to think rationally, make good judgements and feel empathy is lowered during adolescence. The teenage brain is not fully developed and has lots of plasticity, which means it can adapt, change and respond to its environment.

**Be flexible and creative about how you communicate with your child as they grow older – any conversation is better than no conversation. Continue to let them know you are someone they can trust.**



**Most young people don't find teenage years easy! Cast your mind back – did you? Try to remind yourself though, that their brains are busy undergoing important changes and that they need to break away from the family to grow into an independent adult.**



**Get to know what pushes your buttons and what pushes theirs.**

Try to avoid these 'push button' situations or practise walking away when things get heated if you can.

- Although a parent/carer's natural instinct is to rescue their child, this can be unhelpful. Offering too much reassurance can sometimes reinforce the danger and increase anxious feelings. A more helpful approach is to promote the child's confidence in their ability to cope with a threatening situation. This can empower them and reduce anxiety

- Learning strategies for containing a child's anxiety and modelling and encouraging bravery can help the child cope with anxious feelings
- Older children may find it helps to understand what anxiety is and how it affects their bodies. It will help them understand why they are experiencing symptoms and reassure them that these feelings will not necessarily cause them harm

# Understanding what anxiety is and how it affects our bodies

Not everyone will experience all of these feelings and they usually last no more than 15 minutes. When these feelings are overwhelming it's called a panic attack. This can be very frightening but will not usually cause physical harm.

🔍 For more information go to [MindMate 'feeling really stressed or worried'](#)



# Knowing what triggers the anxious feelings

**Helping your child take time to notice when they feel anxious may help them understand what's causing these feelings. For some people it can be one thing, for instance an upcoming exam. For others it could be more general and harder to pin down.**



School can be a source of anxiety for many young people due to difficulties with the following:

- Relationships with classmates and teachers
- Feeling insecure/self-conscious about appearance/ body image
- Feeling pressure to do well with studies/exams
- Pressure to do well with activities such as sports
- Pressure to have latest gadgets, clothes etc

Social media can add to this pressure. Family relationships and finding your own identity can also be a source of pressure.

It is common for all of us to feel anxious at times. For some young people this can be affected by other factors such as:

- Difficulties at home
- Health worries
- Disability
- Being a perfectionist
- Lack of confidence
- Low self-esteem
- Identity/Gender issues
- Financial problems

## **#Coronxiety**

Anxiety UK have developed a range of information, resources and support for helping you and your child understand how to deal with anxiety Coronavirus (COVID-19) has created and the impact it is having on our lives.

# How can parents/carers help?

**Finding a way to help your child cope with anxious feelings is the key to beating anxiety.**

**Over the following pages there are some suggestions to help them overcome anxiety which you can encourage them to try.**

## Helpful strategies

- Role model brave, non-anxious behaviour
- Reward brave, non-anxious behaviour
- Stop your child avoiding the anxiety-provoking situation
- Communicate your empathy
- Prompt your child to cope constructively



## Unhelpful strategies

- Rewarding or indulging displays of anxious behaviour
- Offering excessive reassurance
- Being too directive
- Allowing or encouraging avoidance of the anxiety provoking situation
- Being impatient with your child




# How to be supportive

- 1 Create a space for conversations**
- 2 Demonstrate calm** – Try to model a calm and measured response. We know that children are good at noticing when others around them are anxious and will watch the behaviour of others to work out whether they too should feel anxious themselves. Even if you're feeling anxious on the inside, you can help the young person by remaining calm on the outside. This will help to reassure them that things might be difficult but they are manageable
- 3 Empathise and validate** – We often want to reassure children, and find solutions to make them feel better, but first, spend time listening to young people, ask them questions, and show an interest in viewing things from their perspective
- 4 Introduce alternative perspectives and ways of thinking**
- 5 Reduce environmental stresses**
- 6 Problem solving and coping** – Focus on emphasising confidence in the young person's ability to cope and engage them to think about different strategies
- 7 Check in and monitor progress**



# Help your child develop coping strategies

There is no one way of managing anxious feelings. Different approaches work for different people at different times. Your child may find that certain things help to distract them or to help them feel calmer.

 **MindMate have some 'tips for de-stressing'** this includes [guided recordings for relaxation](#), which you could try together.



## Promote Self-Care

'Self-care techniques and general lifestyle changes can help manage the symptoms of many mental health problems. They may also help prevent some problems from developing or getting worse.'

- Reading
- Writing things down
- Dancing
- Exercise
- Sleep
- Seeing family
- Online support
- Eating healthy foods
- Crafting
- A warm bath
- Baking
- Getting a job
- Singing
- Talking to friends
- Spending time with animals
- Faith...





# Help your child get the right support

MindMate has up to date accurate information about the support services for young people in Leeds and how to access them.



## Recommended reading and useful resources

- Rapee, R. Helping Your Anxious Child: A step by step guide for parents. ISBN 13:978-1-57224-575-4. Available to borrow at Leeds Libraries
- The MindMate website includes pages for young people on Coping with Common Issues and pages for parents and carers
- Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families (2020) 7 ways to support children and young people who are worried
- The 0-19 Public Health Integrated Nursing Service (PHINS) offers a range of services and welcome enquires from children, young people, parents/ carers and professionals. Please contact the 0-19 PHINS of Access by calling 0113 843 5683
- YoungMinds parent helpline gives free confidential advice via phone, email or webchat

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