

EXPLORING CHILDREN'S ANXIETY

There are many things that can play a role in the development of problematic anxiety in childhood

- Temperament
- Genetics
- Traumatic life events
- Development challenges
- Learned
- Might co-occur with other conditions

Hurried children are often stressed.

Modern life is really putting pressure, usually invisible, on our children – especially sensitive children. Children's brains are immature and unable to cope with the stressors of modern adult living and often misinterpret adult challenges as being about them or their fault. **Consistent stress becomes distress and the brain is seriously affected. Irrational behaviour, unstable emotions, sleeplessness and defiance are potential signs that a child is stressed, and struggling.**

Dr Stuart Shanker (*Self-Reg*, 2016) believes that kids vary how much "gas" or energy they have in coping with life. If a child is struggling with stress, abuse or feeling disconnected they will have less energy to learn, to think and to be happy.

According to Shanker's six levels of energy, he says kids need to be at level four to be able to play, to concentrate and to learn.

1. Asleep
2. Drowsy
3. Hypo alert
- 4. Calm, focused and alert**
5. Hyper alert
6. Flooded

What helps build self-regulation?

- Music
- Drama
- Art
- Reading
- Nature
- Quiet time
- Kindness & safe touch
- Deep, loving relationships

What doesn't?

- Too much TV/screen time
- Video games
- Too much stress & pressure
- Poor food
- Not enough human connection
- Stress and threat
- Not enough sleep

Most common mistakes

1. Excessively reassuring your child
2. Being too involved and directive
3. Allowing avoidance
4. Becoming impatient with your child

Symptoms of anxiety

- Complaints of stomach aches or headaches
- Sleep problems or difficulty concentrating
- Behavioural changes such as moodiness, a short temper or clinginess
- Development of a nervous habit, such as nail biting
- Refusal to go to school or getting into trouble at school
- Avoidance behaviours
- Arousal: heart rate, breathing, shaky and dizzy
- Fatigue and exhaustion

Frequently overlooked symptoms

- Angry outbursts
- Oppositional and refusal behaviours
- Temper tantrums
- Aggression
- Attention seeking behaviours
- Hyperactivity and difficulty sitting still
- Silliness
- Concentration problems
- Scholastic underachievement or excessive resistance to doing work
- Frequent visits to school nurse
- High number of missed school days
- Difficulties with social or peer group.
- Perfectionism

— Dr Lyn Miller

What are they saying?

- "What's wrong with me?", "I'm tired", "My tummy hurts", "I have a headache.", "Can you turn on the hallway light?", "I want to go home", "Don't leave me".
Check out the wonderful blog on [TheMighty.com](https://www.themighty.com), which has some great examples of [14 Phrases Kids Said That Were Code Words for "I'm Anxious"](#)

Helping at Home

- Talk about it- *normalise* it, tell them about your experience and what you have done to face your own worries, fears and anxiety...
- Teach children everyone experience anxious feelings to some degree
- Teach children that anxiety won't hurt them and doesn't last
- Promise you will join forces with them to find solutions together

Supportive Steps

- Listen
- Explore and clarify the problem(s)
- Acknowledge and validate feelings
- Explore possible solutions
- Empower your child to decide on the solution they want to use
- Practise
- "Let's pretend"...

So often anxiety can look like aggression...
please see [this article](#) from Karen Young at Hey Sigmund for more on that.

"So many grown ups can't manage stress well because no-one helped them enough with stress and distress in childhood, they never set up effective stress regulating systems in the brains."

– Margot Sunderland, *The Science of Parenting* (2006).



***"Happy, calm children learn best."* — Daniel Goleman**

Benefits of Silence and Stillness

1. Opens mind to creativity and better problem-solving
2. Soothes the nervous system
3. Builds emotional intelligence and competency
4. Improves energetic fields both individually and group
5. Nurtures the inner world and the human spirit
6. Builds resilience skills for life
7. Improves ability and capacity to think
8. Lessens fear – imagined or real
9. Creates opportunity to "be" rather than "do"
10. Helps sensory sensitive students to learn
11. Allows auditory processors a chance to listen to their inner voices
12. Allows reflection time – deeper thoughts have time to surface

Calming overloaded nervous systems in homes, centres & classrooms

- Calm adults
- Routines and habits
- Silent sound signals
- Movement & relaxation
- Calming music
- Mindfulness
- Low vocal tones
- Absorbed play
- Quiet corner
- Thinking time
- Regular quiet times
- creative visualisation – calming audios
- Laughter and lightness
- Nature time
- Breathing deeply
- Create safe enjoyable environment with safe people
- Quiet moments/quiet time
- Techniques – cook's hook up,
- Bush flower essences/Bach flower remedies
- Aromatherapy
- Prayer
- Ceremony
- Tai Chi
- Yoga

“The body of a child will not grow if it is not fed; the mind will not flourish unless it is stimulated and guided. And the spirit will suffer if it is not nurtured.”

– Rachael Kessler, *The Soul of Education* (2000).

Creative visualisation audio tracks

Mindfulness, meditation and creative visualisation are useful practices, not just for helping us relax, and to improve sleep – also for boosting our memory, empathy, self-esteem, awareness. A wide range of audio tracks for children and teens is available at maggiedent.com, including:

Accepting Myself

Beach Bliss

Calming the Angry Ant

Dare to Dream

Flight Fantasy

I Am a Good Friend

Moonlight Magic

My Best Report Ever

The Silent Sound Relaxation

The Sky Blue Relaxation

Soothing the Frightened Butterflies
(specifically for anxious kids)

The Magic Yellow Cloud (for grief & loss)

Safe 'N Sound (free download)

Sleepytime (free download)

Moonlight Relaxation for Mums.

You can also save and have access to a range of audio resources by buying Maggie's audio tracks as [bundles](#) or get all 26 tracks at a big discount with [The Complete Maggie Dent Audio Collection](#). Great for homes, centres or classrooms.

Smiling Mind (smilingmind.com.au) is a free web and App-based program that brings modern meditation to young people, tailored to suit various age groups (it's got some great stuff for parents too).

Other resources that may help...

Best books for children

“Hey Warrior” by Karen Young,

“How Big are Your Worries Little Bear?” by Jayneen Sanders

[“I Can See My Feelings”](#) by Kaylene Henderson

Also check out this comprehensive list from our website of the [best books and resources for supporting kids with anxiety](#)

Online expertise & support

- Karen Young, [Hey Sigmund](#)
- [Mona Delahooke, PhD](#)
- [Dr Vanessa Lapointe](#)
- Natasha Daniels, [Anxious Toddlers to Teens](#)
- [Parent TV](#) featuring a host of experts in one spot (think “Netflix for parent”)
- [The BRAVE Self-Help Program](#) (from UQ) for child & adolescent anxiety –
- [The Centre for Clinical Interventions](#)
- Dr Kaylene Henderson’s [A Dose of Bravery advice pack](#)
- [worrywisekids.org](#)
- Maggie interviews several of these experts & provides lots of other information & exercises in her [Calming Our Children & Calming Our Homes](#) online course.

Some helpful viewing.... Maggie Soothers

Maggie created a series of 17 short videos during the COVID-19 pandemic, to support children and their parents during the disruption of isolation and to navigate the fear and anxiety that the coronavirus crisis has brought into many homes. Here’s a link to the first video to give you an idea...

[**View the complete Maggie Soothers playlist.**](#)



Some helpful listening... The ABC Parental As Anything Podcast



Maggie hosts the ABC podcast, Parental As Anything and in the course of two series she has spoken to many of her favourite experts from around the world about a range of topics that will support parents – from [helping anxious children](#), to [handling meltdowns \(including our own\)](#), to [discipline without damage](#) and so much more. Subscribe via the ABC Listen app, Apple podcasts or most other places you get your podcasts.

[**Check out all the episodes of Parental As Anything.**](#)