



Helping Anxious Children with Mindfulness

Anxiety has roots in biological, family, and environmental factors and is often about 1) fear, 2) uncertainty about the future, and/or 3) lack of control. Mindfulness—which is about paying attention, on purpose in the present moment without judgement—helps us stop anxiety in the moment and reduce how often we feel anxious in general.

Addressing Anxiety Caused by Fear

- Use reason to bring fear back into proportion and explain why imagined outcomes are unlikely, potentially using facts and figures to support
- Use positive self-talk to stay in reality
- Role-play to process scary situations, using puppets, stuffed animals, dolls, etc.
- Slowly get used to triggering situation/object/place, possibly with help from a therapist
- Use breath to relax brain and body

Addressing Anxiety Caused by Uncertainty of the Future

- Validate concerns, especially warranted ones about climate change and social inequities
- Identify actions to take to affect change when reasonable
- Use mindfulness tools like breath work, yoga, and meditation to stay in present moment
- Introduce a variety of tools to process these emotions (art, journaling, dance, etc.)
- Have predictable routines

Addressing Anxiety Caused by Lack of Control

- Help identify bodily sensations, emotional responses, and thought patterns that accompany this feeling
- Find a trusted adult or peer for child to talk to about this feeling
- Provide opportunities for choice, limiting number of options
- Send motivating messages to increase confidence
- Have predictable routines

Biological Factors:

What has been a comfort to family members who have experienced anxiety?

Family Factors:

What messages are kids getting about how family members respond to fear and release stress?

Environmental Factors:

What can you change about where you are, who you are with, what's happening, and how you are acting?

Using Mindfulness to Address Anxiety

- *Breath work* helps the brain, body, and emotions come back to the present moment during times of high anxiety.
 - [Flower breath](#) or [bubble breath](#) can be effective for young children.
 - Older children and parents may enjoy [square breathing](#).
 - Have anxious children practice breath work in times of calm, too, to get used to the practice and to lower general anxiety levels.
- *Yoga* helps our bodies release cortisol, completing the stress response cycle and lowering our anxiety.
 - Fast-paced flow yoga can help release energy for anxious kids with hyperactivity or energize lethargic children.
 - Trauma-informed and restorative yoga were designed to help the body come back to a state of balance after prolonged stress.
- *Meditation, visualization, and self-talk* can help build confidence in anxious children.
 - Have your child design their “happy place” in their imagination, using their 5 senses, and ask them to come back to this place in times of high anxiety.
 - Use a superhero pose with phrases like “I am strong” or “I am powerful.”

