

HOW PLAY THERAPY HELPS ANXIETY AND BEHAVIOR

Practical Things Parents Can Do to Help Their Children

Helping the Child Who Suffers with Anxiety:

1. **Be calm:** When you are calm it helps your child to relax. If you are anxious your child will pick up on your anxiety and it will reinforce their fear/worry.
2. **Structure your Child:** When you have an idea of what is going to take place let your child know. Many times, children can adjust if they are made aware or have some expectation of what is going to take place.
3. **Learn the coping skills that your child is being taught in counseling and help them practice the skill(s).** By learning the coping skills your child is being taught will enable you to help your child by practicing the skills outside of their counseling session. When a person practices and utilizes the coping skills they learn in counseling outside of session they have better results with decreasing the anxiety when situations that cause anxiety come about.
4. **Do not help your child avoid things because of their anxiety:** Avoiding things reinforces the anxiety. It may help in the short term, but the long-term effects will not pay off, the child will continue to be anxious. Remember anxiety is an avoidance disorder so help your child by gently encouraging them to approach the situation(s) that causes them to fear. Take small steps to help them become overcomers.
5. **Do not dismiss your child's feelings but validate his/her feelings.** You may not agree with how your child is feeling but just by validating his or her feelings will help them feel that you understand. We all want our feelings to be validated, and children are no different. When validating your child's feelings be very sure to encourage your child that they can face the fear and overcome it.

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- 6. Help your child develop an action plan to overcome their fear and help him or her practice their plan.** By helping your child develop a plan of action and practice it will help him or her feel invested and build confidence to overcome their fear. It communicates to your child that you are present with them and that you want to help them. It is also teaching him or her how to work through a situation by utilizing problem solving skills.

- 7. Educate yourself on anxiety and seek professional help when needed.** Learn about the signs and symptoms of anxiety and talk with a licensed professional if your child is showing signs symptoms of anxiety. Remember everyone experiences some anxiety. Seeking professional help is necessary when the anxiety is controlling your child's life.

- 8. Be sure to keep a record of the sign and symptoms:** If your child is suffering with anxiety be sure to write down if possible, the signs and symptom. How often these signs and symptoms are taking place. How long have the signs and symptoms been happening. Where the signs and symptoms are taking place. Take this with you when you take your child to seek professional help or to his or her ongoing clinician.

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Helping the Child Who Has Behavioral Problems

- 1. Give clear expectations:** When you are clear with your expectations it helps your child know what you are expecting and they are able to follow through. Be sure to spell out in simple terms your expectations. Example: Don't say clean your room. Say I need you to pick up your toys right now and put them in the toy box. Remember your cleaning is not going to look like your child's cleaning. For younger children model for them what you want them to do.
- 2. Provide Structure for your child:** Provide routine for your child. When a child is provided a routine it helps your child develop organizational skills. You do not want to be rigid in the routine. You will want to help your child adjust to any changes as they arise.
- 3. Be Prepared:** Many times children have temper tantrums or "Melt Downs" when they are hungry, tired, not feeling well or bored. Be sure when going places to pack a bag that has the following items: something to eat, something to drink, coloring book and crayons or something to write on and something to write with, and 2-3 small handheld toys. Be sure to bring a light jacket or sweater just in case the building is called. For infant and toddlers be sure to have a change of clothes.
- 4. Keep calm, do not yell:** When you use a calm firm voice your child is more likely to listen to you. When you yell, children will tune you out or yell and scream along with you.
- 5. Give instructions face to face and clarify:** When giving instructions or directions to your child be sure to talk with them face to face. Be sure to have their full attention. Do not yell across the room or when they are doing something. Have your child stop what they are doing. Give them the directions and have them state in their own words what it is being asked.

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- 6. Model the behavior you want to see:** If I do not want my child yelling and screaming then I do not want to yell and scream. If I do not want my child breaking things or destroying things then I do not need to break or destroy things. Children do more of what you do than what you say. Your words and actions should line up. Example: If you become angry about something say I feel angry, I'm going to take a time out to calm down. And then go sit down at a table or something to calm down.
- 7. Provide choices:** When children are given a choice they are more likely to cooperate because it helps them feel that they are in control. It also helps them take responsibility for their choices. Example: Would you like an apple or an orange? Do you want to pick up your toys off the floor first or do you want to make up your bed first?
- 8. Be consistent:** If you tell your child you are going to do something be sure to follow through with it. Do not make promises that you do not intend to keep. Do not make threats. When you make promises and do not keep them or make threats children will not trust you. This will breed anger, disappointment and resentment and they will not listen to you and do what you ask them to do.