



Tips for parents to relieve anxiety:

For some kids, school can be a tense and fearsome place. Children with special needs in particular may have problems understanding what is expected of them; may face painful social exclusion; and may find the work confusing and stressful. As a parent, your instinct is to charge in on a white horse and slay those dragons. But often, a listening ear, a sympathetic word and a reassuring hug will be a bigger help.

Difficulty: Hard

Time Required: As much as your child needs

Here's How:

1. **Acknowledge the problem.** Does hearing, "Don't worry!" help when you're anxious about something? It probably doesn't comfort your child much, either. The most important thing you can do for a child experiencing school anxiety is to acknowledge that her fears are real *to her*. If nothing else, you'll ensure that she won't be afraid to talk to you about them.
2. **Ask, "What three things are you most worried about?"** Making your request specific can help your child start to sort through a bewildering array of fears and feelings. If he's unable to name the things that are *most* worrisome, have him tell you any three things, or the most recent three things.
3. **Ask, "What three things are you most excited about?"** Most kids can think of *something* good, even if it's just going home at the end of the day. But chances are your child does have things she really enjoys about school that just get drowned out by all the scary stuff. Bring those good things out into the light.
4. **Do some role-playing.** Once you have some concrete examples of anxiety-provoking events, help your child figure out an alternate way to deal with them. Discuss possible scenarios and play the part of your child in some role-playing exercises, letting him play the part of the demanding teacher or bullying classmate. Model appropriate and realistic responses and coping techniques for your child.
5. **Keep the lines of communication open.** Let your child know that she can always talk to you, no matter what. It's not always necessary even to have solutions to her problems. Sometimes just talking about things out loud with a trusted adult makes them seem less threatening. And if the situation does become overwhelming for your child, you want to be the first to know about it.
6. **Understand the value of tears.** Crying can be a great stress reliever. It flushes out bad feelings and eases tension. It's hard to see your child crying, and your first instinct may be to help him stop as soon as possible. But after the tears have all come out, your child may be in a particularly open and receptive mood for talking and sharing. Provide a soothing and sympathetic presence, but let the crying run its course.

7. **Resist the urge to fix everything.** There are some instances in which parents do have to take action. If your child is in a class that's too challenging, or is having trouble because an IEP isn't being followed, there are steps you can take. If a teacher or a classmate is truly harassing your child, you will want to follow up with that. But you'll also want to teach her that some things in life just have to be dealt with, even though they stink. Fix only what's really badly broken.

8. **Know when to get help.** Most children experience school anxiety to some extent, and some feel it more deeply and disruptively. When does it become a big enough problem to require professional help? Some signs to look for are major changes in friendships, style of clothing, music preferences, sleeping and eating habits, attitude and behavior. If you've established a good rapport with your child and he suddenly doesn't want to talk, that's a sign of trouble as well.

IMPORTANT TIPS:

1. Set a regular time and place for talking with your child, whether in the car, on a walk, during mealtimes, or just before bed. Some kids will feel most comfortable in a cozy private space with your undivided attention, but others might welcome some sort of distraction to cut the intensity of sharing their feelings.

2. Be aware that all kids feel anxiety about school, even the ones who seem successful and carefree. Knowing this won't lessen your child's anxiety, but it may lessen yours.

3. ["Freeing Your Child from Anxiety"](#) is a good book for learning more about anxiety and how to relieve it. And to remind yourself how it felt to be in school, read ["The Pressured Child: Helping Your Child Find Success in School and Life."](#)

4. No time to talk? Try one of these [ten chances to chat](#). Then find [more ways to make this the best school year ever](#).

5. If school is truly a toxic environment for your child, you may have to look at other options. Read [one mother's story](#) on the Parenting Special Needs Forum.

What You Need:

- A shoulder to cry on

- A listening ear

- Plenty of patience

- Unlimited understanding

- An unwillingness to judge