

Tips for Addressing Children's Stress and Worries

1. Encourage Open Communication

If you start to notice that your child is worried or stressed, it's time to model open communication. Some of the signs that you might see if your child is worried or stressed are: shutting down/avoidance behaviors, emergence/increase in anger/aggression, and an emergence/increase in defiant behaviors. They can also display an increase/emergence of depressive symptoms (withdrawal, irritability), as well as fears or worries (not sleeping in their own room all of a sudden, fear of the weather or being left alone).

Find a quiet, private place. Often times, especially in larger families, it can be difficult for children to have a lot of 1:1 time with Mom or Dad. Although it can be difficult, try and have these conversations privately, and without distractions (such as being in the car, texting, watching tv, etc). Show your child that you are genuinely interested in what they have to say. Sometimes, children can feel intimidated by being around other siblings and may not share as much in a more public place. This works best with younger children.

- **Older Children.** Alternatively, for teens, it can actually be easier to talk when there is some type of distraction involved. It can be difficult and intimidating for teens to talk one on one and face to face in a quiet space. Sometimes the best places to talk can be the car, walking around a crowded place (store, outdoor market), or while watching a movie together.
- **Ask what's bothering them.** Encourage your child to speak up and express themselves freely. Tell your child that it is normal to have fears and worries, and that you are always there to help and support them.
- **Label and Validate.**
Just like when you were teaching your toddler to talk, labeling every single thing you passed by (ball, truck, and car), the same has to be done to teach feelings language. Although most kids can tell you some main feelings-happy, mad, sad, frustrated- I often find that kids mislabel how they are actually feeling. It's common to hear your child say that he or she is mad, when really they are feeling very sad, and don't know how to express it safely.

2. When your child expresses a worry that he/she asks over and over again try this:

- Acknowledge the worry, and reassure-1 time
- Any subsequent mention of the same worry should be acknowledged, however, instead of reassuring again (which only feeds the worry) say to your child "I understand you're still worried about that, however we've already talked about it. Do you remember what we talked about?" Give your child the opportunity to recite the answer back to you.
- By not constantly reassuring your child by alleviating the same worry over and over again he/she will learn to be able to cope with the uncomfortableness that this worry may be causing them on their own, as well as feel more in control.

Coping Skills:

"Muscle Flex" (PMR)

"Bubble Breathing"

"4 senses" (Mindfulness)

"I Am Statements" (Cognitive Restructuring)

Sensory Integration

Structure and Predictability:

- Morning and Bedtime Routines
- Checklists, visual aids
- Time checks (if necessary)
- Calendars

Sensory Integration:

I LOVE sensory integration for children! These are some of the ones I typically recommend:

- Weighted Modalities (blanket, heated stuffed animals, backpacks)
- Deep pressure (wrapping, burrito rolling, weighted vests, compression shirts)
- Sensory seat
- Body Sock
- Sensory corner/calming corner
- Frozen oranges
- Fidgets/hand manipulatives
- Velcro tabs
- Resistance bands

Things to Keep in Mind:

- Sensory overload
- Screen/video game withdrawal
- Attention seeking behaviors
- Appropriate/natural consequences for behaviors