

### **Worries and Anxieties: Helping Children to Cope**

Children, like adults, have all sorts of strong feelings about what is happening to them. At times, the world can seem frightening or uncertain, which may create fearfulness, worry or anxiety.

#### **Different Types of Anxiety**

##### **Fears and Phobias**

Very young children often develop fears and phobias. These can be triggered by changes (going to childcare, separating from a parent), or particular things (spiders, snakes, monsters etc). Fears like these are common but with encouragement and support most children learn to overcome their anxiety.

##### **General Anxiety**

Some youngsters feel anxious most of the time for no apparent reason – it may be their temperament or may be a pattern of behaviour that is shared by other members of the family.

##### **School-Related Anxiety**

School refusal can be caused by anxiety – separating from parents, fear of bullying, problems with friendships, trouble with school work or teachers are worth investigating

##### **Home Related Anxiety**

Family problems (money issues, squabbling, separation/divorce), death of a family member or friend, harsh discipline or a traumatic experience eg burglary can be a cause of anxiety (as well as depression).

#### **What are the Signs**

- Feeling sick – stomach aches, headaches. Not being able to stomach food.
- Feeling tense, fidgety, needing to go to the toilet often
- Feeling fearful or panicky, breathless, sweaty
- Being irritable, tearful, clingy or having sleeping difficulties
- Withdrawing from social contact

**Anxiety can limit a person's experiences in life. It can contribute to lack of confidence, loneliness, health problems and learning difficulties. The emotional effects if not remedied can be long lasting.**

#### **What to do**

- Talk to your child – show your child that you care and want to understand the reasons for their anxiety
- Give comfort, reassurance and practical help with how to cope eg. encourage helpful thoughts rather than focussing on unhelpful thoughts. (There are children's books to help children cope with divorce, death, anxieties.
- Prepare your child for changes. If possible give sufficient warning – talk to them about what might happen and why, as well as ways to manage the changes
- For children with school/ separation anxiety, regular routines and consistency around sleep, and getting ready for school, having breakfast etc will generally improve the outcome
- Be aware of school or family situations that may be creating worries for your child
- Be aware of your own anxiety and protect your child from taking on your woes
- Use relaxation techniques eg controlling your breathing, listening to peaceful music, doing something you enjoy
- Encourage daily exercise, healthy eating, drinking plenty of water, and most importantly getting enough sleep – children need at least 8 to 9 hours – Healthy body helps keep us on top of difficult situations

If your child is so anxious that they can't cope, more **specialist help** may be needed. Have a chat with your guidance officer, and/ or see your doctor.