



Parent Pages



RESOURCES FOR CHRISTIAN PARENTS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

UPON THIS ROCK:

Attacking the Anxiety Monster

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Believe it or not, anxiety can be a good thing. Anxiety creates a heightened awareness that helps us notice details in the environment. We need a small amount of anxiety to stay alert, do our best under pressure and stay safe.

Anxiety becomes a problem when it takes over the brain and keeps children from living a happy, healthy life. Too much anxiety, especially anxiety that continues over a long period of time, can interfere with learning.

Nearly all children experience anxiety at some point. Learning how to cope with anxious situations is an important life skill. In addition to teaching your child coping skills, it is also important to investigate the situation surrounding the anxiety. When children indicate they do not want to do something, they are communicating what for them is a real concern. It is important to know what is behind the words of worry.

Is your child not ready for the activity? Some children want to watch before they try new things. Other children need more time before launching into something new.

Does your child need some reassurance? If you feel your child is ready for the activity, then confidently assure him that things will be OK and that you (or a trusted adult) will be available to help. The confidence of children greatly improves when something difficult is successfully accomplished.

Is there something else going on? If a child suddenly is anxious about a previously enjoyed activity, then a good conversation is in order. Your child might not realize that an incident with another child, some confusion with an adult or a startling event is the real cause for worry.

Children cannot always process this information. On occasion, their brains will simply cause them to fear the entire situation. Talking about it can help them sort through feelings. It is also good for children to learn they can ask a trusted adult for help.

Is your child refusing to obey? We often assume that anxiety will show itself in timid behaviors, but sometimes



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anxiety shows in defiance or disobedience. It is good to explore this possibility, especially if the behavior is unusual for your child.

Are typical consequences ineffective in stopping an annoying behavior? Parents learn quickly which discipline techniques work for each child. If you find yourself increasing a threatened punishment or promised reward because the first round did not work, you may want to consider a different possibility. Children who act in response to anxiety tend to be resistant to punishment or reward. Their anxiety is a stronger motivator.

Is your child tired? Being physically tired or mentally overstimulated will cause many children to become anxious. For them, it is the best way to give the message that they have had enough.

Anxiety in children and adolescents seems to be on the increase. It was previously thought that children did not typically suffer from anxiety, so a better understanding of anxiety in children may account for some of the increase. It may also be due to environment or lifestyle habits.

Children spend less time playing outside and more time engaged in passive entertainment. Watching television and playing apps on tablets or phones represent passive entertainment, which lulls children into a false sense of calm. When playing with others, children try new things and frequently experience small bouts of anxiety. They learn to cope with this anxiety and how to read it for important information.

Faith development promotes resilience in children. One reason for this is that our faith reminds us that God is in control of our lives, our situation and our anxiety. Regular family devotions also offer times when you can share your experiences and how God helped you to cope. Make a habit of reciting not only the Lord's Prayer, but prayers from the Small Catechism as well, providing a daily reminder of God's love and care.

Keep in mind that the suggestions in this article do not address severe anxiety that can result in panic attacks. Children with intense anxiety issues will benefit from the expertise of a pediatrician and a counselor. Do not hesitate to seek professional help for your child. God blesses us with such tools, and this kind of care will help your child to be healthier and happier. It is also important to resist the temptation to blame yourself as a parent. While counseling should give your family better ways of preventing anxiety, there is no reason to think your parenting style or life circumstances are to blame. Anxiety happens, and God provides insight and care.

For Further Study

This site from British Columbia has much to offer regarding anxiety in children. Look under "resources" for a description of the MindShift app: anxietybc.com/parenting/parent-child.

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