Try to keep the anticipatory period <u>short.</u>

When we're afraid of something, the hardest time is really *before* we do it, so it is important to try to eliminate or reduce the anticipatory period.

For example, if a child is nervous about going to a doctor's appointment, you don't want to launch into a discussion about it two hours   before you go; that's likely to get your child more keyed up. So just try to shorten that period to a minimum.

Model <u>healthy</u> ways of handling anxiety.

There are multiple ways you can help kids handle anxiety by letting them see how you cope with anxiety yourself.

Kids are perceptive, and they're going to pick up on how your handle stress and anxiety.

This isn't about pretending you don't have stress, worries or your own anxiety: let kids hear or see you managing it calmly, tolerating it, and feeling good about getting through it.

A bit about Beam...

Beam is open up to 5 times a week across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin.

We are a emotional wellbeing drop-in for children and young people under 25, their parents, carers and professionals. We aim to give practical advice, support and signposting relating to emotional wellbeing.

We also run regular workshops for young people relating to common mental health conditions. These take place in our Wellington & Shrewsbury venues.

Ask a staff member for our latest workshop calendar.

Alternatively, email AskBeam@childrenssociety.org.uk and ask to be added to our mailing list to get regular updates about what we do!

The Children's Society

No child should feel alone

be **kind** to your **mind**
AskBeam@childrenssociety.org.uk

Beam

Shropshire Telford and Wrekin

SUPPORTING ANXIETY IN CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE:
a guide for parents & carers

Beam does not diagnose specific conditions such as anxiety, but we recognise that some young people show signs of anxious behaviour.

This guide aims to give you some simple, practical tips for supporting your child at times like this.

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is <u>normal</u> and something we all have (& all need)...

Anxiety is one of our internal warning systems that alerts us to danger or other threats and prepares our bodies to fight back or get out of a dangerous situation. This is known as the 'fight, flight, or freeze' response.

A *manageable* amount of anxiety from time to time can be helpful. For example, it can motivate you to prepare for a test, or finish a task at work.

Even happy events like moving to a new home or celebrating an important milestone can bring up anxiety—**all of this is just part of being human**.

Anxiety is a problem when it becomes overwhelming or unmanageable, and comes up unexpectedly.

Respect their feelings without increasing their fear...

No one wants to see their child upset, and this is no different when that child shows signs of anxiety.

It is easy to fall into an unhelpful pattern of trying to protect your child from the thing that is causing the anxiety. This is particularly true when we anticipate a child's fears, and avoid situations as a result.

Don't aim to eliminate anxiety: aim to help manage it...

It is important to resist the temptation to remove the stressors that trigger the anxious behaviour.

Instead, it is important to support them to tolerate their anxiety, and function as well as they can in that situation.

It won't change immediately, but over time the anxiety and anxious behaviour will decrease or fall away.
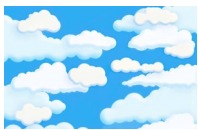
Reassurance-seeking behaviour

Children may seek constant reassurance from their parents about the same situation over and over again. It is usual to want to reassure your child when they appear anxious, but repeated reassurance about an irrational worry can make it worse.

Aim to encourage your child to comfort themselves without relying on your help. This could include:

- positive reframing of whatever is causing the worry
- mindful breathing
- looking at the facts of the situation
- visualising a calming place
- help them be more comfortable with uncertainty

Validating your child's feelings: the Dos and Don'ts

Don't
- tell them their worries and fears aren't real.
- dismiss their feelings as silly.
- just brush them off by saying everything will be ok.

Do
- tell them you can see why they are worried.
- show them that you are confident they will be able to manage how they feel.
- tell them that it won't mean their fear disappears but that it will get smaller over time.

Respect feelings, but don't give power to those feelings.

It's important to understand that validation doesn't always mean agreement.

Listen to their fears and show empathy.

Encourage them to feel that they can face their fear.

I know you are scared. It is ok to be scared. I am here and I will help you get

Don't ask leading questions.

Encourage your child to talk about his feelings by asking **open-ended questions**. An open-ended question is one that cannot be answered with a simple 'Yes' or 'No': it will encourage your child to think about their feelings and answer more honestly.

Leading questions can feed the anxiety more.

instead of …. *Are you worried about your test?*

try saying … *How are you feeling about your test?*

Don't reinforce the child's fears.

What you don't want to do is be saying, with your tone of voice or body language: *"Maybe this is something that you should be afraid of."*

For example, your child has had a negative experience with a dog. Next time she's around a dog, you might be anxious about how she will respond, and you might unintentionally send a message that she *should*, indeed, be worried.

Don't avoid things because they make the child anxious!

Helping children avoid the things they are afraid of will make them feel better in the short term, but it reinforces the anxiety over the long run.

Encourage the child to tolerate their anxiety.

Let your child know that you appreciate the work it takes to tolerate anxiety in order to do what he wants or needs to do. You are encouraging them to engage in life and to let the anxiety take its natural curve.

The anxiety will likely drop over time as your child continues to have contact with the stressor.

It might not drop to zero, it might not drop as quickly as you would like, but that's how we get over our fears.