



# Helpful Tips for Parents: Anxiety & Children

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Adapted from: Your Anxious Child by John Dacey & Lisa Fiore, The Highly Sensitive Child by Elaine Araon

**Anxious children are often hyper aware of subtleties and notice when even the smallest things are not to their liking.**

- Parents should:
  - Believe your child. Just because you don't notice them does not mean the "smallest things" don't exist for your child.
  - Acknowledge their discomfort and let them know how and when it will end
  - Tell your child what they can expect you to do ("I will only re-tie your shoes 2 times").
  - Stick to your limits
  - When possible, put your child in charge of the situation ("what did I say? You tell me how many times we will re-tie your shoes").

**Anxious children are often easily over stimulated and over aroused**

**Anxious children have deep inner reactions that, at times, can appear to be overreactions.**

- Parents should:
  - Attempt to contain your child's emotions until they can do it for themselves.
  - Let your child fully express their emotions while you remain calm and non-defensive. Your attitude should be "tell me more about it...what else...and what else". This full expression will allow both of you to get to real cause of their emotions and the child can feel all that is happening inside without having to endure it alone. You will hold it with them until they learn to hold it themselves.

**Anxious children often appear to lack an awareness of others' feelings.**

- Parents should:
  - Don't take things personally. Your child may seem unaware of how their actions (yelling, accusing, blaming) may affect you.
  - Remember they have not learned to fully recognize or manage their emotions yet.
  - Find "teaching moments". Talk with your child about how others are feeling ("That boy seems sad....I wonder what happened").

**Anxious children show caution before proceeding in new situations.**

- Parents should:
  - See the situation from your child's point of view. You may have been in the situation a dozen times, but they have not. The new situation is less risky for you and you are better able to manage anxiety than your child.
  - Point out what is familiar from past situations the child has already mastered.
  - Always provide a retreat (sitting in the car, talking a walk outside, finding a quiet place to rest).
  - Success is key – point out all they will gain from exploring new things while minimizing the risks.

**Anxious children demonstrate a flight – or fight – response to stressful situations. This fires up when your child perceives a threat – whether the threat is realistic or not**

- Parents should:
  - Remember the flight-or-fight response is a neurological response, not “acting out” or “bad behavior”
  - Work with the child’s therapeutic team to help the child maintain a sense of calm. A calm nervous system, not a highly aroused one, is what they need when dealing with stress

**Anxious children often lack coping skills to manage stressful situations**

- Parents should:
  - Remember your child will often have an alarm reaction. Their reaction is more intense and tiring than yours.
  - Help to find a third alternative to the flight –or –fight response.

**Anxious children often appear over vigilant. They are constantly on the lookout for potential pitfalls. They have an exaggerated sense of present or anticipated stress.**