

So how do you manage an anxious child's behavior?

Reward brave, non-anxious behavior. Every time you see the child doing something brave, make a big fuss. Set up a system of rewards so whenever your child faces a challenging situation they receive a reward.

Ignore behaviors you don't want. When your child engages in anxious behaviors, like having an upset stomach before school, don't acknowledge the behavior, but praise them when the behavior stops. They may move on to a more helpful way of coping.

Prevent Avoidance. Many children run away from anxiety-provoking situations. As a result, they never learn there was nothing to fear in the first place. Encourage them to gradually and slowly face challenging situations when you know they are really capable of being successful in that situation.

Empathize and Understand. Make sure your child knows you understand their anxiety and how difficult facing their fear can be. Provide an example from your own life. They will likely follow your lead as their anxiety coach.

Encourage Constructive Coping. Encourage your child to think of helpful coping options on their own. Doing this instead of telling them how to cope fosters self-esteem and demonstrates that you have faith in their ability to manage their anxiety.

Model Non-Anxious Behavior. Your child watches you face challenging situations. Make sure you are modeling brave coping strategies when you encounter a situation that is scary for you.

The key to helping your child deal with anxiety is strengthening their ability to think, cope and interact in a healthy manner. When responding to your child's behaviors, remember:



Anxiety is a normal feeling many children experience - normalize this experience as much as possible

Participate in this journey with your child every step of the way - children do best when they receive encouragement and coaching in managing their anxiety.

Learning new skills and tackling challenges will be done at the child's pace, break this down into manageable steps for them.

Remember we all feel anxious from time to time. The goal is to help your child cope and master excessive feelings of anxiety. Stick with it! It will take time, but your weeks and months of hard work will pay off for your child and family.

Adapted from Rapee et al. (2000). Helping your anxious child: A step-by-step guide for parents. New Harbinger: Oakland, CA. and Children and Teens (www.adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/children).