

Anxiety in the School: Tips for Teachers

1. Validate the child's feelings and help them to identify it as anxiety.
"You are feeling yucky right now, are you worried about something?"
"It's normal to feel anxious before a test or speaking in front of the class."
2. Do Not reassure an anxious child.
"You'll be fine."
"You always do well on a test."
"You don't have anything to worry about."
"The day will be over before you know it."
3. Help the child to tolerate his/her uncomfortable feelings.
"I know you're feeling pretty bad right now but I wonder if you can sit at your seat while you're feeling bad and I'll check in with you in a few minutes."
"You really miss your mom this morning. It will be hard but I bet you can get started with your work even though you miss her and you might find that working helps those feelings to quiet down a little."
"The storm outside is making you feel very scared. I'm wondering how many of you can work even though you're feeling scared."
4. Be a cheerleader for them as they tolerate their anxious feelings.
"I am so proud of you for finishing your work even though you were feeling anxious!"
"You did a great job of staying in school today even though you missed your mom!"
"I really appreciate how hard you must have worked to not ask me questions all day even though you might have been worried about doing your work correctly."

5. Challenge him/her to go for longer periods of time or to do something that will make them feel worse (after they begin to feel empowered).
"You worked really hard at staying in the class for the last fifteen minutes even though you wanted to go to the nurse's office. Can you work hard for another fifteen minutes?"
"You completed that portion of the test even though you felt anxious. I'm wondering if you can feel anxious and do the next part of the test."
6. Help them to see that when they do something even though they feel anxious, their anxiety eventually quiets down.
7. Reward very anxious children with small tokens, candy, or prizes for completing tasks that make them feel anxious. (Use lots of praise for older children.)

Remember, children will not learn to tolerate anxiety if they do not practice the skill. They need your encouragement to sit with the bad feelings and work anyway. If you reassure them or send them to the nurses office, they will only learn that they can't tolerate these feelings and the anxiety will worsen.

COACHING

1. Do not reassure someone who is anxious. Validate their uncomfortable feelings and help them to tolerate them without solving the problem.
2. Be a cheerleader-convince them that they can tolerate the anxiety feelings without doing anything to feel better. (the anxiety will eventually decrease)
3. Challenge him/her to feel worse (if they can look at a spider, can they also touch the spider?)
4. Help them to change the emotion-anger, frustration, resistance all give anxiety power. Laughter can deflate it!
5. Teach them to rate their anxiety level from 1-10. (10 is a panic attack, and 1 is a breeze). Have them stay with this feeling until their anxiety decreases by 50% then challenge them to feel worse and tolerate it some more.
6. Reward their hard work! (use small gifts for young children and lots of verbal praise for older children, get creative with adults)