

## How OT's help children and young people with Anxiety.

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### How do OT's help a child or young person with Anxiety?

Occupational Therapists are interested in exploring childrens' and young people's capacity to engage in their everyday lives. When children and young people experience anxiety, they find participation in usual activities very difficult. An OT works with children and young people to help them develop the ability to understand the physiological sensation of anxiety, understand and process the triggers for the anxiety and to help develop the ability to self-regulate when overwhelmed. By teaching children and young people strategies to address these challenges across their daily tasks (home, school, sleep, getting organised, socialising), we empower them to become more independent and self-assured.

As OT's we will assess how childrens' and young people's occupations impact on their behaviour and emotional functioning. We look to identify any underlying triggers contributing to the anxiety, the impact socially, emotionally

and cognitively, as well as working with families and support systems to maximise outcomes across functional areas.

#### Key Points:

- Anxiety can effect everyone, but many things can help
- Anxiety can be due to underlying sensory processing difficulties
- OT's are focused on managing anxiety so it doesn't affect functioning (e.g. at school, home or with relationships)
- If you are concerned, OT's are trained to assess and manage these difficulties

### What can you try?

There are many ways to help a child or young person if they have feelings of anxiety. Some helpful hints are over the page if you are worried that your child or young person is experiencing anxiety. If you have ongoing concerns, intervening early and *having an OT assessment* to further understand your worries would be recommended.

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### Helpful Hints:

**Listen:** Make sure you take the time to listen to your child or young person's thoughts and feelings. Simply feeling heard can be very helpful to your child. Writing down worries and helpful/unhelpful thoughts (so they start to be aware of what the thought contents are)

**Normalise:** It is important to let your child or young person know that he or she is not alone. Lots of children and young people have problems with anxiety.

**Educate:** Let your child or young person know that anxiety is normal, harmless and temporary. Let's use a common language that everyone at home can use, such as "how is your engine running"

**Model it:** Model facing fears and provide support and encouragement. Motivate your child or young person through supportive coaching. However, be careful not to push your child or youth too far, too fast. Let your child or young person work at his or her own pace.

**Avoid giving excessive reassurance:** Resist giving excessive reassurance. Instead encourage your child or young person to use his or her coping strategies (for example, challenging unhelpful thoughts).

**Praise:** Don't forget to praise your child or young person for his or her efforts. Remember, facing your fears is not easy!

**Make a routine:** Establish a routine by setting specific times for meals, homework, quiet time and bedtime. Help your child establish a bedtime routine, which may include a bath and reading a story or just time to chat. This can set the stage for helping your child develop better ways to manage anxiety.

**Realistic expectations:** It is important to have expectations for your child and help him or her meet those expectations. However, understand that an anxious child will have some trouble doing things and may need to go at a slower pace. Help your child break down goals into smaller steps that he or she can accomplish. It is important that your child is taking steps forward, even if the steps are small. Try not to push too hard or too fast, but let your child go at his or her pace.

### What should I do if I am worried about this?

We have many ways to support children, young people, adults and families to understand and manage anxiety.

OT's can help with practical strategies to assess and assist children, young people and families experiencing anxiety difficulties and the impact on mental well being and behaviours. If you would like further information, please contact Dr Carina Capra at [carina@thoughtfulhealth.com.au](mailto:carina@thoughtfulhealth.com.au)

or Catherine Daly at [catherine@whataboutplay.com.au](mailto:catherine@whataboutplay.com.au)