

Support Your Child to Overcome Anxiety



A guide for parents

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Introduction

Let's face it. Lots of children, teens and adults experience anxiety on various levels on a daily basis. In my practice I have seen a sharp increase in the amount of requests in the past year for help from parents whose teens and children are experiencing anxiety.

Many children and teens experience a great sense of helplessness when they stand face-to-face with anxiety: They feel like it overcomes them, takes hold of them and withholds them from doing what they really want to: **Living and enjoying their lives to the fullest!**

Perhaps you have tried **everything** to support your child: You encouraged them to stay positive, you helped them make lists of things they're grateful for or perhaps you have tried to encourage them to speak to you. Yet here you are, searching for more advice and tools on supporting your child. Look no further and read along to learn how you can enhance and improve what you have already been doing!



Our experience of anxiety has a direct connection to our thoughts and, in return, our relationship with our thoughts has a direct impact on our experience of anxiety. - Megan Stapelberg

About Megan



As a Counselling Psychologist I am passionate about working with children and teens who are ready to step into their capacity to rise above their experiences of anxiety. I believe that every single one of my clients has the ability to tap into their innate capacity to be resilient and thrive, but I need your support, Mom, Dad, caretaker, to be able to do that.

Collaborating with parents is a key part of my work and I believe the key to successful outcomes in therapy is parents' willingness to be open to **learn and grow alongside their child**, asking themselves: "How are my preconceived ideas or stories that I have learned or tell myself influencing the way I think about anxiety, but also influence the way I support and guide my child?"

If you've tried many things, if you feel helpless, if you feel unsure, if you need inspiration and a new way of thinking about supporting your child's experience of anxiety, look no further. This guide was made for you!

Megan

Contents

Step 1

Change the way YOU think about anxiety!

05

Step 2

Allow your child to experience and share feelings of anxiety.

06

Step 3

Employ mindfulness techniques

07

When is therapy a good idea?

09

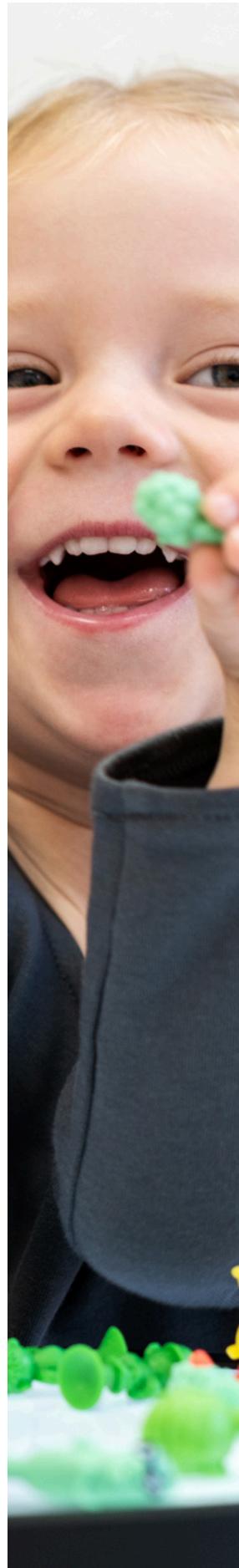
Resources

More helpful resources for you to utilise.

10

About therapy with Megan

11



01 Step 1

Change the way YOU think about anxiety.

Do you view the experience of anxiety as **bad, unnecessary, weak**, or perhaps something else that's 'negative'? Experiencing anxiety isn't necessarily pleasant, but what if we could detach all the **meaning** that we attach to the experience?

Chances are, either by your way of talking about your **own** or your child's experience of anxiety, you have created a certain **narrative** around it. Maybe you have said to your child: "Stop being anxious, it's not helpful." OR "You have so much to be grateful for, that being anxious is unnecessary." OR "I hate it when you make me worry about this."

Children are like sponges. They learn directly from you by observing, listening and taking note of your experience of and thinking about anxiety. Why not make what they observe constructive and helpful?

What if we can take away the labels we so easily place upon feelings of anxiety and rather just seem them as they are: A particular set of feelings that **will pass**. That is all any feeling is, really. An experience that comes, and an experience that goes.



02

Step 2

When our children are permitted to feel their feelings, they are able to release them amazingly quickly. They come out of the pain understanding that pain is just another sensation [...] Once their emotions have been processed, children feel no need to hold onto them long after they have passed in the way adults tend to do. -Dr Shefali Tsabary



Allow your child to experience and share the feelings of anxiety.

Sit with them, allow them to share exactly what they are experiencing **in detail, without interrupting.**

Listen with empathy and curiosity. Respond with some of these prompts:

“can hear you experienced a lot of worries today.”

“How can I help you right now?”

“You seem to have experienced a lot of anxiety today, and that is okay.”

“Where in your body did you/ are you experiencing the worry/ anxiety?”

Note how **none** of these responses dismiss or question your child's experience. All of them make space for and acknowledge your child's experiences.



Step 3

Employ Mindfulness Techniques

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...Like the ebb and flow of the ocean, pain comes in waves - and just as it comes, it also leaves. -Dr Shefali Tsabary

How to use Mindfulness techniques to support your child:

Mindfulness is a wonderful practice that asks of us to befriend the present moment, connect with it and accept it **exactly how it presents itself.**

When children and teens get exposed to mindfulness, it teaches them that:

- They can dial down their thoughts whenever they choose and that their thoughts don't have control over them.
- They can access a sense of calm.
- The present moment is the only moment which we can really take control of.

Here are 2 mindfulness exercises you can do with your child to promote a sense of calm and connectedness:

1. Grounding exercise:

Support your child to return to the present moment and into their bodies by asking them to take deep breaths and slowly name 3 things they can see, hear, smell, taste and feel.

2. Box breathing:

Imagine having a square in front of you. You are going to trace the 4 sides of the square starting bottom left. When you move up the left side, breathe in for 4 seconds, when you move past the top side, hold your breath for 4 seconds, when you move down the right side, breathe out for 4 seconds, when you reach the bottom side, hold your breath again for 4 seconds. Repeat this a few times.

Here's how I use Mindfulness in therapy sessions:

- ✓ Allowing my clients to settle into the present moment, I use mindfulness exercises to help them let go of their day before we start with the session.
- ✓ When a client feels overwhelmed by their emotions, we do a mindfulness exercise to allow the feeling to come and go like a wave.
- ✓ When a client feels unsure about how they would describe their emotions, we do a mindfulness exercise to help them locate it in their bodies. This often helps them explain it in more detail.

3 reasons to seek out personal therapy for your child:

1 When your child's experience of anxiety continues to impact their ability to function on a daily basis (i.e.: go to school, study, do homework, interact with friends etc.)

2 If you've exhausted all your knowledge and resources and feel like you are now playing the role of parent, therapist and soundboard.

3 When your child explicitly asks for help from someone professional (Trust them on this one! If they explicitly ask, it most likely means they're really open and willing to receive more support!)



Resources



Mindfulness exercises for kids

If you have younger children, take a look at the "GoNoodle" YouTube channel for great Mindfulness exercises.

"The Conscious Parent"

Read this revolutionary book by Dr Shefali Tsabary and witness how you can support your child on a whole different level!

Online Mini-Course

Are you open to deepening your knowledge and skills even further when it comes to support your child with their experience of anxiety? Head over to my website to purchase this mini-course for parents.

Journal for teen girls

Being a teen can be very overwhelming & confusing! Journalling can support your teen daughter to make sense of her experiences & emotions in a safe way. This journal can be found on the Mind&Heart Hub on my website.

About therapy with Megan

Having been an expat for 6 years and then returning to my home country, South Africa, I get what it feels like to experience **a lot** of change and uncertainty. My work with expat kids and teens gave me exposure to joining many of my clients on their journey to rise above experiences of anxiety, stress and low mood. I provide online therapy to clients aged 8-18 and can see clients from all over the world!



Are you curious to learn more about what support I can offer your child and/or you? Why not send me an email and we can schedule a free Discovery call!

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Follow me on Instagram to learn more about supporting your expat child or teen.



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