

# Anxiety Coping Skills

## Self-Care to remember:

**Sleep**- Aim for at least 9 hours of sleep each night for your child (some will need up to 12!). Try to have your child go to bed at the same time each night and wake at the same time each morning. Have them sleep in a cool, dark area, and create a bedtime routine for consistency. Ask about our sleep hygiene tips if sleep is a challenge!

**Exercise**- Adding exercise each day will reduce your child's anxiety by helping their body regulate through movement. Bring your child to the playground, go on a walk with them, encourage them to do small exercises throughout the day, have them bounce on a ball, or dance with them to a favorite song.

**Nutrition**- Help your child maintain stable blood sugar throughout the day. Be sure they are eating 3 meals and 2 snacks per day with a mix of protein, healthy fats, vegetables, and fruits. Bring snacks with you when you have a routine change to help them eat when on the move.

## Techniques to try:

### **Grounding with 5,4,3,2,1**

- What are 5 things you can see?
- What are 4 things you can feel?
- What are 3 things you can hear?
- What are 2 things you can smell?
- What is 1 thing you can taste or would like to taste?

**Butterfly Hug**- Cross your arms in front of your chest and place your hands on your biceps. Slowly lift your fingertips off the upper arm and place it back down. Alternate between hands. Continue 10-20 pats then squeeze- like giving yourself a hug.

**Lady bug**- Interlace your fingers, so you come to hold your hands together. Gently and slowly lift your fingertips away from the back of your hand and release back down. Repeat on both sides. Continue for 10-20 times. You should notice your thoughts slowing down or reducing.

**Square Breathing**- Slowly begin to take a deep inhalation and count to 4. Hold your breath for the count of 2, then slowly exhale for 4 seconds and then again hold your breath for a count of 2. Adjust your breath for your body to optimize your experience.

**Soothing Techniques**- Try repetitive motions such as chewing gum, rocking in a chair, or swinging. Listen to music, pet your pets, imagine someone you love giving you a big hug with affirmations of what is good about you, or touch something that is comforting like a piece of fabric or stuffed animal.

**Body Scan**- Scan your body by starting at one end and noticing all major body parts. Search and ask your body, "where do I notice discomfort?", then focus on that area and take 3 deep breaths. Continue this through

the body. Example: start with your feet, then ankles, then shins, quads, hips, low back, stomach, chest, high back, shoulders, neck, arms, hands then up to head. For younger children, just moving each body part helps them begin to connect with each part of their body.

## **Tips for parents:**

**Modeling**- Children learn primarily through observation. They will look to you during times of stress for how to handle difficult situations. Modeling self-care, taking deep breaths, and presence in the moment will help your child learn how to regulate for themselves. Try some of the various techniques we offer for yourself and see how your child follows along.

**Validation**- Naming the child's experience will help them connect their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors together so that they can learn how to communicate what they need to you and others around them. This will also remind them that they are not alone in this experience and that you are with them through the challenge. You don't need to change what is happening, but you can offer verbal and nonverbal support (hugs, sitting with or next to, eye contact, etc).

*Phrases to try:* "It is understandable to be scared when there are new things. Let's try the ladybug hands." "Meeting new people is hard and I'm really proud of you for being here." "It can be scary to sleep in our own room and I know that you can do it. Let's work on feeling better and then I will leave to sleep in my room." "I also get worried when I don't know what is going to happen and I take a deep breath just like this (breathe deep!)."

**Consistency** – While nothing in life can be completely predictable, offering consistency to your child can help reduce anxious feelings. Creating a consistent routine for most days, bedtimes, or difficult situations can be helpful. Consistency is also important in presence. If you tell your child that you are going to do something or be somewhere, following through is important. And if you can't follow through, then apologize to them and rebuild trust by showing consistency in the future.

**Communication** – You child will look to you for communication around what they are experiencing and what to do about it. Talk to your child about the way they are feeling and how they can work through it. You can work with them to find ways that work best for them. In high stress situations, remember that you are the parent and can take control to help them with their anxious symptoms. If you are noticing that they are overwhelmed, don't ask but instead instruct them to practice skills. Any time you can do these skills with your child, they will feel your support.

*Phrases to try:* "I'm noticing that your body is tense. Let's practice butterfly hugs together." "I know that being at the doctor's office can feel scary. Help me find 5 things in this office that you can see."