

Ways to Support Worried Youth

Stephanie Sands, BSc
Stepping Stones to Mental Health

Before We Begin

- This is common
- You are not alone
- Several evidence-based strategies exist
- We hope that this presentation will provide a set of skills and information that provides some useful tools to support you and your family.

Encourage Open Conversation

Creating open communication allows children to feel safe and comfortable discussing their feelings

How can you do this?

- Share what you see
- Ask open-ended questions
- Support your child by saying you believe him/her, and that having these feelings are okay.
- **If you stay calm, it will help your child stay calm, too!**

Highlight the Function

Teach your kids that worrying does, in fact, have a purpose:

- Worrying is a protection mechanism
- Worrying is perfectly normal; everyone experiences it from time to time
- Sometimes our system sets off false alarms
- Ask your child to share their stories and you can share your own stories

Neuroplasticity

- The brain's ability to rewire.
- Thinking is a brain experience.
- Any lingering stressor that we worry over can leave a person with anxiety.

Allow Them to Worry

- Telling your teens not to worry won't prevent them from doing so.
- If your child could simply shove their feelings away, they would.
- Instead:
 - Provide an opportunity for them to express their worries openly in limited and constructive doses.
 - Praise them for their efforts, as facing your fears or talking about your anxiety is not easy.

Get The Conversation Started

- Notice when little conversation openers are offered
- Talk with your youth about what makes them happy or what interests them
- Ask about and acknowledge their feelings
- Ask nonjudgmental questions that require real answers
- REALLY listen to their answers
- Answer questions directly and honestly

Keep The Conversation Going

- Give your undivided attention
- Hold off on providing solutions and advice
- Avoid judgement or minimizing
- Listen more, say less

When Things Become More Challenging

- Always acknowledge their position (even if you disagree!)
- Extend respect
- Try hard to avoid making them defensive
- Don't take it personally
- Try to stay calm
- Reconnect with them and reiterate your love and empathy for them

When Things Become More Challenging

- Keep the conversation safe for everyone.
- Notice and highlight the positive things that they do
- Working through challenges can strengthen relationships
- Seek outside help if youth are reluctant to talk

Limit Stress Where Possible

- Plan some down time
- Look for ways to reduce stress
 - Be mindful of schedules
 - Make time for homework
 - Plan fun activities with family

Build Them Up

- Build special time together into every day
- Boost self-confidence by supporting good decision-making, assertiveness, coping skills, and perseverance
- Help your youth create a wide network of support through friendships, team sports, or other activities
- Use teachable moments as learning opportunities

Be Proactive!

- Get out and get active
- Create distractions or strategies to overcome their anxiety
- Break things to small steps
 - Scaffolding
 - Mini-goals

Tackle Anxiety Together

- Anxious children and teens prefer to have a sense of control in their lives. They feel calmer when:
 - Life is predictable
 - They know what is expected of them
 - They know what the consequences will be
 - Working together

Happy Family, Happy Life

- Negotiate boundaries, rules, and limits with your youth and apply consistently.
- Two ways to help make life more predictable for everyone in the family are:
 - SETTING LIMITS
 - CREATING ROUTINES

*This includes bedtime routines, even for teens!

Make Good Sleep a Priority

- Make it a family priority to get enough sleep. Set clear limits, such as what time lights and devices must be turned off
- Practice good sleep hygiene
 - Relax and unwind
 - Avoid stimulants before bed
 - Create a soothing environment
 - Encourage reading before bed as opposed to tv
 - Set an alarm clock for the morning wake-up time

4 Steps to Creating Routines/Rules

1. Identify the routines/rules
 - For routines:
 - Identify important daily activities
 - Identify key times
 - Make sure it works for whole family
 - For rules:
 - Be as specific as possible
 - Focus on specific behaviours
 - Realistic and developmentally appropriate

Rules = consistently enforced
Routines

4 Steps to Creating Routines/Rules

2. Explain the routines/rules
 - Make sure your teen understands
 - Use reminders
 - Stay consistent

* Be cautious not to assume your youth is being disobedient or malicious when rules are not being followed

Rules = consistently enforced
Routines = flexible

4 Steps to Creating Routines/Rules

- 3. Follow the routines/rules
 - EVERYONE needs to follow them
 - Provide reminders and support when rules are forgotten
 - Try to stick with routine and rules as much as possible

Rules = consistently enforced
Routines = flexible

4 Steps to Creating Routines/Rules

- Use reinforcement
 - Positive and negative consequences
 - Praise/reward for following routine/rules
 - Loss of privilege when routine/rules not followed
 - Be consistent
 - Rules should be the same across caregivers

Rules = consistently enforced
Routines = flexible

Avoid Avoiding Everything that Causes Anxiety

- Avoiding the stimulus all the time can...
 - Reinforce the stimulus
 - Cause bigger problems down the road
 - Prevent your teen from experiencing growth

Face those Fears!

- Some suggestions for giving them independence may be:
 - Giving them responsibilities
 - Support them to problem solve on their own
 - Allow them to do what they can for themselves
 - Give them opportunities to face their fears and reduce their anxiety on its own over time
 - Reward/acknowledge courage

Fixed Mindset vs. Growth Mindset

- The way we praise children can have a profound impact on their mindset. Here are some tips on what to say, and what to avoid when praising your kids.

Say This	Not That
"I love you because I love you!"	"You are so smart!"
"It seems like it's time to go to school today!"	"You did really good on your test!"
"I like watching you do that!"	"You're a natural at that!"
"It really like that man to say for you. I can't help you overcome challenges in your brain anymore!"	"That's right! You did that so quickly and easily, great job!"
"That's so right! You don't understand that job. What manager can you try to understand it better!"	"That's not right. Are you being obedient to God? It seems like you're not listening!"
"That was really hard. Your effort has paid off. Have you ever? It's so good for the kind of challenge!"	"That was really hard. It's so good to see and you don't have to do that again!"
"You're working hard to become a good writer. You should challenge yourself with an advanced class, and learn something you don't know how to do yet."	"You have a natural talent for writing. You should take a creative writing class because you're so good at it!"

Practice Self-Compassion

****Watching your child suffer from anxiety can be painful, frustrating, and confusing. Remember you're not alone, and you're not to blame.**

- Take care of yourself (Self-Care)
- Reduce your stress
- Be mindful of not taking on too much
- Engage in activities you enjoy
- Seek Support
- Talk with friends, meet with a counselor, spiritual advisor, groups, ask for help
- Eat healthy foods and get plenty of rest
- Exercise regularly and listen to your body

Mindfulness

“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”
— Jon Kabat-Zinn

It is hard to be anxious if you are completely focused on the present moment – what you are sensing and doing RIGHT NOW ... and NOW ... and NOW.

Mind Full or Mindful?

- **Observe** – just notice what you are experiencing
- **Describe** – use words to describe what your experience
- **Participate** – get involved in the moment
- **Non-Judgmentally** – see but don’t evaluate
- **One-Mindfully** – focus on one thing at a time
- **Effectively** – focus on what works

Practice Relaxation Exercises

- Deep breathing
 - Effective way of slowing down the body’s natural response to stress. It slows down the heart rate, lowers blood pressure and provides a feeling of being in control.
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
 - This is accomplished by tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups in your body.
- Exercise
- Visualizations
 - This technique uses the imagination to slow down the chatter of the mind and help release negative thoughts and

Don't Worry, Be Happy!

- Laugh
- Stretch
- Listen to music

Community Resources

- **Chestermere Health Centre**
 - Community Addiction & Mental Health Services; Community Health Centre & Laboratory Service
 - (403)943-1500 (via Access Mental Health)
- **Chestermere Community Support Services**
 - Parent Link Centre – Children & Parenting Programs; Community Resource Centre
 - (403)207-7050
 - <https://www.chestermere.ca/738/Support-Services>

Community Resources

- **Calgary Rural Primary Care Network**
 - Health Care & Health Care Education Classes
 - (403)901-0142
 - <http://www.crpcn.ca/>
- **Connected Counselling**
 - Youth, Family & Adult Counselling Services
 - (403)969-1850
- **Access Mental Health**
 - (403)943-1500
 - <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/services/Page11443.aspx>

For Urgent Assistance

- **Distress Centre**

- 24 Hour Support; Crisis Counselling via Phone, Text & Online chat
- (403)266-HELP
- <https://www.distresscentre.com/>

- **Eastside Family Centre (Wood's Homes)**

- One-time sessions available
- 403-299-9696
- <https://www.woodshomes.ca/programs/eastside-family-centre/>
