

# PARENT TOOLBOX

## Tips and Tricks for Helping Anxious Children and Teens

You have two BIG goals:

1. “How do I prepare my child and not spare my child?”
2. “How do I watch the roller coaster without getting on?”

Preparation: Remember that your goal is to help your child develop skills to *overcome* anxiety, not avoid or adjust around anxiety.

Some tips to help your child:

### **Skills Need to be Practiced**

As with any skill, practice leads to improvement. Are you helping your child create time to work on these skills? Are we making time to review and reflect on performance?

### **Modeling Helps**

Do I use these skills myself? Do I show my child how these skills can be effective?

### **Accommodation Should Be Avoided**

Can I identify ways that I spare my child from their anxiety? Can I develop a plan to remove that accommodation?

### **Working harder than my child/teen**

Am I working harder than my child to overcome their anxiety, can I use counterproposals or the language of willingness?

Roller Coaster: Dealing with anxiety can be like riding a roller coaster. As a parent, you want to stay a distance from roller coaster and not get on the ride with your child.

Some tips to help you:

### **Practice Self Care / Fortify the Dam**

Remember to think about your feelings like water up against a dam. Are you using your own calming skills so that your water level is low when you interact with your child? If you are letting yourself step onto the roller coaster while “in the moment,” consider taking a time out and tell your child that you need to use your calming skills on yourself before moving on.

### Remind yourself

Use the image of a roller coaster to remind yourself to watch the roller coaster and not get on it. Sometime that reminder can be enough.

### Child Distress Exposures

You probably have a pattern of getting on the rollercoaster when you see your child in distress. Practice working on your own exposures around distress to help you stay off the rollercoaster. Remember that your child can handle more than you think and letting them work through distress is part of what creates resiliency and anxiety mastery.

## Key Skills to Help with Step “F” in F.A.C.E.

<b>Elicit</b>	Elicit your child’s feelings around this issue <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Repeat this step until you have identified the various types of feelings that come up with this step, especially the anxiety.</li><li>Use your good listening skills, <i>see listener / speaker tool, above.</i></li></ul>
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>I hear you saying that...what feelings does that bring up for you?</li><li>Are there other feelings you can find that go along with...?</li><li>Thanks for sharing, can you tell me more about that feeling?</li><li>I am noticing that you are shaking your leg and your hands are clenched, are those some of the signs that you talked to me about when you are anxious?</li><li>Are those feelings present now?</li><li>That feeling makes sense to me because...</li></ul>

<b>Scale</b>	Scale the Intensity of the Emotions, Especially Focusing on Anxiety
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>How strong is that feeling on a scale from 1 to 10?</li><li>Can you put some numbers to each of the feelings you identified?</li></ul>

<b>Encourage</b>	Encourage your Child or Teen to use Calming Tools
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Can you use a tool right now to help calm down that intensity?</li><li>Is there anything from your calming toolbox you can use right now?</li><li>Let’s keep calming ourselves down, the anxiety still seems intense.</li><li>I am going to use X to calm me down, can you use something like that too? Is there something that works better for you?</li></ul>

**Remember:** Anxiety can spike when beginning to use calming tool, that means it is working, keep using it. The goal is to work towards a 2 degree drop in anxiety level and then move towards next steps.

Key Skills to Help with Step “A” in F.A.C.E.

<b>Step 1</b>	<p><b>Demonstrate understanding and support to help your child or teen express their worries.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Repeat this step until you have identified the most pressing worries.</li> <li>It can be helpful to write these down.</li> </ul>
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I hear you saying that...did I get that right?</li> <li>Thank you for sharing. Are there more worries that we need to identify?</li> </ul>

<b>Step 2</b>	<p><b>Help your child or teen decide which worry to focus on first and the scale or intensity of that worry.</b></p>
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Out of all these worries, which one should we focus on first?</li> <li>Or, which is your biggest worry, maybe we should focus there first?</li> <li>How strong is that worry on a scale from 1 to 10?</li> </ul>

<b>Step 3</b>	<p><b>Ask if your child or teen can think of a coping thought for each of the worries they identified.</b></p>
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you think of a challenge for that worry?</li> <li>What coping thought could you use for that worry?</li> </ul>
<b>If they say YES</b>	Go to step 4
<b>If they say NO</b>	Ask questions to help them identify coping thoughts. You can use the <b>Questions to Illicit Coping Thoughts Sheet</b>
<i>You can say:</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Since this one seems hard, can I ask questions to help you think of a coping thought?</li> </ul>

	Do you mind if I ask you some questions to help you?
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<b>Step 4</b>	<b>Once your child or teen identifies a coping thought, reinforce it.</b>
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That sounds like a great coping thought to me!</li> <li>• Could you see yourself using that to challenge your worry thought?</li> <li>• Should we write that one down, because it seems like a great coping thought?</li> </ul>
<i>Option</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Now practice, with parent being “worry brain” and child being “smart brain.”</li> </ul>

**Note:** Help your teen focus on one worry at a time, remember anxiety will jump to different train cars

### Key Skills to Help with Step “C” in F.A.C.E.

<b>Stair steps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work on this ahead of time.</li> <li>• Agree what step you are on in that challenge and what it takes to get to completion.</li> <li>• Ensure that they are ready for this step. If it’s too hard, work on the previous step.</li> <li>• Remember the key is to not leave the stairs when things are tough. It’s OK to back up and try again.</li> <li>• Reward the effort for trying the step rather than focusing on the outcome.</li> </ul>
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you agree that we are going to work on this step this week? The plan is...</li> <li>• Are you ready for this step?</li> <li>• You got this, I just saw you complete the earlier step and you did great!</li> <li>• Great job trying to take this next step.</li> <li>• Or, wow, this step was harder than we thought, let’s keep practicing it until it gets easier.</li> </ul>

<b>Problem Solving</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elicit child/teen problem solving on the issues, it is not your job to problem solve.</li> <li>• Do not support problem solving that includes avoidance or total accommodation to anxiety.</li> <li>• Keep reinforcing the need to brainstorm solutions.</li> </ul>
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I’m glad you thought of these options. Are there any more to include in a possible plan?</li> <li>• Are you struggling coming up with options? Do you want to brainstorm together? r</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These solutions seem to contain a lot of avoidance. Can we think of a few more?</li> </ul>
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<b>Attitude</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind your child or teen of ways to have courage when facing the exposure.</li> </ul>
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything from your bravery sheet or toolbox that you could use right now?</li> <li>• How can I help you right now channel your inner bravery and courage?</li> <li>• Gentle Cuing: Should we play that courage playlist in the car on the way to school?</li> </ul>

<b>Rehearse</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help figure out the key skills involved and practice them together.</li> </ul>
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything we should practice or rehearse prior to this challenge?</li> <li>• Let's practice this skill so it is easier to do in the future.</li> <li>• Remember we want to practice skills, I noticed that (<i>insert microskill</i>) would be good for us to practice and you can get points for doing so.</li> </ul>

## Key Skills to Help with Step "E" in F.A.C.E.

<b>Evaluate &amp; Fight Back</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the original worries did not come true.</li> <li>• Ensure that the original scaling of anxiety did not come true, or if it did that they made it through.</li> <li>• Keep reinforcing the theme that anxiety is a bad predictor and that their children can overcome it</li> <li>• Don't let anxiety take the victory and turn it into a defeat.</li> </ul>
<i>You can say (after the challenge)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So, did your worries come true?</li> <li>• Did your anxiety get as high as you thought it would?</li> <li>• What can you say back to your worry brain now the next time it worries about this?</li> <li>• What did we learn from this experience?</li> <li>• Is your anxiety mounting a counterattack to your victory? What can you say back to that worry?</li> </ul>

<b>Enhance Motivation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find a hook that will help increase motivation and compliance with skill practice.</li> <li>• Discuss with your child/teen, tools that help motivate them when they are anxious in the moment as well as tools to help them practice on a daily basis.</li> </ul>
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<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (If future goals motivate) Remember, we are doing this so you can be _____...</li> <li>• (If praise motivates) You got this, I believe in you!</li> <li>• (Consequences motivate) Remember, you will have to practice for an additional 10 minutes if you don't do this now.</li> </ul>
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<b>Rewards and Consequences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decide rewards and consequences for exposures and compliance ahead of time.</li> <li>• Be specific about the nature of the reward and the consequence.</li> <li>• Reward and praise effort, not the outcome.</li> <li>• If a reward is offered for accomplishing one thing, you cannot take the award back for failure to accomplish something else.</li> <li>• Keep your word. If you set a reward or consequence, you must be willing to carry it out.</li> </ul>
<i>You can say</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before we look at exposures for the week, what may be some good rewards or consequences to work towards?</li> <li>• I am so proud that you attempted to talk to that person. That was great effort there.</li> <li>• You get the reward because you were able to do that hard exposure, but we need to look at how you talk to me when you are upset.</li> <li>• If you are not willing to go to program today, then (x). What x is, you will need to carry it out.</li> </ul>