



accommodating

## **Accommodating**

When we are discussing accommodation in terms of anxiety, we are addressing parental behaviors that are being done because of the child's anxiety.

Accommodating a child in distress is a natural thing that as parents we want to do. Good parents do this because they are nurturing, attentive to the child's needs and we don't want to see our child suffer. This is the innate part of parenting – wanting to help our child especially in times of distress.

When we accommodate, the child's anxiety decreases immediately because the accommodation has taken away the stressor and the child does not have to cope. The problem with this is that every time this happens, it becomes more difficult for the parent to not accommodate, and the child will continue to ask/expect the accommodation. Here's the difficult part and the part that goes against our parental instincts – the more we accommodate to reduce the distress, the more we are not allowing the child the opportunity to learn that he/she can cope and can cope with more distress than they thought.

Think: Is what I'm about to do promoting my child's ability to function better?

### **Types of Accommodating:**

- Buying or providing items the child requires because of anxiety.
- Purchasing certain foods or not having feared food in the house for anyone.
- Providing reassurance (kids are tricky in how they ask for this).
- Performing actions on behalf of the child because of the child's avoidance.
- Speaking in place of a child with social anxiety.
- Sleeping next to a child who fears being in bed alone.
- Writing notes excusing a child from speaking in class or participating in other school behaviors.
- Not going out in the evening or only having one particular babysitter.

- Participating in OCD rituals such as hand washing or repetitive checking.
- Answering questions relating to a child's persistent worry.
- Providing the child with information about the parent's schedules or plans.
- Cutting food for a child who is afraid of touching a knife.
- Not inviting guests to the home.
- Not opening windows or shades.
- Not throwing away unnecessary items.
- Repetitive or overly rigid nighttime rituals.
- Reassuring a child they have not done wrong.
- Buying particular food products or avoiding specific foods because of a child's anxiety.
- Not bringing home books or movies with anxiety provoking stimuli.
- Driving particular routes.
- Refraining from using certain words.
- Swearing or promising that certain things will not happen.
- Taking a child to unnecessary medical checkups or procedures.
- Leaving lights on in the home.
- Not having balloons in the house.
- Preparing particular clothing articles.
- Doing homework instead of a child because of anxiety.
- Accompanying child to a part of the house he or she fears approaching alone.

If you are unsure if you are engaging in a behavior which may be an accommodation:

Did you do this with your other children?

Would you be able to stop this behavior?

If your child was not anxious, would you still do this?

What would happen if you did not do this one day?

Think of ways you may be accommodating?

## Examples of Helpful and Unhelpful Accommodations

Child is asking for reassurance to make sure he did or did not do something.	Answer or allow time to check.	Use supportive statement and avoid reassurance answers.
Peer in class threw up and child won't really go to school as she feels she will get sick.	Allow her to stay home. testing.	Go to school and go thru
Child upset due to not seeing food not being cooked.	Cooks something else or waits to cook until child can watch.	Cook when convenient and make other food/dinners.
Child has test anxiety and feels she is not prepared and hasn't studied enough.	Call the school saying she is sick to give her more studying time to feel more confident.	Have child go to school to learn to cope & experience outcome likely to be more positive than expected.
Child wakes up not feeling well.	Allows child to stay home.	Expect child to make an attempt to attend. If child does not, the day should replicate a usual school day.

## Reducing Accommodating Behaviors – Begin Thinking About What YOU Will Do Differently

This process is usually done in a gradual way with specific guidelines for what accommodation will continue and what will be changed. Remember that these are behaviors that YOU are doing and that YOU have control over.

While removing accommodations can be challenging, this will force your child to succeed. **As parents, we usually don't have this type of opportunity to guarantee success for our child, so this can be very powerful and very helpful in helping your child.**

Think of the following and decide if the target is a good accommodation to target or not:

*Letting your child know you will be answering only one phone call from her a day.*

*Giving your child a limit of washing her hands.*

*Picking up your child at school when feeling anxious.*

*Limiting to answering the same questions over and over (reassurance) one time only.*

*Sleeping in bed with your child.*

*Stopping all accommodations.*

*Parents will plan a weekend vacation and have grandparents stay with the child.*

*Agreeing to stay close to the bathroom while child showers and gradually increase time child's time alone.*

### **Calls to Parents Throughout the Day**

- Mother and father will each not respond to more than one phone call a day.
- Mother and father will each call child one time per day. Mother will call at 2 P.M. and father will call at 4 P.M.
- Child will be rewarded for every day they do not call each parent more than one time.
- Child will be informed of this in advance.
- Child will be instructed to send a text message in case of urgent need to communicate with parents. The text message must include the specific reason for calling. Any other messages will not be responded to.

### **For a Child Who Insists Parents Participate in Washing Rituals**

- Parents will not wash their hands in the child's presence (will wash normally—alone).
- Parents will not answer any questions regarding their hand washing.
- Parents will not allow child to “inspect” their hands.
- Child will be informed in advance of the changes to parent behavior, including a clear statement that parents will maintain cleanliness as they see fit.

### **For a Child with Separation Anxiety Who Will Not Stay Alone**

- Parents will leave the home together for 5 minutes each evening—time to be increased gradually.\*
- Parents will take their phone but will not respond to calls from child.\*
- Parents will arrange for another person (possibly aunt or uncle) to speak on the phone with child while parents are out of the house—if child wishes.

- Child will be informed of the plan in detail—including exact time that parents will be out.
- Parents will be careful to return after specified time.

\*If child is willing to engage in the process, then the length of parents' absence and the issue of responding to the phone will be negotiable. If child refuses to collaborate then parents will leave for the planned 5 minutes and not answer the phone.

### **For a Child with Extended “Good Night Rituals” Involving Both Parents**

- One parent will say good night to child in bed—the other will say good night in the living room.
- Parent will leave the room immediately after saying good night. Parent will return to room after 20 minutes if child is awake or in distress but will not perform ritual. Parent will say “I know you are feeling uncomfortable right now, but I’m sure you will be okay.”
- Child will not be punished for staying up or acting out unless there is physical aggression.
- In the morning both parents will say, “I’m proud of you—you got to sleep without the rituals.”
- If child becomes overly distressed for more than 1 hour then the following night parents will arrange for aunt to stay in the home and will leave the house after saying good night once.
- Child will be informed of the plan—apart from the possibility of parents leaving the home.

## **• Informing the Child**

- Do not expect for the child to agree with this change.
- Stay strong because your child needs this from you as he/she is not able to do this on his/her own.
- Below is an example of informing the child of the plan described above for a girl with repeated phone call throughout the day:
- *Olive, we love you so much and you are truly such an amazing girl. We also know how much you struggle with your worry thoughts at school and when you’re away from us. We know these thoughts make you feel really scared and we are so proud of you for how well you do in school, how you treat your friends and so many other things. We also know that calling us during the day in school to ask for our help is something that may seem to help you in the moment, it actually keeps your anxiety strong. Even though you think you need to talk to us in order to feel better, we believe 100% that you will be ok even if you don’t call/text us. Because we believe this so much and want to help you, we will be making some new plans for calling/texting us. From now on, when you call/text us from school we will not answer more than one call a day. We know that this may be*

*difficult for you at first so I will call you mid-day to check in and then again after school. On the days you don't call at all, you will earn a reward. If you do call more than once, we will try again tomorrow for the reward, however; we will still not answer the call or respond to the text. If there is something urgent, you can text us with this situation and we will determine if we call you or not. We are not doing this to punish you and we are not mad at you. It is because we love you and we want to help you.*

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## Selecting a Target Accommodation & Presenting the Announcement

### When deciding on a target accommodation to reduce:

1. Pick something that happens frequently multiple times or week or daily.
2. Pick something YOU can control – is the accommodation something that YOU are doing, or YOU are not doing. This is about changing YOUR behavior not about changing anyone else's. You should be able to start the sentence with "I am ... or I am not..." If you are unable to do this, the target is probably not something within your control and is not a good target to use.
3. Pick something that bothers you or the function of the family.

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### How To Notify the Child:

Do this at a quiet, relaxed time and not at a time in the heat of the moment or when feeling annoyed or frustrated.

Utilize **Empathy**, **Support** and **Confidence** in the child.

Write the change you have decided on in writing. This is important as this needs to be more formal than what you have been communicating. By communicating this differently, you are also reducing the risk of an escalation. By writing the announcement, you are also able to concisely express the message. You are also expressing, the importance and your commitment to maintain this new plan.

Do not expect for your child to agree with this. The key to remember is: Your child does not have to agree to something that you are doing that is best for him/her.

# Dealing With Child Reactions to Decreased Accommodation

Reducing accommodation will almost inevitably increase the child's anxiety in the short term, and parents need to be prepared for this both emotionally and practically, in terms of responses to child behavior. Let's discuss parents' thoughts or fears regarding the way their child will react and role playing those situations together can be helpful in creating confidence about their ability to persevere despite potential stress.

Keep in mind that we are changing the rules that the child has come to rely on and to which you have conformed for a long time. It took a long time for you to feel prepared to take action to overcome the anxiety and it is unrealistic to expect your child to feel just as prepared simply because you decided to act. You are doing what you know to be necessary and helpful in the long run, but your child may not see it that way yet and we cannot expect her to. Be prepared for her to feel more anxious or even to feel a sense of betrayal at your decisions. **And remember that right now she needs you to be strong for her because she is not yet ready to be strong for herself. Sometimes being a parent is about doing what's right for your child even when they don't want you to.**