



One School's Effective Support Strategies for Anxious Children

Within our Primary school community, we are seeing more and more children presenting with anxiety. It is much more than the usual anxieties that all children experience at some time or another; these young people are genuinely unable to cope with the demands of the school day.

We cannot always change a child's circumstances but we can give them the tools, skills and understanding to help them to manage their anxieties.

UNDERSTANDING

- Develop an understanding of difficult emotions - by using an Emotion Coaching approach; staff are able to connect with the pupil in a positive way. Establishing an attuned connection with the child not only shows empathy but also enables the development of self-regulation. By recognising, empathising, validating feelings and labelling them, we can help a child to move forward. Setting limits on behaviour and problem solving with the child are positive ways to deal with behaviours that are so often present with children who are anxious.
- Healthy coping skills are encouraged - Mindfulness, breathing exercises, Time Out cards, Therapeutic Colouring sheets along with provision of named supportive 'Buddy', a listening ear from all staff and plenty of time and understanding are all simple, (inexpensive) yet supportive measures.

- ✓ <https://www.emotioncoachinguk.com>
- ✓ <https://mindfulnessinschools.org>
- ✓ https://www.anxietybc.com/sites/default/files/calm_breathing.pdf
- ✓ <http://tandfbis.s3.amazonaws.com/rt-media/pp/resources/CBTCHILD/worksheets.pdf>
- ✓ <http://www.relaxkids.com/free-downloads>
- ✓ <http://www.elsa-support.co.uk/time-cards/>



- Children also respond well to the teachings of how our brains work. The Dan Siegel Hand Model, also the story 'Little Meer Cats, Big Panic' by Jane Evans are useful resources to help a child to understand what's going on in their bodies and minds.

- ✓ The Hand Model for Kids: https://youtu.be/H_dxnYhdyuY
- ✓ <http://www.thejaneevans.com/portfolio/little-meerkats-big-panic/>

- Developing language skills and emotional literacy are also helpful strategies.
- We have some wonderful people who knit teddies with tiny bags, which we give to anxious pupils. Notes can be popped into these bags to give the child a positive message, either from a parent/carer or a key worker giving the child confidence that no matter how tough their day may feel, there is someone out there holding them in mind and caring about them.
- We make little laminated pictures based on the senses using Google Images, photos, catalogues etc, of the child's favourite things. These pictures are placed in a bag and kept with the child. Looking at pictures of their favourite things to see, hear, smell, touch and taste are a great way of helping a child to feel calm.

COMMUNICATION

- Communications Passports are made with the child so that all staff have a good awareness of a child's strengths and difficulties. This is a powerful way of giving the child the confidence that they will be accepted and understood.

- ✓ <http://mycompass.com>
- ✓ <https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/simple-communication-passports-6312055>

- Supply teachers have access to Communications Passports - it is vital that everyone has an awareness of a child's difficulties so that they are not put in a position of being challenged which can lead to an escalation of anxiety based behaviours.



- Communication with all relevant staff, parent and child is actively encouraged in order to be prepared and to be one step ahead of any potential events that a child may be feeling anxious about.

OFFICE STAFF

- Our office staff are wonderful! If they are aware of a child having trouble at the start of a school day, they always offer comfort to enable the child to feel supported enough to enter the school building.
- They build strong trusting relationships with families so that communications remain good.
- No parent is ever made to feel that they will be reprimanded or challenged about late arrivals or absences. This in turn means that the parents remain willing and confident enough to persevere when faced with their child refusing to come to school.

We know that working with, not against families works!

With thanks to Sue, Primary School Inclusion Officer (Emotional Support)