

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD IN AN ANXIOUS MOMENT

When your child is in the middle of a very anxious moment, they may feel frightened, agitated or worried about having a panic attack. The important thing to do in the moment is to help them calm down and feel safe.

1 BREATHE SLOWLY AND DEEPLY TOGETHER

You can count slowly to five as you breathe in, and then five as you breathe out. If this is too much, try starting with shorter counts. If it works for them, gradually encourage your child to breathe out for one or two counts longer than they breathe in, as this can help their body relax.

2 SIT WITH THEM AND OFFER CALM PHYSICAL REASSURANCE

Feeling you nearby, or holding your hand or having a cuddle if it's possible, can be soothing.

3 REASSURE THEM THAT THE ANXIETY WILL PASS AND THAT THEY WILL BE OKAY

It can be helpful to describe it as a wave that they can ride or surf until it peaks, breaks and gets smaller.

4 ASK THEM TO THINK OF A SAFE AND RELAXING PLACE OR PERSON IN THEIR MIND.

If you haven't tried this before, agree with them when they're feeling calm what this place or person is. It could be their bedroom, a grandparent's house, a favourite place in nature or somewhere they've been on holiday. Sometimes holding a memento of a relaxing place, like a seashell or pebble, can help.

5 TRY USING ALL FIVE SENSES TOGETHER

Connecting with what they can see, touch, hear, smell and taste can bring them closer to the present moment and reduce the intensity of their anxiety. You might think together about five things they can see, four things they can touch, three things they can hear, two things they can smell and one thing they can taste.

6 ENCOURAGE THEM TO DO SOMETHING THAT HELPS THEM TO FEEL CALMER

This could be running, walking, listening to music, painting, drawing or colouring-in, writing in a journal, watching a favourite film or reading a favourite book.