

HOW ADULTS CAN HELP KIDS WHEN THEY WORRY

As kids grow, they face many new things. Starting school. Meeting new friends. Learning to swim, competing in sports, etc. When kids and teens face new things, they often feel a mix of emotions. Facing something new — even when it's a good thing — can be stressful. It's natural to feel excited about what's ahead — and to worry about whether they're ready to handle it.

Worry isn't all bad. It can be helpful as long as it doesn't last too long, become too intense, or happen too often. Worry is a caution signal. It's a natural response to a big event, change, or challenge. Worry is a way of thinking and feeling ahead: "Am I ready for this? What's going to happen? Is it safe to go ahead? What do I need to do to get ready? How will I do it? What if I feel nervous?"

Thinking through the part they worry about — calmly and with support from parents — can help kids get ready for what's ahead. When kids feel prepared, they can focus on the part they're looking forward to.

HOW ADULTS CAN HELP

Spend time with them. Do this every day, even if it's just a few minutes. Do things together that you both enjoy. Go for a walk, cook, eat, play — or just hang out. Find ways to smile and laugh together. This keeps the bond between you strong and positive. And it creates moments for kids to open up naturally.

Ask what's on their minds. Help kids label what they think and feel. They might not always have a lot to say. And they might not always want to talk about what's on their minds. But let kids know you're open to listening and talking any time.

Listen with patience. When kids and teens want to talk, listen with your full attention. Give them time to put their thoughts and feelings into words. Ask questions to hear more. Don't be too quick to give advice. Let them confide. Listen calmly to what they have to say.

Help them practice. When possible, help kids break a new thing into small steps. Let them practice one step at a time as they build toward their goal. Celebrate each success.

Validate. Let kids know you understand. Say it's okay to feel how they feel. Tell them their feelings are normal. Try not to say, "There's nothing to worry about." This can make kids think they shouldn't feel the way they do. Instead, listen calmly and accept how they feel. That makes it easier for kids to share.

Help kids think of how to handle things. Help them feel capable. Don't jump in to solve things for them. Instead, invite kids and teens to think of what they can do. Support their good ideas. Talk it through together. Remind them of times they tried something new and it went well. Offer to help as needed.

Soothe and comfort. At times, kids and teens may feel overwhelmed by worry. In those moments, trying to talk it through isn't likely to help. It might help more to offer comfort and understanding. Remind them that you're there to help them through things that happen. Teach them to use calm breathing to relax their mind.

Encourage. Praise your child's effort and progress. Tell them what they said or did that made you proud. Help them relax so that stress and worry don't build up.

Help them expect good things

Ask your child or teen to share what's going well and what they look forward to. Ask about the good things that happen in their day. Tell them about the good things in your day, too. Let them know that it's OK to talk about worries but it helps to put more focus on the good moments.