



The TOOLBOX

TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THEIR EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL NEEDS



ABOUT ANXIETY WITHOUT STRESS... FOR PARENTS

TOOL: Prevention

TARGET AUDIENCE: Elementary | Secondary

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Parents



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ABOUT ANXIETY WITHOUT STRESS... FOR PARENTS

TOOL: Prevention

TOOL INTENDED FOR: Parents

– Details: E.g. Parents of elementary and secondary school children

TARGET AUDIENCE: All children and teenagers who have or are at risk of developing anxiety symptoms

NEEDS AND BEHAVIOURAL MANIFESTATIONS

Children and teenagers who have or are at risk of developing any of the following anxiety symptoms:

- Difficulty sleeping;
- Loss of appetite;
- Intense fears leading to avoidance;
- Excessive control of the environment;
- Fear of new situations;
- Refusing to attend school or participate in activities;
- Difficulty making friends;
- Stomach aches and headaches, vomiting, fatigue, muscle tension;
- Concentration and organizational problems;
- Excessive need for reassurance;
- Irritability, tantrums, bouts of tears, opposition;
- Low self-esteem, distress.

SPECIFIC GOALS

- To develop the knowledge of parents of elementary and secondary school children about stress and anxiety.
- To provide parents with practical strategies to help their children deal with anxiety.



TOOL CONTENT

THIS FACT SHEET HELPS PARENTS TO:

- Tell the difference between stress and anxiety;
- Become familiar with the main signs of anxiety;
- Understand some basic anxiety concepts, such as comfort zone, avoidance, exposure, etc.
- Use practical strategies to help their children deal with anxiety.

USEFUL RESOURCES



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<https://sante-mentale-jeunesse.usherbrooke.ca/>

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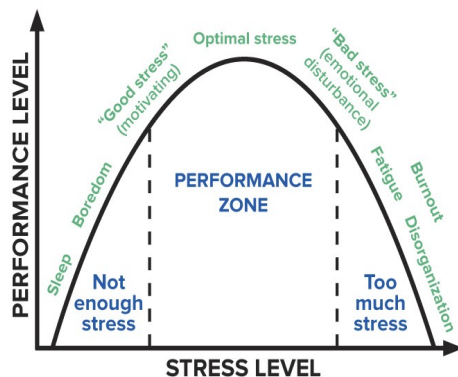
About Anxiety Without Stress...For Parents

Stress and anxiety are challenges for many children and teenagers—but also for you as a parent! This document is a reference tool to help you develop your knowledge about anxiety and learn practical strategies to help your children deal with anxiety.

Stress or anxiety?

Stress is a universal and necessary response of human beings. It's an alarm signal that motivates the individual to take action in order to adapt and survive. Faced with a stressful situation, your child either confronts it by taking action or flees it. Procrastination is a way to escape.

(Lupien, 2019; Marchand, Letarte & Seidah, 2018; Shih & Lin, 2017; Strack & al., 2017)



(Palazzolo & Arnaud, 2013; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908)

Did you know?

The inverted stress curve shows how stress is necessary when well-balanced.

However, too little stress or too much stress has a negative impact on functioning.

Anxiety occurs in anticipation of a situation. The situation doesn't need to be real to trigger an anxiety response. It's also the tendency to create disaster scenarios and to imagine fears based on things that haven't yet occurred. It becomes problematic if it prevents your child from functioning properly and causes distress.

Anxiety is the fear of being afraid!

(Lupien, 2019; Yerkes & Dodson, 1908)

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Signs

Help your child detect the signs and determine what causes anxiety. It's important to note that these signs may vary from child to child.

- Difficulty sleeping;
- Loss of appetite;
- Intense fears leading to avoidance;
- Excessive control of their environment;
- Fear of new situations;
- Refusing to attend school or participate in activities;
- Difficulty making friends;
- Stomach aches and headaches, vomiting, fatigue, muscle tension;
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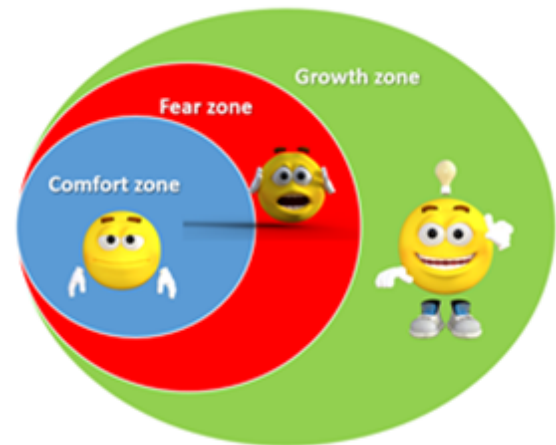
(Government of Québec, 2018; Dumas, 2013; CYMHIN-MAD, 2010; Hincks-Dellcrest-ABCs, n.d., in Government of Ontario, 2013)



Anxiety may sometimes take the form of oppositional behaviour, tantrums or embarrassment. As a parent, it's important to find out what certain behaviours may be hiding.

COMFORT ZONE: an important concept

A **comfort zone** is a situation where children **feel good** or in familiar territory. To successfully expand this comfort zone, children must go through their **fear zone**. To avoid being afraid, children may tend to return to their comfort zone. This is called **avoidance**. The more children avoid fear, the more their comfort zone shrinks and the greater their fear zone increases. On the contrary, the more children face their fears, the more their comfort zone expands and their fear zone shrinks. They can thus discover a world of growth!



(based on White, 2009)

Avoidance is anxiety's best friend!

Although avoidance at first seems to calm down anxiety, it ends up making it worse. It's therefore important to help children deal with anxiety-provoking situations. This is called **exposure**. Anxiety is uncomfortable, but it's not dangerous!



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Attitudes to encourage

1. Help children manage what is making them anxious

- Reduce your accommodation behaviour;
- Use a *small-step* approach while respecting children's pace;
- Don't avoid situations that scare them. Teach children to face them calmly while supporting them;
- Praise them when they get over their fear.

(Couture, 2016)

Accommodation consists in changing parents' behaviour in order to prevent or reduce children's distress associated with anxiety. In the very short term, accommodation reduces children's anxiety by allowing them to avoid the anxiety-provoking situation. In the long term, these behaviours maintain and accentuate their anxiety.

(Thompson-Hollands et al., 2014)

2. Act as a role model and set an example

Stress resonance

Like sound, stress resonates with the people around a stressed or anxious person. These people then feel the stress and their bodies will also produce stress hormones. The closer the people are, the stronger the response.

(Lupien, 2019)

- Address the anxiety-provoking situations you are going through and share your strategies;
- Accept mistakes;
- Talk about your emotions;
- Use stress management strategies: your stress may exacerbate your children's stress, whereas your confidence will increase theirs! This is called stress resonance.
- Take care of yourself and, if necessary, seek help;
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle.

3. Provide a caring and comforting environment

- Establish clear rules and consistently and coherently apply disciplinary measures;
- Adopt a positive attitude towards your children, encourage them, highlight their successes and efforts, take an interest in them and their interests;
- Help your children prepare for new situations;
- Remind them that you trust them;
- Don't try to control everything. New things and the unexpected are part of life and allow children to develop resistance to stress.

4. Promote their autonomy and independence

- Give your children opportunities to try, take risks—and make mistakes;
- Get involved in your children's lives—but not too much!

(Berthiaume, 2017; Lebowitz et al., 2014; Naître & grandir, 2016; Otto, 2016; Pelletier, 2019)

5. Reduce sources of pressure

- Resist pressure from society: always faster, always more, always better;

- Set realistic expectations based on learning rather than performance;
- Don't overload your children's schedule;
- Distinguish between your own ambitions and those of your children.

(Berthiaume, 2017; Couture, 2016; Duclos, 2011)

6. Be a good listener

- Don't trivialize or minimize what your children are going through; fear is real, even if you don't understand it;
- Normalize what they're experiencing;
- Ask questions and listen;
- Don't try to find a solution to these fears at all costs; your children often simply need to be heard and understood;
- Set up a time with your children when they can talk to you about their concerns instead of constantly responding to their demands for reassurance. This will help them develop their tolerance for uncertainty.

(Couture, 2016; Naître et grandir, 2016)

7. Help your children adopt healthy lifestyles

- Get enough sleep;
- Eat healthy, be active, do exercise;
- Maintain healthy relationships with others;
- Take time to have fun;
- Maintain a good balance between various areas of their lives;
- Be kind;
- Practise mindfulness;
- Develop self-esteem;
- Limit screen time;
- Have a spiritual life.

(Naître et grandir, 2016)

8. Help your children adopt stress management strategies

- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| ○ Physical exercise; | ○ Arts; |
| ○ Yoga; | ○ Laughing; |
| ○ Breathing and relaxation; | ○ Contact with nature; |
| ○ Mindfulness; | ○ Etc. |

For more information: <https://sante-mentale-jeunesse.usherbrooke.ca/je-suis-un-jeune/boite-a-outils-2/strategies-pour-appivoiser-mon-stress/>

(Every Moment Counts, 2014; Psychology Foundation of Canada, 2011; Gasparovich, 2008; Leroux, 2016)

Resources

- LigneParents (toll-free crisis line: 1 800 361-5085)



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- Tel-Jeunes (toll-free crisis line: 1 800 263-2266)
- Mouvement Santé Mentale Québec
- Canadian Psychological Association

Are you worried? We encourage you to consult a professional.

- Info-Santé 811;
- Family physician;
- Integrated Health and Social Services Centre (CISSS) or your Integrated University Health and Social Services Centre (CIUSSS);
 - Ordre des psychologues du Québec ;
 - Ordre des psychoéducateurs et des psychoéducatrices du Québec.

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