

The
Mental Wealth Co.

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Parenting an Anxious Child

A calm, practical guide for the parent trying to hold it all.

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Hello,

If your child is anxious, one of the first things I want you to hear is: this is not your fault. Anxiety runs in families the way music does — through genes, modeling, and the sheer proximity of feeling.

The good news is that the parent's response is one of the most powerful factors in how a child's anxiety develops over time. Not perfect responses. Present ones.

This guide is for the ordinary, tired, loving parent — the one googling this at 10pm after another hard bedtime. I hope you find something in here you can actually use.

— *Jasmine*

Founder, The Mental Wealth Co. · LPC, NCC

What childhood anxiety looks like

In their body

- Stomachaches, headaches — especially on school mornings.
- Trouble falling asleep, or waking up in the middle of the night.
- Restlessness, nail-biting, chewing on clothes.
- Big physical reactions to small things.

In their behavior

- Clinginess, especially at drop-off or transitions.
- Avoidance of things they used to enjoy.
- Big meltdowns that feel out of proportion.
- Perfectionism, or fear of getting anything wrong.
- Constant reassurance-seeking.

In what they say

- 'What if...' questions on repeat.
- 'I don't feel good' when nothing is medically wrong.
- 'I can't do it,' about things they can do.

What helps and what doesn't

What often helps

- Naming the feeling: 'It sounds like your body is really nervous right now.'
- Validating without agreeing with the fear: 'That does feel scary. And I know you can handle this.'
- Predictable routines, especially around sleep and transitions.
- Preview and prepare: walk through what will happen in a scary situation.
- Your own regulated presence. Kids co-regulate off adults.

What often makes it worse

- Accommodating the fear entirely (skipping every hard thing).
- Dismissing the feeling ('You're fine, stop crying').
- Over-reassuring in a loop ('Are you sure you're okay?' 20 times).
- Solving their feelings quickly instead of sitting in them briefly.

You don't have to say the perfect thing. You have to stay in the room.

Sentences you can use tonight

"Your body is telling you something big. I'm right here."

"That sounds really hard. Do you want ideas or do you want a hug?"

"You don't have to feel brave to be brave."

"Let's take three slow breaths together."

"I'll walk you to the door. You can do the last part."

"You've done hard things before. Remember when...?"

"It's okay to feel two things at once — nervous AND excited."

Small routines that make a big difference

Mornings

- Same order of things, when possible.
- One connected minute before you rush — eye contact, a hug, a joke.
- Preview the day out loud: 'After school, I'll pick you up. Then dinner.'

Transitions

- Warn ahead: 'Ten more minutes, then we're leaving.'
- Name what's next: 'When we get home, first we'll do X, then Y.'

Bedtime

- Same wind-down each night — bath, book, dim lights.
- Save hard conversations for the next day when possible.
- 'Worry time' before teeth-brushing: two minutes to name worries out loud, then closed for the night.

After a hard moment

- Repair, don't relitigate. 'That was hard. I love you. We're okay.'
- Wait until the storm passes before you problem-solve.

When to reach out for professional support

Some anxiety is part of normal development. But if you're noticing any of the following, a licensed pediatric therapist can be a real gift.

- The anxiety is stopping your child from doing things they need or want to do (school, friendships, sleep, activities).
- It's been going on for more than a few weeks and isn't improving.
- Your child is expressing thoughts of self-harm, hopelessness, or not wanting to be alive.
- The whole family's daily life is being organized around avoiding the fear.
- You're exhausted, and you feel out of ideas.

Reaching out for professional help is not admitting failure. It is modeling for your child exactly what you want them to learn: when something is hard, we get support.

Where to start

- Ask your pediatrician for a referral to a licensed pediatric therapist.
- In the US, contact your insurance for in-network options, or search Psychology Today for pediatric providers in your area.
- For urgent concerns about a child's safety, call 911 or your local crisis line.

For you, the parent

You cannot pour from an empty cup. Answer these gently.

How am I doing under the surface right now?

One thing that's harder than I let on:

One small way I could support myself this week:

Someone I can talk to about this — not to fix it, just to be heard:

One phrase I want to remember: 'A calm parent is a gift. Perfect isn't required.'

A gentle note.

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If you are working with a therapist or clinician, consider bringing this resource into your work together so they can help you apply it to your specific situation.

If you are experiencing a mental health emergency, please call 911 or contact your local crisis resource. In the United States, you can also dial or text 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

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With warmth,
The Mental Wealth Co.