

Assisting children with anxiety problems

Suggestions for teaching staff

Children with anxiety problems are easily overlooked at school as they are usually quiet and obedient.

Often they get anxious about doing the wrong thing, about their schoolwork not being perfect and about social relationships. Worries about issues that arise outside of school may also interfere with their ability to concentrate in class or relate to others.

How teaching staff can help

• Teach coping skills

Learning about feelings and how they can be managed can really help these children. Regular social and emotional learning that emphasises coping skills will be helpful. Children with severe anxiety will benefit most from a social and emotional skills program targeted for children with internalising difficulties (see KidsMatter Programs Guide listing for Component 4).

• Discourage avoidance

The tendency to avoid difficult situations or tasks stops the student learning how to manage in spite of feeling anxious. Where necessary the task or situation can be modified to provide more manageable steps. However do not force a child to take on something that is too overwhelming.

• Encourage 'having a go'

Encouraging students to participate and 'have a go' helps them get over doubts about their ability to manage. Giving positive feedback for trying can make a big difference.

• Set realistic expectations

Feeling pressure to be perfect is a common problem for children with anxiety disorders. Setting realistic expectations for academic work is important to help them learn to manage their anxiety and stress less.

• Modify and monitor stressful activities

Test situations or class presentations may be particularly stressful for children with anxiety problems. Teachers may need to modify assessment tasks to relieve some of the pressure, for example by providing breaks or extra time for tests, or having children present to small groups rather than the whole class. Monitor the child's progress and gradually provide more challenging requirements as confidence increases.

• Develop independence

Provide opportunities for children with anxiety to take on special responsibilities that help them support their view of themselves as capable. Developing a sense of independence reduces their need for reassurance and builds confidence.

• Access help when needed

Anxiety can be caused by a range of factors. When children's anxiety symptoms are severe or persistent it is important to access the help and advice of your school counsellor, psychologist or other mental health professional.

This resource is part of the KidsMatter Primary initiative. The team at KidsMatter welcomes your feedback at www.kidsmatter.edu.au



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