

MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STRESS AND ANXIETY?



Stress

It's the way we react to a life **event** that we perceive as a threat or a challenge.

- It is short-lived
- It happens in the here and now
- It is related to a real situation (the house is burning down)
- It allows us to **adapt and meet challenges** (a person calls 911 because the house is burning and makes sure everyone gets out quickly)

Anxiety

It's worrying and creating **scenarios** about what **might happen**. It's the fear of being afraid! It can be normal and healthy (see the next page).

- Helps us protect ourselves from an actual danger
- Helps us anticipate a catastrophic event
- Allows us to **mobilize and find solutions** (check the batteries in the smoke detector and the accessibility of a fire extinguisher, in case the house catches fire)

IT'S ALL **NORMAL!**

WHEN DOES ANXIETY BECOME A PROBLEM?

WHEN IT PERSISTS OVER TIME AND WHEN IT HAS A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON A CHILD'S LIFE.

HOW DO WE RECOGNIZE IT?



Releases natural **protective mechanisms** (e.g., insomnia or avoiding situations perceived as dangerous)



Prevents us from having satisfaction in daily life



Causes uncomfortable physical symptoms

POSSIBLE PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS

- Change of **habits** (Consult the Info Sheet: Social Isolation)
- Refusal to **talk**
- **Procrastination** (putting everything off until tomorrow)
- Intense fear leading to **avoidance**
- **Excessive control** of his environment (always wanting to know where his parent is and what the parent is doing)
- Fear of **new situations**
- Refusal to go to **school** or participate in activities
- Difficulty **making friends**
- Difficulty **being organized**
- Excessive need for **reassurance**
- **Irritability**, tantrums, crying fits, resistance
- Low **self-esteem** with a sense of helplessness



POSSIBLE PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- **Headaches**
- **Fatigue**
- **Dry mouth**
- **Difficulty sleeping**
- **Difficulty concentrating**
- **Sense of cognitive “emptiness”**
- **Panic** attack or difficulty breathing
- **Tics** or compulsions
(nail biting, skin scratching, hair pulling, etc.)
- **Nausea**
- Increase or loss of **appetite**
- **Diarrhea**
- **Stomach** ache
- Tightness or pain in the **chest**
- Increased **heart rate**
- Feeling of a «lump» in the **throat** or choking
- **Dizziness** or feeling light-headed
- **Chills** or hot flashes
- **Numbness** or tingling
- **Trembling**
- High **blood pressure**
- **Restlessness** or difficulty keeping still
- Increased **sweating**
- **Redness** of the skin
- **Muscle** tension



Anxiety can be difficult to detect because it can be masked by other behaviours (resistance, tantrums, embarrassment, etc.).

If the difficulties and symptoms persist and significantly interfere with your child's functioning, you should consult a professional. Find available resources on the rapcotenord.ca website



ADVICE AND TIPS

N.U.T.S. (by Sonia Lupien)

Stress triggers always contain at least one of these ingredients: N.U.T.S.
The more ingredients at play in a situation, the more stressful it is likely to be for your child.

Novelty

Something your child has never experienced is happening, like going to an unfamiliar place.

- Present the new thing in a less threatening and more predictable way
(Before the start of high school, you can make an appointment to tour the school)

Unpredictability

Something completely unexpected happens or your child did not know it was going to happen.

- Get him to ask questions about what is going to happen
- Remind him of past experiences where he adapted to a change
(How did he react when a beach trip was rescheduled or postponed because of the weather or a change of teacher?)

Threat to the ego

Your child's skills and self-worth are being tested. He has doubts about his abilities.

- Help him practice his oral presentation skills
- Remind him of past successes

Sense of lack of control

Your child feels he has little or no control over the situation.

- Offer him choices
(When moving, let him choose the colour of his room)



ADVICE AND TIPS



Abdominal breathing

Suggest that your child do abdominal breathing to slow the **heart rate** down and calm breathing using 5 steps:

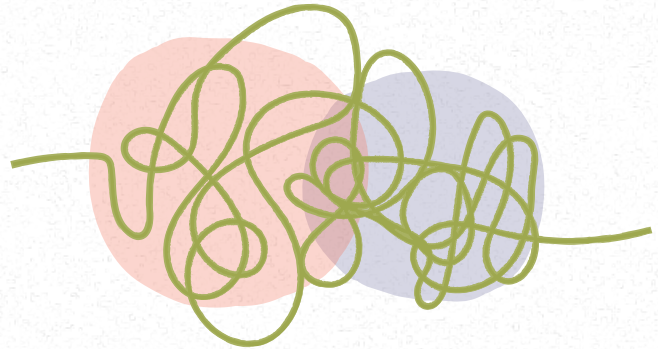
1. **Inhale** and push the belly out as much as possible
2. **Hold** his breath for a few seconds
3. **Exhale** completely and pull the belly in
4. **Hold** his breath for a few seconds
5. **Repeat** as many times as desired



Recherche de solutions

La recherche de solutions augmente la confiance en soi et l'**estime de soi** et amène des réussites.

- Amenez votre enfant à identifier des solutions possibles à une situation créant de l'anxiété ou du stress



Replacing anxious thoughts

When your child has an unpleasant thought, help him replace it with a **pleasant one**.

Does your child express his fear of going to the swimming pool? (fear of drowning, afraid of being laughed at, etc.)

- Get him to see the positive side of the activity (being with friends, having fun, getting a reward afterwards, etc.)



Action Steps

It is important to take action to have control of life and **avoid the victim role**.

- Be physically active
Consult the Info Sheet: Healthy Lifestyle Habits
<https://rapcotenord.ca/saines-habitudes-de-vie/>
- Find a distraction
(watch a movie or read a book)
- Watch a funny video or a comedy show
- Spend time with friends or family
- Do good deeds
(participate in a rewarding activity, such as providing a service or volunteering)

Actions Steps - Source: <https://humanstress.ca/stress/trick-your-stress/principles-of-stress-management/>

ADVICE AND TIPS

Helpful Thoughts

Never question the feelings your child has. Fear and its symptoms are very real. It's the perception of the situation that is wrong. That's why he needs help to see things differently.



To accomplish this, ask these questions :

- What is the worst thing that could happen to you in this situation?
- If that happened to you, would it be so terrible?
- If your friend was faced with this situation, what would he think or do?
- Are you certain about what you think is happening?
- What makes you see the situation that way?
- Is there a different way to look at the situation?
- Are you concluding too quickly that it will be a disaster?
- Have you experienced similar situations in the past that turned out well?
- Is it a given or can it be looked at differently?

Helpful thoughts – https://reussirestrie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Presentation_Webinaire_Anxiete_16fev2021.pdf (in French only)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC

What can I do as a parent? Stress or anxiety? (in French only)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OolPaQYZs3E8ab_channel=LeCentreRBCd%27expertiseensant%C3%A9mentale

My child... anxious? (in French only)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjD6LgAyXVc8ab_channel=LeCentreRBCd%27expertiseensant%C3%A9mentale

Information sheet that summarizes the concepts of the videos: (in French only)

https://sante-mentale-jeunesse.usherbrooke.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Fiche_parents_stress_anxiete.pdf

PowerPoint presentation of the RBC Center for Academic Mental Health Expertise Webinar (in French only)

https://reussirestrie.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Presentation_Webinaire_Anxiete_16fev2021.pdf

Stress Management - Quick Fixes

<https://humanstress.ca/programs/de-stress-for-success/>

N.U.T.S.

<https://humanstress.ca/stress/understand-your-stress/sources-of-stress/>

<https://www.stresshumain.ca/Documents/pdf/De-stresse-et-progresse/CestquoidetresseetProgresseV2.pdf> (in french only)



Réussite - Accomplissement - Persévérance