



Discoveries with the Deputy Principals

It is the time of year when anxiety builds up at school - going to college, going to a new school, catching a bus, moving into a new classroom, will I have friends in my new class, will my new teacher be 'nice' the list can go on.....

It is natural that children have these concerns/anxieties but it is important to address them. Below are some things that parents can do at home to help with this. It is written by Karen Young who is a psychologist. She has also written a book on anxiety which is suitable for children 5+ Hey Warrior



Beating school anxiety - powerful things parents can do

Anxious kids are brave kids. They are creative, thoughtful and have the potential to light the world on fire - every one of them, often in unexpected ways. When anxiety takes hold though, it's overwhelming. It can shut down their potential, their engagement with the world and their self-belief. Anxiety feels awful and life can become all about avoiding it. But the good news is that anxiety can be managed so that it stays in the background and out of the way. For anxious kids, the important adults in their lives are powerful allies in helping to make this happen.

Let nothing be off-limits - Let them know that they can come to you with anything. They don't have to know how to start or how to say it. Ensure your child knows that it's enough to let you know that something is troubling them, even if they don't have the words yet. The next part you can do together.

Set a time to chat - Have a regular talk time with a definite beginning and a definite end where they can stop the conversation if they want to with no pressure from you to keep it going. Let them have the control.

Help them find words for what they might be feeling - Anything you can do to flourish their emotional vocabulary will help them to make sense of things. Name what you think they might be feeling in a way that makes it easy for them to correct you. "You seem angry/confused/sad right now." Then let them know that it's okay for them to feel what they're feeling, and that you understand. Let them know these emotions make sense to you.

Get the information - When things are calm and happy, have a chat about what you can do to make things better when their anxiety is at full throttle. Ask them what helps and what you (or others) do that doesn't help. Listen and try not to take it personally.

Understand why being tough won't help - It's likely that you've tried the tough love thing, even if only in desperation. It's also likely that it didn't work. Anxiety is driven by a brain that thinks it's under threat. It's physiological. Their body is being surged with neurochemicals and when there's no need to flee, the neurochemicals build up and it feels awful. **That's anxiety. It's not bad behaviour and it's not the result of soft parenting.**

Being tough or telling them to 'get over it' will be as useful as telling them to catch falling stars in a thimble.

Anxiety is difficult to deal with, but it is manageable