

## Home Management Strategies for Generalized Anxiety Disorder

### Step 1: Teaching your child about anxiety

- Regardless of the type of anxiety problem your child is struggling with, it is important that he or she understands the **facts about anxiety**.

**Fact 1:** Anxiety is a normal and adaptive system in the body that tells us when we are in danger.

**Fact 2:** Anxiety can become a problem when our body tells us that there is danger when there is no real danger.

- As an important first step, help your child understand that all the worries and physical feelings have a name: **Anxiety**.

To learn how to explain this to your child, see  
[How to Talk to Your Child about Anxiety.](#)

### Step 2: Teaching your child about GAD

- Like all anxiety disorders, children and teens with GAD become anxious when they are faced with a **trigger** for their worries. But what is the trigger in GAD?
- Children with GAD become anxious whenever there is **uncertainty** or they are **unsure about something**. This is why kids with GAD worry about everything. Since most things in life are uncertain, there is always something to worry about!

### Step 3: Encouraging your child to stop seeking reassurance

- Children with GAD often seek reassurance many times daily from their parents, in an attempt to be 100% sure that everything they are doing is okay. Parents often find this quite tiring and frustrating.
- A good way to address this is in two parts:
  1. Tell your child this is his or her GAD talking: That is, your child is always asking for reassurance because the anxiety is bullying him or her. n with your child to beat back GAD by not giving reassurance.

A plan you can try is the following:

- Tell your child that he or she can only ask you something **once**.
- Afterward, answer your child's repeated questions for reassurance by saying, "I don't know," or "Well, if you aren't 100% sure, what is so bad about that?"

To learn how to explain this to your child, see [How to Address Excessive Reassurance Seeking](#).

#### Step 4: Building your Child's Toolbox

The best way to help your child deal with anxiety and worries is to give him or her tools that can be used against worrying. For GAD, tools in the toolbox include:

**Tool #1: Learning to calm anxiety by slowing down your breathing** (see [Teaching Your Child Calm Breathing](#)).

**Tool #2: Learning how to calm anxiety by relaxing the muscles in your body** (see [How to Do Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)).

#### Tool #3: Making “coping cards” with your child

- Because it is difficult to face anxiety, it is a good idea to give your child some “coping cards” to carry with him or her throughout the day.

For some tips on how to help your child use coping cards, see [Developing and Using Cognitive Coping Cards with Your Child](#).

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#### Tool #4: Becoming Comfortable with some Uncertainty

Because children and teens with GAD feel anxious whenever things are uncertain, a good way to fight back worries is to help your child become more comfortable with uncertainty. They do this by deliberately taking action when they are not sure what will happen. Like any tool that involves facing a fear, it is important to start small. The following are some exercises your child can do:

- Completing homework without asking family whether it was done correctly (or only asking once).
- Calling a friend spontaneously and asking him or her to come over to play without making plans in advance.
- Start doing things that your child has been avoiding (for example, if your child doesn't watch the news because of fears about war or community events).
- Deliberately making a small mistake on homework so that it isn't perfect (crossing something out; making it a little messy).
- Coming to school a few minutes late.
- Talking to someone in school without planning the conversation.
- Saying “I don't know” when the teacher asks a question.
- Looking out the window for a few seconds when the teacher is talking.

**Tip:** Since many children and teens with GAD are also perfectionistic, good exercises to do with your child can involve deliberately being imperfect (e.g. making a small mistake on a homework assignment). For more information, see [Helping Your Child Overcome Perfectionism](#).

#### How to do these exercises:

It is important to prepare your child for the fact that he or she **will** feel anxious while doing this, but **that is normal!** In order to fight back anxiety, it is normal to feel a little anxious in the beginning. It is also very important to **praise** (“great job!”) and **reward** (extra TV time, making a favourite dinner) your child for any successes, as well as any attempts at trying to face his or her fears... after all, facing anxiety is hard work!

**Hint:** For more strategies and tips on conducting exercises like these with your child, see

[Helping your Child to Face Fears: Exposure](#)

### **Tool #5: STOP Plan or Realistic Thinking**

Often, children and teens with GAD have worries that are unrealistic or very unlikely; however, when they are anxious, it is difficult for them to recognize this. For example, your child might worry excessively about mom and dad being in a car accident if they are late coming home.

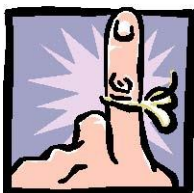
One way to help your child examine his or her thoughts and decide whether the worries are unrealistic is to use the STOP Plan. The STOP Plan helps children recognize their anxiety and unhelpful thoughts, and develop new thoughts. For older children and teens, help your child challenge his or her unrealistic or anxious thoughts.

For a young child, see [Healthy Thinking for Young Children](#); for teens see [Realistic Thinking for Teens](#)

### **Step 5: Building on Bravery**

Your child's progress develops from a lot of hard work. If you are noticing improvements, both you and your child deserve a lot of credit! Learning to overcome anxiety is like exercise – your child needs to "keep in shape" and practice his or her skills regularly. Make them a habit. This is true even after your child is feeling better and has reached his or her goals.

Don't be discouraged if your child has lapses and returns to old behaviors every once in awhile, which can happen during particularly stressful times or transitions. This is normal, and just means that one or two tools in the toolbox need to be practiced again. Remember, coping with anxiety is a lifelong process.



**Hint:**

Every once in awhile, remind your child what he or she was not able to do before learning how to cope with anxiety and face fears. It can be very encouraging for your child to see how far he or she has come. This is why it is a good idea to create a chart that records all of your child's successes!