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# ANXIETY MANAGEMENT

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Anxiety is a natural emotion which is adaptive – it is important to our lives. Without anxiety as an adaptive function, we would die. For example:

Person in house smells smoke → anxiety/fear → person runs out of house.

This is called the **fight/flight** response because of the main responses experienced. All organisms have this response.

Everyone gets anxious. The only difference is the degree of anxiety experienced. Children who have anxiety problems become anxious more easily, more often and more intensely. However, the basic emotion of anxiety is the same for these children as for everyone else and everyone can benefit from learning to control his/her anxiety. Anxiety, when uncontrolled, may cause a great deal of interference in the child's life, e.g. at home, with their family, at school, on the sports ground etc.

### There are three aspects to anxiety:

1. **Physiological:** This includes increases to the heart rate, muscles becoming tense and increases in mental awareness. These changes prepare the body for action.
2. **Cognitive:** Anxiety may begin as a worrisome thought which cannot be ignored.
3. **Behavioural:** An urge to run away or sometimes lash out.

### There are two main causes for anxiety:

1. **Genetics:** There is probably not a specific anxiety gene. However, increased emotionality – the anxious person is more emotional – seems to be genetically based. Increased emotionality can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, the person is more sensitive, caring and responsible. On the negative side, the person is more prone to anxiety and depression.
2. **Learning:** Anxious people learn that the world is a potentially dangerous place. They also learn that it is easy to get hurt – either socially or physically. There is not specific evidence for where this learning originates. However, it is probable that children learn it in their family. Often it is not explicitly learned, but may come from observation and modelling. Children gather information from the subtle watching of how others react to situations. Often one parent is anxious and the child will pick up on this, no matter how hard the parent tries to hide it. The child watched and learns. Children also learn from other people such as grandparents, relatives and children at school. Anxiety may also be based on some bad experiences in any number of situations.

Sometimes, understandably, some parents feel bad for their child and take over or help excessively. If this is done, the child again learns that the world is a bad place and further, that he/she is not capable of handling it.

### Helping your child to cope with anxiety and become more confident:

1. Help your child to try new things. Give positive reinforcement for having a go.
2. Do not over-protect and allow your child to avoid.
3. In situations where the child lacks confidence and is fearful, give the child small steps to achieve and reinforce his/her success.
4. Label emotions and model techniques for calming down.
5. Involve your child in generating solutions to problems. Involve him/her in carrying out a part of the solution.
6. Guide your child in the use of coping strategies such as positive self-talk.
7. Provide practice situations through role-play in which to rehearse coping strategies appropriate to the situation.