

## 8 Tips to beat Anxiety from Dr. Daalsgaard

**1. Normalize** - anxiety is the most common problem in kids.

Our bodies have a fight or flight response. (Either fight to stay alive – from back in cave man days with dinosaurs potentially attacking; OR flight/run away from danger). Oftentimes, that fight or flight response is triggered when there isn't really "danger" – we call it "False Alarm" of body, brain, and behavior. You can beat the "fight or flight" false alarm by learning and practicing skills.

**2. Teach kids to tolerate distress.**

Kids need the chance to learn that painful emotions are normal, temporary, & can be endured.

**Avoid...**

Rescuing the child from temporary distress. Allow them to stay home, avoid dance class, etc.

**Instead....**

- Normalize / empathize – *"I get it that you are feeling scared."*
- Make eye contact and model how to breathe in through nose, hold for 2 secs., out through mouth.
- Model being able to tolerate your child's distress – try not to bring attention to it. Calmly state – "You're experiencing a false alarm" anxiety signal and it's making you feel sick, but you can beat this."

**3. Provide kids instruction and practice on getting good at using their bodies as a coping tool**

*"It's hard to have a relaxed body AND an anxious mind at the same time."*

Relaxing the body is a skill and, like all skills, must be learned and practiced to mastery.

- Encourage and practice relaxation techniques (short mindfulness exercises\*, yoga, deep breathing)
- Encourage and practice Brave Body (what a brave body looks like as opposed to a scared one)

**4. Encourage exercise** – walk around the block, jump rope, dancing – all can lower anxiety and increase the positive mood chemicals in our brains.

**5. Educate kids on importance of sleep**

- Set a bedtime, limit caffeine, have a half-hour of calm prior to bedtime – soft music, reading, yoga, journaling, limit screen time and tv before bed.

**6. Educate students to learn to externalize anxiety**

Practice this skill:

- anxiety is ALWAYS exaggerating or outright lying
- anxiety is therefore best understood as a telemarketer. Or pop-up ad. Or a bully. (picture one of those three in your head – or the FEAR character from Inside Out movie)
- anxiety, therefore, is best ignored or bossed back - Get out of my head you bully!

**Avoid...**

Giving the impression that you think worry has "something important" to tell the child – don't keep asking what is causing the anxiety – and give power to that "thing".

**Instead....**

Model externalization. Name the anxiety character and talk back to it.

Remind the child to hang up the phone, press the delete button, or boss back.

**7. Teach the skill of COMPARTMENTALIZATION**

Worry is a waste of time so, **Avoid...**

Allowing the child unlimited time to talk about worries. Especially at bedtime or at nurse's office.

**Instead....** Pick a guaranteed 5-minute time the student can voice worries (i.e. during an otherwise preferred activity, such as recess). At night, make the talk positive – 3 things I'm thankful for, etc.

## **8. Never be afraid to REWARD brave behaviors**

- Rewards are not bribes
- Rewards are there to motivate healthy behavior and the acquisition of skills
- They don't have to be big, they just have to be **motivating** (to the kid) and **feasible** (to the caregiver)
- Removal of privileges until a brave behavior is performed? Yeah, that's good caregiving.

### **Avoid...**

Expecting the child to do something scary for "free" or just because you think she should.

### **Instead....**

Have the reward established in advance, part of the plan, and preferably ready to be awarded as soon as the brave behavior is performed.

**9. Practice Exposure** - gradually expose child to that which they would rather avoid on the rationale that avoiding a safe situation causes greater fear of that situation, which in turn drives greater avoidance.

Usually practiced with therapist support, patients are encouraged and praised for every step they take toward sticking with what scares them until it doesn't scare them anymore.

**10. Systematic Desensitization** – similar to exposure, but exposes you to your fears slowly while practicing relaxation techniques.

Example- a child with a fear of bees might start by looking at a drawing of a bee, then look at a photo of a bee, listen to bee noises, watch a tv show about bees, then go see bees in a container, then go outside near where there are bees on flowers so they are desensitized to the sound and ultimately, the fear of being exposed to bees.