

Anxiety: How to Address Excessive Reassurance Seeking

Children look to their parents for information about the world. It is normal and helpful for parents to provide children with information about challenging situations. However, for some children, asking for reassurance about the same situation over and over again becomes an unhelpful way of coping.

Some examples of reassurance seeking:

- “Are you sure you locked all the doors?”
- “Did you wash your hands before you cooked dinner? Are you really sure?”
- Calling mom or dad over and over again on the phone from school to make sure they are okay.



What is the problem with giving reassurance?

- Most parents already know that giving reassurance over and over again can be exhausting! No matter how much reassurance you give your child, he or she will always want more! It becomes addictive for kids!
- Giving reassurance is a band-aid solution: it only relieves your child anxiety in the moment. More importantly, giving reassurance actually keeps your child’s anxiety alive, because it maintains the problem in the long-term.
- Giving your child reassurance also sends the message that there’s actual danger that he or she needs to be protected from, when it is in fact the anxiety that is driving the reassurance seeking.

What is the solution?

Step 1: Make a Clear Plan

- What specific behaviors are you trying to change?
- Is everyone in the family on board?
- Make sure your child or teen understands and agrees with the plan



Step 2: Following Through on the Plan

Step 3: Give lots of praise!

FOCUS ON POSITIVE BEHAVIOR, NOT ANXIOUS BEHAVIOR

Because your child will probably be quite anxious at first when not getting reassurance, your first instinct might be to soothe him or her in other ways (giving lots of affection and attention, treats or rewards).

- By doing this, you are actually rewarding the anxious behavior.
- If you stick to the plan, resist giving reassurance, and encourage your child to handle anxiety on his or her own, you are ignoring the anxious behaviors
- Encouraging your child to reassure him or herself, and to problem solve independently will help your child to become independent and confident.
- After your child has calmed down, or if he or she is using a coping tool to deal with anxiety, then you can praise this positive behavior!

