

Summary

High learning potential children worry about many different things for many different reasons. There are strategies that can be adopted to help alleviate the child's anxieties before they become unmanageable.

Introduction

It is normal to feel anxiety from time to time and due to their advanced understanding of the world around them children with high learning potential can experience strong feelings of anxiety more often than their peers. There are different strategies that can be tried at home and at school to manage anxiety, some of which are given below. Different things work for different children and all of the strategies explored here can be modified to suit a variety of situations. When the level of anxiety is too high, however, and the child cannot cope with everyday life, counselling, mentoring and other therapies should be sought.

Things High Learning Potential Children Worry About and Why

- **School:** because they think they are different, or they are not understood or accepted, or they are bored, or they think they don't understand because they can see a wider task than the one outlined by the teacher.
- **New situations:** because they can visualise possibilities for disaster that others can't envisage.
- **Media reported world issues:** because they want to do something but feel powerless and they can imagine how it would feel if it were them or their family who were affected.
- **What others think of them:** because they have self-esteem issues, feel different to others, feel pressured to achieve or are overly sensitive to the opinions of others.
- **Doing the right thing and perfectly:** because their perceptions of their abilities cause them to feel a failure for not always succeeding, achieving or doing things perfectly.

Strategies to Help Overcome Anxieties

Worries and Happiness Books

Get two notebooks, label one 'Worries Book' and the other 'Happiness Book'. The child might like to design front covers to decorate each book.

At the end of each day, record anything that the child is worried about in the 'Worries Book'. You can demonstrate how it's done by sharing some of your worries too. Worries can be recorded with either words or pictures. It will be beneficial for the child to write or draw in the book themselves, but if they really don't want to, you will have to do it for them.

Then tell the child something along the lines of:

"I'm going to take these worries away with me. I will read them again and if I can help you with any of them then I will. If I can't do anything straight away, then we will leave it in the book until something can be done about it."

Take the book away to a safe place, out of sight of your child. This will reinforce in them the belief that you are now taking responsibility for their worries.

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Now write or draw happy things from the day in the ‘Happiness Book’. Again, you can demonstrate how to identify happy things if necessary. Remember to include the little things as well, like, ‘hearing a bird today’ or ‘the sky was really blue’, or even ‘I got dressed by myself’. The ‘Happiness Book’ is then kept by the child, under their pillow or close by.

This strategy is aimed at younger children. For older children and young adults, writing down concerns is often a good way of letting them go or sharing them. Sometimes disposing of the written worries, by burning or shredding them, for instance, is quite liberating. Writing down concerns at school, can be useful in alerting teachers to worrying issues that are arising in class, but that are difficult to talk about.

Talk Tin

In a quiet corner of the house or classroom, place a box or tin with a lid. Next to it leave a pile of post-it notes and a pencil. Spend time outlining the rules to the children. The rules are:

- Anyone can write anything they want to, no limits.
- If it is placed inside the tin it is just between the writer and the keeper (a responsible adult).
- If it is stuck on the top it is an issue to be shared with the whole family.
- No one needs to write their name.

Mentors/Buddies

Schools can help by running a buddy system, where an older child is paired with a younger one to support them at various times in the school day. It is beneficial for the older child as it is a position of responsibility and for the younger as they have someone other than an adult to turn to for help. It is worth coaching the older buddies on what to do if they hear something worrying and to designate an adult supervisor for the scheme.

An adult other than a teacher or the child’s teacher can be designated as a mentor in school. Time can be set aside for meetings where worries can be shared confidentially. At home a mentor can also help for older children – someone trusted but outside the immediate family, an uncle or aunt, a family friend.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a way of meditation which has shown to improve general wellbeing and help children (and adults) to control anxiety. Other relaxation techniques, including yoga for kids can also be tried. There are classes the child can be enrolled in, and programmes that be carried out in the home and in school.

Counselling

Sometimes worries can grow to a point where they are unmanageable, before this happens it is better to seek the help in the form of counselling. Go through the child’s GP for a referral to a specialist counsellor. There are different methods of counselling, so it is advisable to look into each one before deciding which is the most relevant to the child’s needs, this can be discussed with the GP. Remember to always check the counsellor’s qualifications and recent training.

Further Information Books can be ordered from our website shop: www.potentialplusuk.org

PA601 Social and Emotional Development of High Learning Potential Children	This advice sheet is downloadable from our website.
PA604 Perfectionism and High Learning Potential Children	This advice sheet is downloadable from our website.

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www.youngminds.org.uk 0808 802 5544	Young Minds – UK’s leading charity committed to improving the emotional well being and mental health of children and young people.
http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/expertadvice/parentsandouthinfo/parentscarers/worriesandanxiety.aspx	Worries and anxieties - helping children to cope: information for parents, carers and anyone who works with young people, a fact sheet from the Royal College of Psychiatrists.
http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/expertadvice/parentsandouthinfo/parentscarers/worriesandanxiety.aspx	‘Worries and anxieties: information for young people’, a fact sheet from the Royal College of Psychiatrists.
<i>Helping Children Cope with Anxiety</i> by Jill Eckersley	Book for adults covering all ages of children.
<i>Worry Box: Managing Anxiety in Young Children</i> by Dr Hannah Mortimer	A practical framework to help adults provide emotional support to young children aged 4-11.
<i>When My Worries Get Too Big!: A Relaxation Book for Children who Live with Anxiety</i> by Kari Dunn Buron	Through the irresistible character of Nicholas, this book gives young children an opportunity to explore their own feelings through relaxation techniques.
<i>David and the Worry Beast: Helping Children Cope With Anxiety</i> by Anne Marie Guanci	Book helping young children understand their fears and anxieties.
<i>What To Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kids’ Guide to Overcoming Anxiety</i> by Dawn Huebner	An interactive self-help book designed to guide 6-12 year olds and their parents.
<i>10 Mindful Minutes: Giving our children - and ourselves - the skills to reduce stress and anxiety for healthier, happier lives</i> by Goldie Hawn	This book outlines short, practical exercises for parents and children - taking less than 10 minutes - to help young children and teenagers reduce stress and anxiety, improve concentration and academic performance, effectively manage emotions and behaviour, develop greater empathy for others and the world, and be more optimistic and happy.

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