



THE SEND APPROACH



Edition 1 : November 2020

Anxiety-Led School Refusal

What can be put in place to help my brain feel safe at home and school?

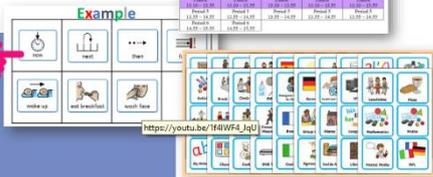
Sometimes anxiety is easy to identify – like when a child is feeling nervous before a test at school. Other times anxiety in the classroom can look like something else entirely – an upset stomach, disruptive or angry behaviour, ADHD, or even a learning disorder.

Visual Timetables

- Use a visual timetable for home and school
- I need to know if there is a change to the timetable in advance
- Go through the next day, the night before

PROVIDE ME WITH ROUTINE

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-8:30	8:00-8:30	8:00-8:30	8:00-8:30	8:00-8:30
8:30-9:00	8:30-9:00	8:30-9:00	8:30-9:00	8:30-9:00
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1:30-2:00	1:30-2:00	1:30-2:00	1:30-2:00	1:30-2:00
2:00-2:30	2:00-2:30	2:00-2:30	2:00-2:30	2:00-2:30
2:30-3:00	2:30-3:00	2:30-3:00	2:30-3:00	2:30-3:00
3:00-3:30	3:00-3:30	3:00-3:30	3:00-3:30	3:00-3:30
3:30-4:00	3:30-4:00	3:30-4:00	3:30-4:00	3:30-4:00
4:00-4:30	4:00-4:30	4:00-4:30	4:00-4:30	4:00-4:30
4:30-5:00	4:30-5:00	4:30-5:00	4:30-5:00	4:30-5:00



On a whiteboard
On a calendar
Tick List
Visual Timetables

There are many different kinds of anxiety, which is one of the reasons it can be hard to detect in the classroom. What they all have in common, says neurologist and former teacher Ken Schuster, PsyD, is that anxiety “tends to lock up the brain,” making school hard for anxious kids.

Children can struggle with:

- **Separation anxiety**: When children are worried about being separated from caregivers. These kids can have a hard time at school drop-offs and throughout the day.
- **Social anxiety**: When children are excessively self-conscious, making it difficult for them to participate in class and socialize with peers.
- **Selective mutism**: When children have a hard time speaking in some settings, like at school around the teacher.
- **Generalized anxiety**: When children worry about a wide variety of everyday things. Kids with generalized anxiety often worry particularly about school performance and can struggle with perfectionism.
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder**: When children’s minds are filled with unwanted and stressful thoughts. Kids with OCD try to alleviate their anxiety by performing compulsive rituals like counting or washing their hands.
- **Specific phobias**: When children have an excessive and irrational fear of particular things, like being afraid of animals or storms.

Regulating emotions

When my controlling brain puts me into survival mode – I need to know how to regulate my nervous system and feel safe again ... help me to feel calm



Green


energy


healthy cells


smiling


focused on learning


active listening


calm

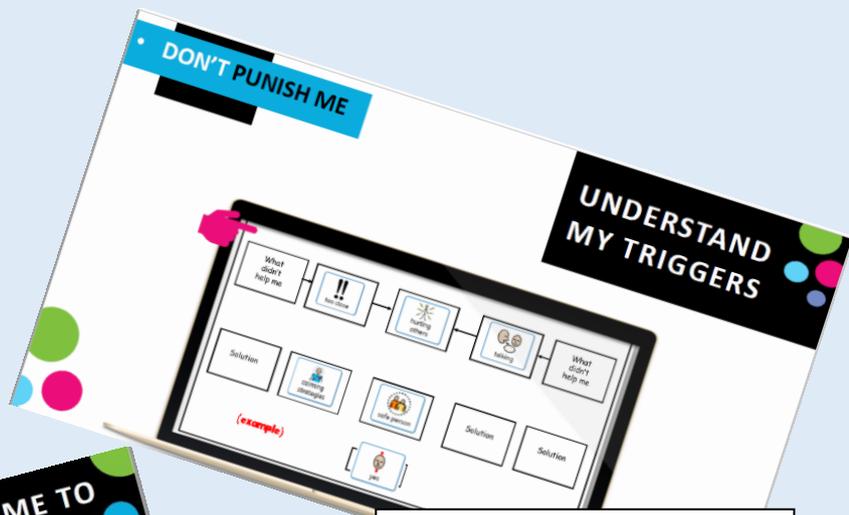
HELP ME TO FEEL CALM

Zones of Regulation

Naming emotions
Understanding emotions
Regulating emotions

Inattention and restlessness

When a child is squirming in his seat and not paying attention, we tend to think of ADHD, but anxiety could also be the cause. When kids are anxious in the classroom, they might have a hard time focusing on the lesson and ignoring the worried thoughts overtaking their brains. "Some kids might appear really 'on' at one point but then they can suddenly drift away, depending on what they're feeling anxious about," says Dr. Schuster. "That looks like inattention, and it is, but it's triggered by anxiety."



Disruptive behaviour

Acting out is another thing we might not associate with anxiety. But when a student is for example compulsively kicking the chair of the kid in front of him. Similarly, kids who are feeling anxious might ask a lot of questions, including repetitive ones, because they are feeling worried and want reassurance.

Anxiety can also make kids aggressive. When children are feeling upset or threatened and don't know how to handle their feelings, their fight or flight response to protect themselves can kick in — and some kids are more likely to fight. They might attack another child or a teacher, throw things, or push over a desk because they're feeling out of control.

Trouble answering questions in class
When kids are anxious about answering questions in class, "they're going to break eye contact, they might look down, they might start writing something even though they're not really writing something. They're trying to break the connection with the teacher in order to avoid what's making them feel anxious."
If they do get called on, sometimes kids get so anxious that they freeze. They might have been paying attention to the lesson and they might even know the answer, but when they're called on their anxiety level becomes so heightened that they can't respond.
When a student doesn't do their work-it could be because she is worried that it isn't good enough. Likewise, anxiety can lead to second guessing — an anxious child might erase his work over and over until there's a hole in the paper — and spending so much time on something that it never gets finished. We tend to think of perfectionism as a good thing, but when children are overly self-critical it can sabotage even the things they are trying their hardest at, like school work.
You might also notice that some anxious kids will start worrying about tests much earlier than their classmates and may begin dreading certain assignments, subjects, or even school itself

Avoiding socializing or group work

Some kids will avoid or even refuse to participate in the things that make them anxious. This includes obvious anxiety triggers like giving presentations, but also things like gym class, eating in the cafeteria, and doing group work.

When kids start skipping things it might look to their teachers and peers like they are uninterested or underachieving, but the opposite might be true. Sometimes kids avoid things because they are afraid of making a mistake or being judged

Problems in certain subjects
When a child starts doubting her abilities in a subject, anxiety can become a factor that gets in the way of her learning or showing what she knows. Sometimes this can be mistaken for a learning disorder when it's really just anxiety.
However anxiety can also go hand in hand with learning disorders. When kids start noticing that something is harder for them than the other kids, and that they are falling behind, they can understandably get anxious. The period before a learning disorder is diagnosed can be particularly stressful for kids.