



**Our Lady of  
Good Counsel**  
Forestville

## **Parent Resource - Fact Sheet 1**

### **Anxiety**

***OLGC parent's have asked for guidance on a number of topics as we continue with HBL and prepare for the return of face to face learning at school. Returning to full time face to face learning is likely to bring with it mixed thoughts, emotions and behaviours for children. It is important to recognise and acknowledge the role that anxiety plays in both adult and child behaviours.***

The following information has been taken from the [Beyond Blue](#) website and developed in consultation with our school counsellor to assist OLGC parents.

#### **How can I recognise anxiety?**

Anxiety is part of our survival instinct. When we're faced with a threatening situation, our brains and bodies respond by kicking into safety mode. Our adrenaline starts pumping, helping us get ready to escape the danger.

However some people, including children, react more quickly or intensely to situations they find threatening, or find it harder to get their anxious feelings under control. Some children also perceive the world to be scarier or more dangerous than others.

Fearful and anxious behaviour is common in children – especially as they come across new situations and experiences. Most children learn to cope with different fears and worries.

However, they may need some extra support when:

- they feel anxious more than other children of a similar age
- anxiety stops them participating in activities at school or socially
- anxiety interferes with their ability to do things that other children their age can do
- their fears and worries seem out of proportion to the issues in their life

A child with anxiety difficulties may:

- seek reassurance often
- avoid situations they feel worried or scared about
- try to get others to do the things they are worried about
- tell you they have physical pains
- dislike taking risks or trying new things
- have lots of fears
- get upset easily
- have lots of worries

Children with anxiety difficulties tend to lack confidence in their abilities and feel overwhelmed easily. They are also driven to avoid the things that cause them anxiety, and in doing so, don't get the chance to learn that what they fear will usually not happen. Adults can help by working on coping and problem-solving skills together. Remember, the goal for most children isn't to eliminate anxiety completely (remember it is part of our survival instinct). It's really about giving them the skills to manage anxiety so it doesn't get in the way of enjoying life.

## How can I assist my child who is feeling anxious?

### 1. Start by slowing down

Encourage your child to take some slow, deep breaths to calm the physical effects of anxiety. Practice together by breathing in for three seconds, holding for three seconds, then out for three. Once they're feeling a bit calmer, you can talk through what's worrying them

### 2. Make time to worry

Setting aside some designated time to deal with worries can stop anxious thoughts from taking over. Try creating a daily ritual called 'worry time', and encourage children to draw or write down whatever is bothering them. You can make the activity a bit more fun by decorating a 'worry box' or building a 'worry wall' out of post-its. When the time is up – after 10 to 15 minutes – shut the worries up in the box or tear them off the wall and say goodbye to them for the day

### 3. Climb that ladder

Instead of skirting the scary situation, you could try a technique called 'laddering' – breaking down worries into manageable chunks and gradually working towards a goal.

Let's say your child is afraid of water and swimming. Instead of avoiding the pool, create some mini-goals to build their confidence. Start out by just sitting and watching other kids swimming. As they feel more comfortable, get them to try dangling their legs in the water, then standing in the shallow end, and so on.

### 4. Encourage positive thinking

Children with anxiety often get stuck on the worst-case scenario or 'what ifs' in any situation. You can help them shift these thinking patterns by:

- reminding them of times they've dealt with similar issues in the past and how things worked out OK
- helping them to challenge the scary thought with facts and evidence. For example, we know that crocodiles can't survive under our bed
- make a plan for how they'll respond if things don't go as they'd like.

### **5. Have a go**

Anxious children often worry about making mistakes or not having things perfect. This can lead to them avoiding situations or activities – they'd rather sit out than get it wrong. Emphasise giving new things a try and having fun over whether something's a success or failure.

### **6. Model helpful coping**

Don't just tell your child how to overcome emotions – show them. When you get anxious or stressed, verbalise how you're coping with the situation: "This looks a bit scary, but I'll give it a go." And hey, you might even knock off one of your own fears.

### **7. Help your child take charge**

Think about what you can do to make your child feel like they have some control over the scary situation.

### **8. Be upfront about scary stuff**

Talk through their fears and answer any questions truthfully. Don't sugar-coat the facts – try and explain what's happening in a way that puts their fears in perspective.

### **9. Check your own behaviour**

Children pick up all sorts of signals from the adults in their lives, so have a think about the messages you're sending. Over-protective family members can inadvertently reinforce children's fears that the world is a dangerous place where everything can hurt you. Similarly, parents who 'over-help' are subconsciously telling their kids that they can't do anything without adult support.

If you're prone to 'helicoptering', try taking a step back and waiting next time before you jump in. It can be hard seeing your child distressed, but figuring things out for themselves is an important step in building resilience.

If you feel that your child continues to display signs of anxiety after having implemented these strategies, you may like to seek support through:

- Parentline 1300 1300 52
- Kids Helpline 1800 55 1800
- Family Referral Service 1800 066 757
- Mental Health Access Line 1800 011 511
- School Counselling Service
- Your GP