

How we respond and communicate with an anxious child

In the last resource we highlighted that reassurance can be a maintaining factor for a child's anxiety. If we constantly reassure children – they learn that they need the reassurance to cope with the situation. It is our instinct to want to make things better for our children and part of that is reassuring them. It is not about removing reassurance but rather changing the way we offer it.

Look at the following examples:

Situation – going to school Monday morning

Child – I am worried that I will get something wrong and get told off. School is really busy and noisy. I don't want to go.

Parent responses:

1 – don't worry, everything will be ok. There is nothing to be worried about. You'll be ok.

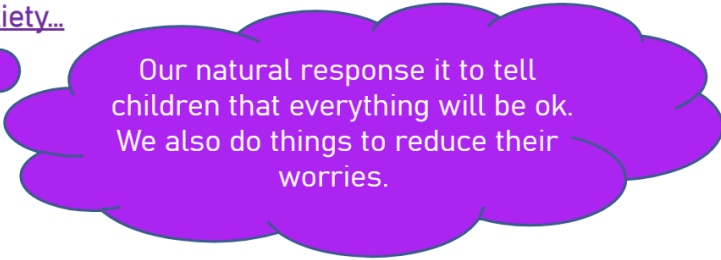
2 – I can see that you are worried, can you tell me why? Ah, I see – so you are worried about getting told off. I understand, that can be scary. Getting told off isn't very nice. Do you remember that time when you.....That was really brave. I think you are really and brave and even though you are scared, I think you will can give this a go.

Which response do you think is going to have a longer lasting impact on the child?

When your child is anxious try to avoid general reassurance statements and think about being curious, understanding and supportive. Validate what your child is feeling – show you understand that what they are worrying about would make most people anxious too!

Have a go at filling out the next page – plan out how you are going to respond next time that your child is anxious about a certain situation.

Responses to anxiety...



Our natural response it to tell children that everything will be ok. We also do things to reduce their worries.

Responses
You will be fine
Nothing bad will happen
I know you can do this.



Be curious!

- ✓ Why are you feeling worried?
- ✓ What is frightening you?
- ✓ What do you think will happen?
- ✓ What is the worst thing that might happen?
- ✓ What is it about [this situation] that is making you worried?

WHAT IS HAPPENING?	WHAT IS MY CHILD THINKING? (What is the anxious expectation?)	MY CHILD'S RESPONSE (did you notice avoidance, reassurance seeking or safety behaviours?)	MY RESPONSES
My child is saying they don't want to go to school	They are worried they are going to get told off by the teacher	They are getting upset and saying they feel ill so they don't have to go to school (Avoidance)	<p>Usual: Don't worry, nothing bad will happen. Everything will be ok.</p> <p>New: What are you worried about? ...That does sound difficult. What makes you worry about that? Has it happened before? Does it happen a lot? What makes you think it will happen today? Etc.....I can see that you are worried about this. You were really brave yesterday when you went to school – let's give it a go today too.</p>