

How to support a child with

PANIC ATTACKS

Useful Apps:

Unless stated otherwise, apps are not supplied by the NHS and the NHS is not liable for their use.



SAM



FearTools



What's Up?



Fabulous - Daily
Routine Planner



Stop, Breathe and
Think Kids



WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

- Disrupted sleep.
- Needing more reassurance and support.
- Avoidance of activities they usually do.
- Becoming distressed or agitated when confronted by their fear.
- Repetitive or patterns of behaviours (e.g., repeated checking or counting).
- Episodes of panicking such as getting distressed, racing heart rate, quicker breathing, upset tummy, feeling sick, feeling dizzy or faint.
- Needing things be done in certain ways.
- Anxiety can affect the whole family as they may need to adjust accommodate how the young person is feeling or responding.

Mental health and wellbeing cards

<https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk>

WHAT ARE PANIC ATTACKS?

Panic attacks are a type of anxiety response causing intense physical sensations which escalate quickly. This can be overwhelming and frightening and last between 5-20 minutes, although the child may remain highly anxious for some time after a panic attack.

Signs of a panic attack include;

- a racing heart.
- feeling faint or dizzy.
- feeling very hot or very cold.
- sweating.
- nausea.
- chest pain.
- difficulty breathing /choking feeling.
- feeling shaky and unsteady.
- feeling disconnected.
- difficulties communicating.
- racing thoughts that something awful is going to happen.

WHEN SHOULD I BE CONCERNED?

Everybody has worries, it is part of daily life. However, if the worry is affecting the child's daily living it may be a sign they need more support.

When to be concerned;

- If the degree to which a young person feels low appears out of context or disproportionate to the reason why they might be feeling low.
- If episodes are more frequent or prolonged and cause the young person distress.
- If it impacts on their ability to cope with everyday life such as going to school, seeing friends or taking part in leisure activities.

WHAT CAN I DO TO SUPPORT MY CHILD?

- Reassure your child that we are all scared of something, validate their fear/worry.
- Learn about their fear, discuss ways of overcoming their fear in a safe and gradual way.
- Support and encourage gentle exposure to their fear, over time this will lead to reduced anxiety.
- Take slow and deep breaths with them for however long it takes, this tells that body that it is safe.
- Break things down into steps and do these as often as possible.
- Share concerns with your child's school / college and discuss potential accommodations to support the young person.
- Depending on the context and / or the origins of the anxiety being experienced, other services may be helpful e.g. family guidance if there is family breakdown or conflict.

Neurodivergent young people may experience high levels of anxiety. They may benefit from;

- Provide details and structure around activities so they know what to expect.
- Let them know in advance where they are going and what they are doing, some young people may like to see visuals so they can have a picture in their mind.
- Avoid sudden changes to plans and support the young person to self advocate when feeling discomfort.

It can be very upsetting supporting a child with anxiety, remember to look after your own mental health.