



# Inclusion News

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## Issue 1: Spring Term 2020

Dear Parents/ Carers,

Welcome to the first edition of Inclusion News, which we hope will become a termly newsletter. We aim to provide information on a wide range of topics relevant to all children to support with their social and emotional development, and to promote positive mental health. We will also signpost to local Hertfordshire agencies, charities and professionals if you would like to find out more or feel that you or your child needs more support. We hope that you will find these useful, and would welcome any feedback about this new initiative, especially if you have suggestions for future topics. All editions of the newsletter will be archived on the website for future reference.

We have decided to start this term, with one of the most commonly asked about topics, worry and anxiety in children.

This information has been taken from the NHS website: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/anxiety-in-children/>

### Anxiety in Children

Just like adults, children and young people feel worried and anxious at times. But if your child's anxiety is starting to affect their wellbeing, they may need some help to overcome it.

**What makes children anxious?** Children tend to feel anxious about different things at different ages. Many of these worries are a normal part of growing up.

From about eight months to three years, for example, it's very common for young children to have separation anxiety. They may become clingy and cry when separated from their parents or carers. This is a normal stage in children's development and tends to ease off at around age two to three.

It's also common for pre-school children to develop specific fears or phobias. Common fears in early childhood include animals, insects, storms, heights, water, blood, and the dark. These fears usually go away gradually on their own.

Throughout a child's life there will be other times when they feel anxiety. Lots of children feel anxious when going to a new school, for example, or before tests and exams. Some children feel shy in social situations and may need support with this.

### When is anxiety a problem for children?

Anxiety becomes a problem for children when it starts to get in the way of their day-to-day life.

We all get anxious at times, but some children seem to live a life of anxiety, where it's not short-term and it's not just an occasional thing," says Paul Stallard, Professor of Child and Family Mental Health at the University of Bath. "For example, if you go into any school at exam time all the kids will be anxious but some may be so anxious that they don't get into school that morning," says Professor Stallard.

Severe anxiety like this can harm children's mental and emotional wellbeing, affecting their self esteem and confidence. They may become withdrawn and go to great lengths to avoid things or situations that make them feel anxious.

### What are the signs of anxiety in children?

When young children feel anxious, they cannot always understand or express what they are feeling. You may notice that they:

- become irritable, tearful or clingy
- have difficulty sleeping
- wake in the night
- start wetting the bed
- have bad dreams

In older children you may notice that they:

- lack the confidence to try new things or seem unable to face simple, everyday challenges
- find it hard to concentrate
- have problems with sleeping or eating
- are prone to angry outbursts
- have negative thoughts going round and round their head, or keep thinking that bad things are going to happen
- start avoiding everyday activities, such as seeing friends, going out in public or attending school

### Why is my child anxious?

Some children are more prone to worries and anxiety than others. Children often find change difficult and may become anxious following a house move or when starting a new school. Children who have had a distressing or traumatic experience, such as a car accident or house fire, may suffer with anxiety afterwards. Family arguments and conflict can also leave children feeling insecure and anxious.

## How to help your anxious child

If a child is experiencing anxiety, there is plenty parents and carers can do to help.

First and foremost, it's important to talk to your child about their anxiety or worries. Reassure them and show them you understand how they feel.

If your child is old enough, it may help to explain what anxiety is and the physical effects it has on our bodies. It may be helpful to describe anxiety as being like a wave that builds up and then ebbs away again.

As well as talking to your child about their worries and anxieties, it's important to help them find solutions, says Professor Stallard.

"The tendency is to say, if you're worried about that sleepover, don't go," he says. "But what you're doing is saying, if you get anxious about something, it means you can't do it.

"It's more helpful to say, 'I hear that you're worried about this. What can you do that's going to help?'," says Professor Stallard. "Focus on exploring solutions with your child, instead of just talking about all the things that could go wrong."

## Other ways to ease anxiety in children

- Teach your child to recognise signs of worry in themselves and to ask for help when it strikes.
- Children of all ages find routines reassuring so try to stick to regular daily routines where possible.
- If your child is anxious because of distressing events, such as a bereavement or separation, see if you can find books or films that will help them understand their feelings.
- If you know a change, such as a house move is coming up, prepare your child by talking to them about what is going to happen and why.
- Try not to become anxious yourself or overprotective – rather than doing things for your child or helping them to avoid anxiety-provoking situations, encourage your child to find ways to manage them.
- Practice simple relaxation techniques with your child, such as taking three deep, slow breaths, breathing in for a count of three and out for three.
- Distraction can be helpful for young children. For example, if they are anxious about going to nursery, play games on the way there, such as seeing who can spot the most red cars.
- Turn an old tissue box into a "worry" box. Get your child to write down or draw their worries and post them into the box. Then you can sort through the box together at the end of the day or week.

## When should we get help?

If your child's anxiety is severe, persists and interferes with their everyday life, it's a good idea to get some help.

If your child's anxiety is affecting their school life, please come and talk to us about it in school. In the first instance, please talk to your Class Teacher or you can speak to the Inclusion Manager (or email: [senco@stipps.herts.sch.uk](mailto:senco@stipps.herts.sch.uk)). We will be able to help with practical support in school, and can also signpost and refer on to other agencies if we need to.

GPs and the School Nursing Team are also useful sources of information. They will often ask for a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire to be completed before they will consider any support or treatment. Mrs Nichols can provide this questionnaire and we will gladly complete in school too.

School Nursing Team: Both school and parents can access the school nursing team:

<https://www.hct.nhs.uk/our-services/school-nursing/>

Educational Psychology Contactline: Wednesday 2- 4.30pm – a 'quick queries' service for parents to speak to an Educational Psychologist on 01992 588574.

Parents and carers can get help and advice around children's mental health from Young Minds' free parent helpline on 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am-4pm).

**Shelf Help: Please ask Mrs Nichols if you'd like to borrow any of these resources to read at home:**



