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Techniques for Calming Anxiety for Youth

By Caitlin Bootsma

Do you have a child in your care who has higher levels of anxiety than other kids? Maybe she is really afraid of trying activities that could be somewhat risky, like riding a bike or diving into a pool. Perhaps he doesn't like new situations, particularly with bigger crowds or unfamiliar people. Maybe she worries to the point of tears about taking a test or performing in some way. Perhaps he is so afraid of heights it is hard to get him on a plane.

If so, they are not alone. Research [shows](#) that about 15-20% of kids have higher levels of anxiety due to the amygdala part of their brains being more reactive to stimuli. This sort of anxiety can keep kids from experiences they would normally enjoy and cause a lot of stress for kids and caretakers alike.



The following are some great techniques for helping kids deal with anxiety, suggested by Psychology Today.

- **Activate the Vagus Nerve** (on both sides of your voice box): Activities like chewing gum, singing or eating chocolate can send a signal to your brain that everything is okay.
- **Deep breathing**: Along with taking deep, long breaths, you can also try having children whistle or blow bubbles.
- **Crossing the midline of the Body**: Amazingly, when you have your arms and legs cross the center of the body, it can activate both hemispheres of the brain! Try windmills, marching, or walking around in a figure eight.
- **Muscle movement**: Carrying a heavy backpack, doing pushups against a wall, or pulling a wagon (or dragging a full laundry basket) can help kids calm down.
- **Talk it out**: Expressing what is bothering them can be an important way to name their fear and then create a plan for overcoming it. Remember, emotions are neutral, and "feelings" should always be validated.

Find more ideas [here](#).

Some of these ideas will be more effective and some will be less so depending on the child. In addition, if anxiety is persistent and regularly interrupts daily life, seeking professional assistance from a mental health professional or agency can be a crucial step to getting children the help they need.

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What is Your Opinion?

When do you feel God's mercy?

- When I attend Mass or take the time to read the Scriptures.
- After I have forgiven myself for something or received grace through reconciliation.
- By being merciful to someone else.
- After accepting that I am not to blame for someone else hurting me.
- I'm not sure.

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