

How to help kids manage worries

Our tamariki mightn't have to pay bills, cook dinners or organise carpools but just like us they face daily demands and worries, and what seems trivial to us can be important to them. So what can we do to help?

Be a first-rate listener

Firstly, think about yourself as a child or young adult. Did anyone make you feel truly listened to? If so, what did they do? Copy this! Be available and interested. Take casual opportunities to ask your tamariki how different things are going.

Also, be assured our brains are malleable and flexible, so children can re-learn coping strategies that don't include lots of worrying. But as always, seek extra help, if you have ongoing concerns.

Show you care

If your child does share a worry, avoid intensely questioning or lecturing them. Just listen attentively, be interested and show you care. They may talk to you while you're doing the dishes or in the car and if so, great! They'll be more relaxed when the focus isn't completely on them.

Validate their feelings

Voice the feelings you pick up (E.g. "That sounds like it's worrying / bothering / bugging you."). And thank them for chatting with you. Remind them that worrying is normal and can even be helpful - motivating us to study, be alert, focus and run faster.

Event-based worries

If something worrying is coming up - i.e. a test or their first day at a new school - encourage them to think of a similar challenge they overcame i.e. their first day of school. Talk about the strengths they have and how these can help. If your child is 11 or older, we recommend our [Find Your Strengths quiz](#).

Teach perspective and humour

Without minimising their worry, remind them that problems are temporary and solvable, and that whatever happens things will be okay. Where appropriate, humour can lighten the mood and foster resilience, as can reminding them that there'll be better days and chances to try again.

Guide kids to solutions

When possible, support tamariki to deal with challenging situations. If your child tells you about a problem, offer to brainstorm solutions together, resisting the urge to jump in and fix the issue. Then encourage them to pick the best solution. When children play an active role, you're teaching them how to problem-solve.

Offer Physical reassurance

If your child is frequently worried or anxious, look for ways to let them know their world is safe. This can mean going back to basics and providing physical reassurance through love, hugs, back-rubs, hand holding or keeping them close.

SHOW THE WAY

THE MOST POWERFUL LESSONS WE TEACH ARE THE ONES WE DEMONSTRATE. YOUR RESPONSE TO YOUR OWN WORRIES, STRESS, AND FRUSTRATIONS CAN GO A LONG WAY TOWARD TEACHING YOUR TAMARIKI HOW TO DEAL WITH EVERYDAY CHALLENGES. IF YOU'RE RATTLED OR ANGRY WHEN DEALING WITH A TO-DO LIST, YOUR CHILDREN WILL LEARN THAT THIS IS HOW WE RESPOND TO STRESS.

INSTEAD, LOOK ON THE BRIGHT SIDE AND VOICE OPTIMISTIC THOUGHTS AS OFTEN AS YOU TALK ABOUT WHAT BOTHERS YOU. BY SHOWING YOUR CHILDREN YOU CAN BOUNCE BACK, YOU'LL HELP THEM LEARN TO RESPOND TO SMALL PROBLEMS WITH OPTIMISM, CONFIDENCE AND PERSEVERANCE.

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Create a 'chat time' or worry box

You might also like to schedule a chat time early in the evening, where 'thoughts' (worries) can be shared, particularly about the next day (to avoid dwelling on these at bedtime). Another great strategy is to create a "worry box" you can store these worries in. The idea is to write them down, fold them up tight and put them in the box, so your child can be free of them until morning.

Externalise worries

For an easy means to talk about worries, we recommend books such as [Maia and the Worry Bug](#). Maia stomps on her worries and throws them out the door. Externalising worries is fantastic for tamariki aged 4-8 years, while Rising Tide has great strategies for children aged 8-13.

Front-foot things

If you suspect your child has a worry, let them know you're there if they want to talk. Avoid bringing up challenges they've had in the past, as this can cause them to refocus on things they've moved on from. A great way to promote open communication is to say: "You can tell me anything" when your tamariki ask if they can tell you something. Foster mindfulness: Learn about mindfulness – focussing on the here and now rather than dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. Try the CD [Sitting Still like a Frog](#), and see our [How to help kids keep calm sheet](#) for handy techniques like tummy breathing and creating routine.

Build self esteem

If your child worries often, give praise when they:

- Walk into a new place. E.g. "Thanks for coming to the supermarket with me, I loved having your company."
- Manage a new situation: "I liked the way you walked into your class today. You looked really confident and it made me proud."
- Try something new: "I love that you gave that a go, and kept at it."
- Make a decision: "Great decision. Well done."
- Converse with you: "I love talking with you."

Play together

Spend time playing with your child each day. Even if it's just 10 minutes. Give them some undivided attention – bounce on the trampoline, build the Lego tower. Let them see you having fun and enjoying being with them.

For our favourite kids' books, resources and tips, head to allright.org.nz/sparklers/kids

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