



The Parent's Guide

ANXIETY

Your child and anxiety

A warm, practical guide for the parent of a worried child: how to see the fear underneath the behaviour, lower the heat at home, take small brave steps together, and know when to get help.

Who this is for: the parent or carer of a child who worries.

Cited: peer-reviewed research and national guidance.

Languages: English, Hindi, Marathi, and Kannada.

Read it free at weave.clinic/family

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✿ IS THIS MY CHILD

Is this my child, or is this worry?

✿ IN SHORT

The tummy ache before school. The endless "what if" questions. The meltdown at the door, the clinging at drop-off. If this is your home, you are not failing and your child is not being difficult on purpose. Something real is going on, and it has a shape.

Maybe it is the same scene most mornings. The stomach ache that appears right before school and fades by lunchtime. The questions that never end, each answer only buying a minute of calm. The tears at the gate, the small hand that will not let go. By the time you get to work you are already tired, and a little worried about what people think.

Here is the first thing to know. **Worry is one of the most common struggles children face, not something rare and not your child being naughty.** Roughly one in fifteen children and teenagers around the world live with this kind of ongoing fear. Your child is far from alone, and so are you.

Only a doctor or a trained clinician can say what is really going on, and this booklet puts no label on your child. What you can do today is simpler and just as powerful: notice the pattern, and start meeting it with a little more calm.

About 1 in 15

children live with ongoing worry

A worried child is far from alone. This is a recognised, common struggle, not rare and not a child's fault.



The gate, the goodbye, and the fear that shows up as a stomach ache.

For many worried children, school is where the fear gathers. The night before, the questions start. In the morning, the body joins in: a churning stomach, a headache, legs that suddenly will not move. It can look like stubbornness or drama from the outside. Underneath, it is a child bracing against something that feels genuinely dangerous, even when you can see there is nothing there to fear.

There is real relief in learning that this has a shape and a name that professionals understand well, and that there are clear, tested things that help. You do not have to guess your way through it alone. The rest of this booklet walks you through what worry actually is, what your child feels underneath it, and the small moves at home that make the biggest difference.

● TRY THIS

For the next two days, just notice, without changing anything yet. When does the worry spike, mornings, bedtime, new places, goodbyes? When is your child easy and light? You are not fixing anything. You are learning the shape of your own child's fear.

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✿ WHAT IT IS, WHAT IT IS NOT

What it is, and what it is not

✿ IN SHORT

This is wiring, not bad behaviour and not bad parenting. A worried child has an alarm system that fires too often and too loudly, warning of danger that is not really there. You did not cause it.

Think of it as an alarm that is set too sensitive. In a worried child, the part of the brain that senses danger goes off easily and loudly, even when there is nothing to fear. The fear is real to your child, even when the danger is not. So the avoidance, the refusal, the tears and the endless questions are the alarm doing its job, not your child choosing to make life hard.

And you did not cause this. Fear like this grows from a mix of things: a child's inborn temperament, their life experiences, and family history. It is not the result of anything you did wrong. Blaming yourself helps no one, and it is not even accurate.



The day I stopped asking "what did I do wrong" and started asking "what does he need from me right now", the mornings got easier for both of us.

A mother, Hubli

A naturally cautious or shy child, the one who hangs back at the party and takes a long time to warm up, is a little more likely to grow into a worried child. But temperament is not destiny. Being cautious as a baby does not seal a child's future. The way the family responds to the fear can change the path a great deal, and that is genuinely hopeful news.

It helps to hold two things at once. The behaviour that frustrates you, the "I can't", the clinging, the flat "no", is the fear talking. It is not defiance, and it is not a verdict on your love or your parenting.

 REMEMBER

The avoidance and the refusal are the fear speaking, not your child choosing to defy you. Naming it as fear, out loud and to yourself, is the first step to staying patient when it is hard.

More, if you want it

Separating the fear from the child does not mean nothing is expected of them. It means you stop treating a frightened child as a badly behaved one, and start treating the fear as the problem you both face together. "Your body is telling you this is dangerous, and I know it feels real, and I also know you are safe and you can do this" is a sentence a worried child can slowly learn to trust.

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✿ WHAT YOUR CHILD FEELS UNDERNEATH

What your child feels underneath

✿ IN SHORT

Under the behaviour is a body on high alert: a racing heart, a tight chest, a churning stomach, a mind spinning worst-case stories. To your child, the danger feels completely real.

Picture what worry does inside a small body. The heart speeds up. The chest tightens. The stomach churns. The mind runs ahead, spinning one worst-case story after another. This is not your child being dramatic. It is a real physical state, the same one your own body makes when you are genuinely afraid, switched on over things that are not actually dangerous.

The clinging, the questions, the "I can't", these are attempts to feel safe, not attempts to control you. And here is the tricky part. Avoiding the scary thing brings quick relief, which is exactly why the fear keeps coming back stronger. Every time your child escapes the feared thing, the alarm learns that escape was necessary, and it rings louder next time.

The fear feels real

to your child, always

Their body is genuinely on alert, even when you can see there is no danger.

Relief that lasts minutes

teaches the fear to return

Avoiding the scary thing calms things now, and strengthens the fear for next time.

This is why reassurance is such a trap. Answering the same worry for the twentieth time feels kind, and it does calm your child, for a moment. But the calm never lasts, because reassurance quietly teaches the brain that the situation really was dangerous and needed rescuing. The worry comes back needing another dose, and then another.

Children often cannot put any of this into words. A meltdown, a stomach ache, or a flat "no" may be the only way the fear can speak. When you can see the fear underneath the behaviour, it becomes far easier to stay patient, and your patience is one of the most useful things you have.

● **TRY THIS**

Next time your child is gripped by worry, try naming the feeling instead of arguing with it. "Your worry is really loud right now. I can see it. I am right here." You are not agreeing the danger is real. You are showing your child that big feelings can be met calmly and survived.

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✿ WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS AT HOME

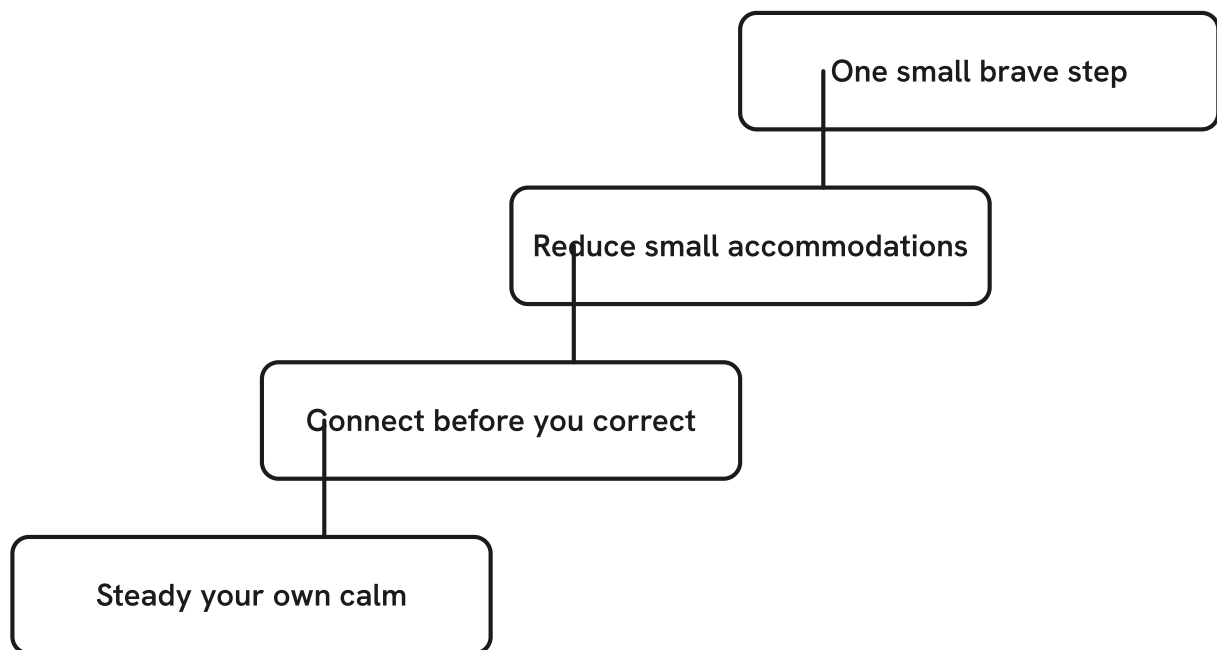
What actually helps at home

✿ IN SHORT

Lower the heat first: your calm, steady presence is the strongest tool you have. Then, gently and slowly, stop the whole family from bending around the fear, and take small brave steps together.

Start with yourself. A regulated parent helps a dysregulated child settle, so connect before you correct. When your child is flooded with fear, they cannot think or reason. Your steady voice, your slower breathing, your calm body, these do more than any clever words. Get alongside the feeling first. The problem-solving comes after the storm has passed, not during it.

Then, gently and gradually, reduce the small accommodations. Every time the whole family bends around the fear, skipping school, answering the same worry twenty times, letting a child sleep in your bed to avoid the upset, it quietly feeds the fear. Family accommodation drives a large share of the day-to-day trouble that worry causes. You are not being unkind by easing off it. You are handing your child back their own strength.



Lower the heat, one step at a time. Start with your own calm, and build up to a small brave step together.

Start by steadying your own calm before anything else.

Connect with your child before you try to correct or fix.

Gently reduce the small ways the family bends around the fear.

Take one small brave step, and praise the trying.

The key is to support, not rescue. Rescuing removes the scary thing; supporting helps your child face it while you stand close. Show quiet confidence that they can handle hard moments: "I know this feels scary, and I know you can do it, and I am right here." Take one small brave step at a time, not a giant leap, and praise the trying, not just the outcome. A child who tried and wobbled still tried, and that is what you celebrate.

Support, do not rescue.

Do not remove the scary thing for them. Stand beside them while they face a small piece of it, and let them feel themselves cope.

One small step.

Break the feared thing into tiny stages. Each step your child manages makes the next one possible. Slow is not failure, slow is how bravery is built.

Praise the trying.

Notice and name the effort, not only the win. "You were scared and you did it anyway" is the sentence that grows courage.

Drop the extra reassurance.

Answer a worry once, kindly, then gently hold the line. Endless answering feeds the fear it is trying to soothe.

The evidence here is strong. Structured therapy for the child, and parent-led approaches that reduce accommodation, both bring real improvement, and helping the parent alone can work as well as treating the child directly. What you do at home genuinely matters.

● TRY THIS

Pick one small accommodation this week, just one. Maybe you answer the same bedtime worry a little less each night, or your child walks the last few steps to the gate alone. Warn them kindly in advance, stay calm and close, and praise the trying afterwards. Small and steady beats big and forced every time.

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✿ LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF AND THE FAMILY

Looking after yourself and the family

✿ IN SHORT

This is a marathon, not a sprint. Your own rest and support are part of the treatment, not a luxury. Watch that worry does not quietly take over the whole household, and share the load.

You cannot pour from an empty cup. Parent stress and exhaustion are real and completely expected when you are living alongside a worried child. Your own rest and support are part of the treatment, not a luxury you have to earn. A depleted parent cannot stay calm, and calm is exactly what your child needs most.

Watch, too, that worry does not quietly reorganise the whole household. It is easy for the family schedule, the outings, even the conversations, to slowly bend around one child's fear, leaving brothers and sisters feeling sidelined. The family works best as a calm team facing the fear together, not one child versus everyone else.

♥ IN YOUR CORNER

If it ever tips into "I cannot keep doing this", that feeling is common and reachable, not a failure. You are allowed to be tired, and you are allowed to need support of your own. The crisis card linked below has people you can talk to, any time.

Notice your own worry, gently and without shame. Fear can travel between generations, and children read our faces closely, so a parent's own steady, brave coping is one of the most powerful lessons on offer. You do not have to be fearless. You just have to show your child, in small everyday ways, that scary feelings can be faced and survived.

And share the load. Bring in a partner, a trusted relative, or your child's school, so that no single person carries all of it. In India, a supportive family network is a real strength here, use it. A grandparent who understands the plan, an aunt who can take an evening, a teacher who knows not to make a fuss at drop-off, all of these lighten what you carry and steady your child.

More, if you want it

Find one person who is fully on your side, someone you can say the hard, tired parts to without being judged. Resentment and exhaustion grow in silence. Saying them out loud to someone who gets it takes weight off your chest, and a lighter parent is a calmer parent. Looking after yourself is not taking something away from your child. A rested, steadier you is the best thing your child has.

● TRY THIS

This week, choose one small thing that is only for you, half an hour with a friend, a walk, an early night, and take it without guilt. Then think of one person you could bring into the team, and tell them one specific way they could help.

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✿ WHEN TO GET HELP, AND CRISIS

When to get help, and crisis

✿ IN SHORT

Consider seeing a doctor or child mental health professional when the fear stops normal life, or when it has lasted weeks and is not easing. Help works, and the earlier a family reaches for it, the better things tend to go.

It is worth seeing a doctor or a child mental health professional when the fear stops your child from going to school, sleeping, eating, making friends, or joining normal family life, or when it has lasted for weeks and is not easing on its own. Reaching out early is not an overreaction. It is one of the wisest things a parent can do.

And help genuinely works. Talking therapy is the first-line, well-tested treatment, and it helps a great many children. Sometimes a doctor may also discuss medicine as a category, weighed carefully case by case, but that is a conversation to have with a clinician, never an automatic step. The earlier a family gets support, the better things tend to go.

Help works

and earlier is better

Talking therapy is the first-line, tested treatment for a worried child, and reaching out sooner tends to mean better outcomes.

There is one situation that needs a different kind of attention. If your child ever talks about not wanting to be here, about hurting themselves, or about wanting to disappear, take it seriously and stay close. Do not leave them alone, gently remove access to anything dangerous, and reach out for help the same day. These words from a child are always worth acting on, even when part of you hopes they did not mean it.

You can call **Tele-MANAS on 14416** any time, day or night, for free mental health support across India, in your own language. In an immediate emergency, go to the nearest hospital. Asking for help is a sign of strength, not failure, and it is one of the bravest things a parent can model for a worried child.

 REMEMBER

You do not have to carry this alone, and you were never meant to. Notice the pattern, lower the heat, take small brave steps together, and reach for help early. A worried child, with a calm and steady parent beside them, can learn that the world is more manageable than the fear insists.

● TRY THIS

Write down two things and keep them on your phone. One: the single worry or behaviour you would most want to ask a doctor about. Two: the Tele-MANAS number, 14416. Two small moves, one toward understanding and one toward help, are how the road forward begins.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

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FURTHER READING

- NHS: Anxiety disorders in children, information for parents

This guide helps you recognise and understand. It is not a diagnosis. For that, see a professional.

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- Feeling like it is all too much? **Read the crisis card.** Help is one page away.