



# PRESCHOOL ANXIETY

## CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A PRESCHOOLER BEING ANXIOUS, but sometimes this can happen in uncertain situations, a crowded or loud environment, or when they are separated from a parent. What seems small to us, as adults, can be very big to a preschooler. It's even harder to know when a preschooler is anxious because they may not have the words to verbally express what they're feeling and thinking. That's why it's important to be aware of physical cues that may be telling you they are experiencing anxiety such as stomach aches, sudden change in behavior, excessive crying and extreme frustration.

## EMBRACE THEIR PHYSICAL NEEDS.

Knowing how to talk with your child during these times can help them learn how to express and process their anxiety in healthy ways. Here are a few ideas of what to say and what not to say.

### WHAT TO SAY

- "I am here. You are safe." (*reassure*)
- "May I give you a hug?" (*co-regulate*)
- "Use your words to tell me about your worry or what you're afraid of. Can you draw me a picture of it?" (*acknowledge*)
- "Tell me about a time that made you feel really happy inside." (*imagery*)
- "God wants us to talk to Him when we're worried and afraid. Tell Him how you feel, because He loves you and wants to help."
- "Thank you for telling me how you feel. I will always try to help you as much as I can."

### WHAT NOT TO SAY

- "It's time to be a big boy/girl."
- "You'll be fine, so just stop worrying."
- "Stop being silly."
- "There's nothing to be worried/scared about."
- "That will never happen."
- Nothing.

MAKE SURE TO INVOLVE PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS, AS NEEDED, AS WELL AS YOUR MINISTRY LEADER.



# ELEMENTARY ANXIETY

## CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

TRYING OUT FOR A TEAM. TAKING TESTS IN SCHOOL. MAKING NEW FRIENDS. Every kid will be faced with these common events in the elementary years and some will experience anxiety when they do. What may seem small to us, as parents, can feel overwhelming to a kid. While some kids are very verbal about their worries and fears, others need a little more observation from caring adults to see the non-verbal physical signs of anxiety such as stomachaches, extreme frustration and isolation.

## ENGAGE THEIR INTERESTS.

Knowing how to talk with your kid during these times can help them learn how to express and process their anxiety in healthy ways. Here are a few ideas of what to say and what not to say.

## WHAT TO SAY

- "I am here. You are safe."
- "Tell me about your day. *(Or the practice, party, sleepover . . . whatever event immediately happened prior to the anxious behavior.)*"
- "Tell me about your worry or what you're afraid of. Can you describe it? Draw it?"
- "Think about a time that made you feel happy—no worry, no fear, just happy. Would you like to tell me what you're thinking?"
- "God wants us to talk to Him when we're worried and afraid. Tell Him what you're thinking and how you feel. He loves you and wants to help."
- "Thank you for telling me how you feel. I will always try to help you as much as I can."

## WHAT NOT TO SAY

- "Stress is just a part of life."
- "There's nothing to be worried/scared about."
- "These are the reasons not to be scared/worried . . ."
- "Why are you anxious/afraid/stressed?" *(Avoid "why" questions because they may not be able to articulate what is motivating their feelings.)*
- "Don't worry. I can fix it." *(Don't try and fix anything—just be present.)*
- Nothing.

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# MIDDLE SCHOOL ANXIETY

## CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

MIDDLE SCHOOL IS A TIME WHEN students and parents can be equally as anxious. The student is thinking . . . *Will I fit in at the new middle school? Will I remember where my classes are? Will I make any friends?* It's important that you as a parent model the behaviors you want for your student. While some middle schoolers can tell you exactly what they're thinking and feeling, others are still attempting to formulate thoughts into words during this phase. Be patient and aware of nonverbal physical signs of anxiety such as stomachaches, extreme frustration, avoidance and isolation.

## AFFIRM THEIR PERSONAL JOURNEY.

Knowing how to talk with your child during these times can help them learn how to express and process their anxiety in healthy ways. Here are a few ideas of what to say and what not to say.

## WHAT TO SAY

- "Tell me about your day. (Or the practice, test . . . whatever event immediately happened prior to the anxious behavior. Or whatever friends or people they were with prior to the anxious behavior.)"
- "Can you describe what worries you/what you're afraid of?"
- "How has feeling this way prevented you from being happy/being who you want to be/doing what you want to do?"
- "This is what I hear you saying . . . Did I hear you correctly?"
- "God wants us to talk to Him when we're worried and afraid. Tell Him what you're thinking and feeling. He loves you and wants to help you."
- "Would you be willing to speak with someone, like a counselor, who can give you some things to do to help you when you're anxious?"
- "Thank you for telling me how you feel. I will always try to help you as much as I can."

## WHAT NOT TO SAY

- "Life is stressful. You have to learn to deal with it."
- "Christians are not supposed to be anxious. It's wrong."
- "This is what I think . . . This is what I feel . . ."
- "These are the reasons not to be scared . . ."
- "Don't worry. I can fix it." (Do not try and fix anything—just be present.)
- "Let's just think this through logically." (Avoid using logic. Logic does not speak to emotions.)
- Nothing.

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# HIGH SCHOOL ANXIETY

## CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

LEARNING TO DRIVE. PEER GROUPS. FIRST REAL JOB. DATING. GETTING INTO COLLEGE. There's a lot of pressure in high school just with "normal" life. Throw in any number of additional stress inducers and you may see signs of anxiety, such as stomachaches, extreme irritability, avoidance and isolation.

### MOBILIZE THEIR POTENTIAL.

Being able to handle feelings and thoughts associated with anxiety is a major life skill you can help your student develop. Knowing how to talk with them during these times can help them learn how to express and process their anxiety in healthy ways. Here are a few ideas of what to say and what not to say.

### WHAT TO SAY

- "Would you like to tell me about what worries you/what you're afraid of?"
- "How has thinking/feeling this way stopped you from being happy/being who you want to be/doing what you want to do?"
- "This is what I hear you saying . . . Did I hear you correctly?"
- "I can see how you would feel that way/think that."
- "I have struggled with feeling anxious too." (*Be authentic and share your own experience with anxiety.*)
- "God wants us to talk to Him when we're worried and afraid. Tell Him what you're thinking and feeling. He loves you and wants to help you."
- "Would you be willing to speak with someone, like a counselor, who can give you some things to do to help you when you're anxious?"
- "I can't thank you enough for telling me how you feel and what you're thinking. I will always try to help you as much as I can."

### WHAT NOT TO SAY

- "Life is stressful. Get over it."
- "Christians are not supposed to be anxious. It's wrong."
- "This is what you need to do . . ." (*Try and listen and reflect back on what you heard rather than just telling them what to do.*)
- "Don't worry. I can fix it." (*Don't try and fix anything—just be present.*)
- "Let's just think this through logically." (*Avoid using logic. Logic does not speak to emotions.*)
- Nothing.

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