



PARENT TOOLKIT

Anxiety (Out of School)



Anxiety is a normal emotion that helps keep us safe, but sometimes it can become overwhelming for children. Many children experience anxiety not just at school, but when out with parents in everyday situations like shopping, visiting new places, or being in crowds.

Common Signs of Anxiety

Children may:

- Worry a lot about where they are going or what will happen
- Stay very close to parents or refuse to separate even briefly
- Become overwhelmed in busy, noisy, or unfamiliar places
- Ask repeated questions for reassurance
- Complain of tummy aches, headaches, or feeling unwell
- Become upset, withdrawn, or have meltdowns when out

Anxiety When Out with Parents

Common situations:

- Going to shops or supermarkets
- Attending parties, events, or family gatherings
- Visiting new places (e.g. holidays, days out)
- Being around unfamiliar people

What it might look like:

- Clinging to you or refusing to walk independently
- Wanting to leave quickly
- Becoming tearful or overwhelmed
- Avoiding interaction with others

How to help:

- Talk through plans before leaving the house (what, where, how long)
- Use simple, clear expectations
- Bring familiar comfort items (toy, snack, headphones)
- Allow your child to stay close to you if needed
- Offer reassurance, but avoid repeating it excessively

Anxiety in Busy or Crowded Places

What it might look like:

- Sensory overload (noise, lights, movement)
- Covering ears or shutting down
- Irritability or sudden emotional outbursts

How to help:

- Start with quieter environments and build up gradually
- Visit places at off-peak times
- Identify quiet spaces or exits in advance
- Take regular breaks
- Give your child a sense of control (e.g. choosing an item, helping with a task)

Anxiety About Separation (Even Briefly)

What it might look like:

- Not wanting to let go of your hand
- Distress if you step away (e.g. paying at a till)
- Fear of getting lost or not finding you

How to help:

- Stay calm and confident
- Explain clearly what will happen ("I'll be right here")
- Practise short separations in safe environments
- Praise bravery, even for very small steps

Practical Strategies to Support Your Child

1. Prepare in Advance
 - Talk through what to expect
 - Use visual cues or simple plans ("First we shop, then we go home")
2. Use Calming Techniques
 - Deep breathing (in for 4, out for 4)
 - Grounding (name 5 things you can see, 4 you can feel, etc.)
 - Holding a comforting object

3. Build Confidence Gradually
 - Break outings into small, manageable steps
 - Increase time or complexity slowly
 - Celebrate small successes
4. Offer Choices
 - Give simple choices to increase control ("Do you want to hold my hand or the trolley?")
5. Stay Calm and Consistent
 - Your response helps shape theirs
 - Keep your tone steady and reassuring

Helpful Phrases to Use

- "I can see this feels a bit scary. I'm right here."
- "Let's do this together."
- "We can take a break if you need one."
- "You're safe with me."

Every child is different. With patience, preparation, and support, children can learn to manage anxiety in everyday situations. Small steps make a big difference over time.