



# PARENT TOOLKIT

## *Anxiety (KS1)*



### Understanding Anxiety in Young Children

At this age, children often don't have the words to explain their worries. Anxiety usually shows up through behaviour:

- Tummy aches / headaches
- Tearfulness or clinginess
- Avoiding school or activities
- Angry outbursts
- "What if?" questions
- Trouble sleeping
- Freezing, refusing, or hiding
- Seeking reassurance often

Anxiety is **not naughtiness** — it is a signal that something feels scary or too big for them.

### Common Triggers

- Separation from a parent
- Changes in routine
- Loud noises or busy environments
- Worries about friendships
- Fear of making mistakes
- Not understanding instructions
- Sensory overload
- Feeling rushed
- Conflict or tension at home

Children feel calmer when life is predictable and adults stay steady.

## **Everyday Strategies to Reduce Anxiety**

### **Keep routines predictable**

Daily patterns help children feel safe.

### **Use visual schedules**

Pictures help them understand “what’s next”.

### **Give gentle countdowns**

“5 minutes left until tidy-up.”

### **Keep instructions short**

One simple step at a time.

### **Build in movement breaks**

Jumping, stretching, crawling, pushing — it regulates the nervous system.

### **Notice strengths**

Praise effort and courage, not perfection.

### **Model calm behaviour**

Slow voice, slow body, slow breathing.

## **Emotional Literacy for KS1**

Children need help naming their feelings. Try:

- **Feelings charts**
- **Emotion faces**
- **Storybooks about feelings**
- **“I feel... I need...” sentence starters**
- **Daily check-in:**  
“What colour is your mood today?”

Keep it simple and playful.

## **Calming Strategies for Young Children**

Teach these when they're calm so they can use them when anxious:

### **Breathing games**

- Blow bubbles
- Feather breathing
- “Smell the flower, blow the candle”

### **Safe sensory activities**

- Playdough
- Water play
- Fidget toys
- Weighted cuddly toys (under guidance)
- Calm corner with blankets or a tent

### **Movement to release tension**

- Animal walks
- Bear crawls
- Wall push-ups
- Jumping on the spot

## Grounding techniques

- “5 things you can see”
- “Wiggle your fingers and toes”
- “Hold something soft”

## Home Strategies

- Keep mornings calm and organised
- Use a goodbye routine (hug → phrase → wave)
- Practise “little brave steps” gradually
- Avoid lots of reassurance — replace with **confidence-building**:  
“You can do hard things. I believe in you.”
- Make a worry box or worry monster
- Keep bedtime gentle and predictable

## School Strategies

Schools can support by:

- Providing a calm, predictable classroom routine
- Giving visual aids for transitions
- Offering a safe space (reading corner, tent, beanbag)
- Using a calming activity on arrival
- Allowing a “help card” or “I need space” card
- Offering check-ins with a familiar adult
- Preparing the child ahead for changes
- Using small, achievable steps for tasks
- Praising bravery, not outcome

## **When Anxiety Shows as “Behaviour”**

For young children, anxiety might look like:

- Refusing
- Hiding
- Freezing
- Running off
- Shouting
- Clinging
- Meltdowns

Respond with calmness and reassurance:

“Your body feels worried. I’m here. Let’s help it feel safe.”

Avoid punishment — fear makes anxiety stronger.

## **Helpful Phrases to Use**

- “You’re safe.”
- “Your feelings make sense.”
- “I’m here to help.”
- “Let’s breathe together.”
- “You’re brave for trying.”
- “It’s okay to feel worried. We can handle it.”

Short, soothing and predictable words work best.

## **When to Seek Extra Support**

Seek guidance if:

- Anxiety stops them joining in
- They refuse school regularly
- Sleep is heavily disrupted
- They have panic-like symptoms

- Avoidance is increasing
- Their worries are affecting family life