



PARENT TOOLKIT

Anxiety (KS2)



What Anxiety Looks Like in KS2

Children at this age are more aware of the world and often worry more deeply than younger children. Anxiety can show up as:

- Frequent “what if...?” questions
- Avoiding school or activities
- Fear of trying new things
- Perfectionism or fear of making mistakes
- Reassurance-seeking
- Tummy aches or headaches
- Trouble concentrating
- Irritability or emotional outbursts
- Trouble with sleep
- Becoming quiet, withdrawn, or shutting down

They may understand their worries better, but still lack the skills to manage them.

Common Triggers

- Friendship issues and social pressures
- Schoolwork difficulty or fear of failure
- Tests and assessments
- Changes in routine or teacher absence
- Being in trouble
- Performance situations (reading aloud, PE, group work)
- Worries about illness, harm or safety
- Increased independence expectations

- Online/social media exposure (for some)

These worries feel very real and overwhelming to children.

Everyday Strategies That Really Help

Predictable routines

Structure creates security.

Plan for transitions

Give warning before changes, lessons, or leaving the house.

Chunk tasks into small steps

Success creates confidence.

Avoid rushing

Pressure increases anxiety.

Teach self-talk

“I can handle this.”

“This feeling will pass.”

Keep expectations clear and simple

Children feel safer when they know what to expect.

Calming Strategies

These work well because KS2 children can understand the purpose behind them.

Breathing Techniques

- Box breathing (4 in, 4 hold, 4 out, 4 hold)
- Rainbow breathing (trace an arc while breathing in and out)
- Counting breaths to 10

Grounding Techniques

- 5-4-3-2-1 senses activity
- Notice 10 things that are the same colour
- Hold something cold, warm, or textured

Worry Externalisation

Help children “take worries out of their head” by:

- Worry journals
- Worry monsters
- Writing worries on paper and scrunching it up
- “Parking” worries in a special box until later

Movement Regulation

Anxiety lives in the body. Movement calms the system:

- Walks, stretches, cycling
- Sensory regulation (fidgets, chewy tubes, tactile objects)
- Outdoor play

Emotion Coaching

Use this simple approach:

1. Name the feeling

“I think you’re feeling worried about tomorrow.”

2. Validate

“It makes sense you feel that way.”

3. Support

“Let’s look at what we can do about it.”

4. Teach a strategy

Breathing, grounding, problem-solving, or breaking the task down.

This helps children feel understood and builds long-term resilience.

Building Resilience & Coping Skills

Teach skills gradually:

- **Problem-solving** (“What are your options?”)
- **Planning ahead** for tricky situations
- **Positive self-talk**
- **Recognising early signs of worry**
- **Distinguishing fact from feelings**
- **Learning that mistakes are safe**

Use everyday moments:

“Remember when you were worried before and you managed it?”

School-Based Support

Schools can help by providing:

- A calm start to the day
- Clear routines and visual timetables
- A designated safe adult or area
- Break cards or movement breaks
- Check-ins before known triggers (tests, transitions)
- Extra time to complete work
- Alternatives to speaking in front of the class
- Advance notice of changes
- Reduced sensory overload in learning spaces

Evening & Sleep Support

Anxious children often struggle at night because the brain is quieter:

- Keep bedtime routine predictable
- Avoid screens for at least 1 hour before bed
- Use calm activities (reading, drawing, warm bath)
- Use a “worry notepad” to write thoughts down before sleep
- Reassure with confidence-based phrases:
“You can handle tomorrow. You’ve done it before.”

Helpful Phrases to Use

- “Your feelings make sense.”
- “Let’s solve this together.”
- “You don’t have to be perfect — you just need to try.”
- “You’ve done hard things before.”
- “Worries are thoughts, not facts.”
- “This feeling will pass.”
- “You’re safe, and I’m right here.”

When to Seek Extra Support

Consider further help when anxiety:

- Stops your child attending school
- Causes panic attacks
- Leads to extreme avoidance or distress
- Affects sleep long-term
- Interferes with friendships
- Prevents them taking part in everyday activities
- Has lasted for several months without improvement