

Healthy Living

Managing Anxiety



There could be any number of situations that might cause a child to feel anxious. As individuals what causes them anxiety could be similar or different to others. What is important is that practitioners can recognise signs that a child is experiencing anxiety, and that they are skilled in applying a measured and consistent approach.

Through a strong key person system and positive relationships with those in the setting, the child will be enabled to develop trust and a sense of security. Children that experience heightened anxieties can be unsettled and may present behaviours that challenge. Some children may not be able to express verbally how they feel. They may need support in understanding what is causing their feelings of anxiety.

Task 1

The child.

How will you know that a child is struggling? What behaviours might we see?

Draw a stick child on a piece of flip chart/large paper. Take it in turns noting a potential indicator that you might see in the child should they be struggling with anxious feelings e.g., rigid posture, avoiding eye contact, rapid breathing, shouting, throwing, seeking physical comfort etc...

Can you think of a time when a child in your care demonstrated these kinds of behaviours? Did you feel at the time that this could be linked to anxious feelings that the child was experiencing? How did you respond?

It is important to remember that anxiety is a natural emotion – the aim is not to eradicate all feelings of anxiety, but instead to support children to express and manage their anxieties before or as they become consuming.

Task 2

Your curriculum.

On a fresh piece of paper, start working on a mind map of what you already provide as part of your curriculum that supports children to develop the skills to understand and manage feelings of anxiety?

Make a note of any resources you may have e.g., comforters, stress balls, fidget toys, family books, the child's favourite toy etc.

What about the layout and freedom with the environment e.g., a quiet space, can they go outside if they need to, can they hide under a table if it makes them feel safe.

Don't forget to capture the activities you plan around emotions, links to PSED, how you manage and facilitate transitions etc.

Task 3

The role of the key person.

Reflect individually on the skills and practice the key person needs to possess to effectively support a child experiencing anxiety?

Consider:

- Strong communicator: are they mindful of the language they use when communicating with a child – is it age appropriate, is it leading?
- Active listener – do they make the child feel heard?
- Emotional coach* - promoting vocabulary to support children in articulating their emotions.
- Patient – staying calm and regulating own emotions when children present behaviour that is challenging.
- Empathetic – Able to show care and understanding when a child is distressed, supporting parents and children with separation anxiety.
- Vigilant – Able to identify when a child becomes withdrawn etc.
- Observer – able to read what they are seeing and relate this to their knowledge of child development.

What more needs adding to this list? Does this list reflect you as a key person? Where you identify gaps, speak with your line manager about opportunities to develop your skills as a key person.

Task 4

Research task – Anxiety in the early years is an extensive topic, with a wealth of information readily available to support professionals.

Task a member of the team to spend some time exploring different aspects of managing anxiety in the early years, using reputable sources such as;

- Link to other Q cards: Teaching and learning section.
 - Separation anxiety
 - Developing relationships and emotions
 - Feeling secure
- [Action for children - https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/](https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/)
- [NHS moodzone - https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/](https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/)
- [Mental health for early years children - Help for early years providers - GOV.UK \(education.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/mental-health-for-early-years-children)

Ask the member of staff to feedback their learning to the rest of the team.

See also – Developing relationships – feeling secure (Teaching and learning)