

21 Phrases to Calm Anxiety

As parents, we would like to shield our children from life's anxious moments, but navigating anxiety is an essential life skill that will serve them in the years to come. In the heat of the moment, try these simple phrases to help your student identify, accept, and work through their anxious moments.

1. "Can you draw it?"

Drawing, painting or doodling about an anxiety provides them with an outlet for feelings when they can't use their words.

2. "I love you. You are safe."

Being told that you will be kept safe by the person you love the most is a powerful affirmation. Remember, anxiety makes us feel as if our minds and bodies are in danger. Repeating that they are safe can soothe the nervous system.

3. "I will say something and I want you to say it exactly as I do: 'I can do this.'" Do this 10 times at variable volume.

Marathon runners use this trick all the time to get past "the wall."

4. "What will happen next?"

If your student is anxious about an event, help them think through the event and identify what will come after it. Anxiety causes myopic vision, which makes life after the event seem to disappear.

5. "If how you feel was a monster, what would it look like?"

Giving anxiety a characterization helps to take a confusing feeling and make it concrete and palpable. Once kids have a worry character, they can talk to their worry.

6. "Let's put your worry on the shelf while we ____ (listen to your favorite song, run around the block, read this story). Then we'll pick it back up again."

Those who are anxiety-prone often feel as though they have to carry their anxiety until whatever they are anxious about is over. This is especially difficult when your students are anxious about something they cannot change in the future. Setting it aside to do something fun can help put their worries into perspective.

7. "Let's count ____."

This distraction technique requires no advance preparation. Counting the number of people wearing boots, the number of watches, the number of kids, or the number of hats in the room requires observation and thought, both of which detract from the anxiety your student is feeling.

8. "Close your eyes. Picture this..."

Visualization is a powerful technique used to ease pain and anxiety. Guide your student through imagining a safe, warm, happy place where they feel comfortable. If they are listening intently, the physical symptoms of anxiety will dissipate.

9. "I get scared/nervous/anxious sometimes too. It's no fun."

Empathy wins in many, many situations. It may even strike up a conversation with your older child about how you overcame anxiety.

10 "Let's pull out our calm-down checklist."

Anxiety can hijack the logical brain; carry a checklist with coping skills your student has practiced. When the need presents itself, operate off of this checklist.

11. "Tell me the worst thing that could possibly happen."

Once you've imagined the worst possible outcome of the worry, talk about the likelihood of that worst possible situation happening. Next, ask your student about the best possible outcome. Finally, ask them about the most likely outcome. The goal of this exercise is to help them think more accurately during their anxious experience.

12. "Let's find some evidence."

Collecting evidence to support or refute your student's reasons for anxiety helps them see if their worries are based on fact.

13. "Remember when..."

Competence breeds confidence. Confidence quells anxiety. Helping your student recall a time when they overcame anxiety gives them feelings of competence and thereby confidence in their abilities.

14. "I am proud of you already."

Knowing you are pleased with their efforts, regardless of the outcome, alleviates the need to do something perfectly – a source of stress for a lot of kids.

15. "We're going for a walk."

Exercise relieves anxiety for up to several hours as it burns excess energy, loosens tense muscles and boosts mood. If your student can't take a walk in that moment, have them run in place, bounce on a yoga ball, jump rope or stretch.

16. "I'm taking a deep breath."

Model a calming strategy and encourage your student to mirror you. If they allow it, try holding them to your chest so they can feel your rhythmic breathing and regulate theirs.

17. "How can I help?"

Let your student guide the situation and tell you what calming strategy or tool they prefer in this situation.

18. "I know this is hard."

Acknowledge that the situation is difficult. Your validation shows that you respect them.

19. "We'll get through this together."

Supporting your student with your presence and commitment can empower them to persevere until the scary situation is over.

20. "What else do you know about (scary thing)?"

When there is a source of consistent anxiety, research the topic when they are calm. Read books about the scary thing and learn as much as possible about it. When the anxiety surfaces again, ask them to recall what they've learned. This step removes power from the scary thing and empowers them.

21. "Let me hold you."

Give them a front hug, a hug from behind, or let them sit on your lap. The physical contact provides a chance for them to relax and feel safe.