



Addressing Anxiety in Foster Care

When children come into foster care, they have experienced tremendous loss. Although the removal from their family home was determined to be in their best interests and to keep them safe, it doesn't feel like it to the child. These children have lost family, home, personal belongings, and sometimes they lose siblings who may have been placed in a different home. Children experience anxiety when they go through loss, grief, or stress just as adults do. The difference is that children have not learned or acquired coping skills to help them through difficult times.

Here are some ideas that may help you as you parent a child experiencing anxiety.

- Express empathy when listening. Don't tell the child there is nothing to worry about. Their anxiety is real and being told that "everything will be fine" will be meaningless to them. When children explain what they are nervous about, let them know it's normal to be nervous or anxious. Let the child know that lots of kids feel the same way.
- Ask open-ended questions about feelings. Try not to make guesses about why the child is anxious. Doing so can add to a child's anxiety.
- Find things you can do together. Play games as a family, get out the bubbles or playdoh, go for walks to the park, read silly stories. Happiness and laughter can help alleviate anxiety and an opportunity for the child to open about feelings.
- Teach positive coping skills to build confidence. Coping skills for anxious children include learning deep breathing techniques and enjoying some type of physical exercise together. Don't forget that physical touch can also reduce anxiety for many children.
- Create a worry box. A worry box will provide children with a physical way of getting rid of their worries so they don't need to carry worries around anymore. It can also create a routine for sorting out their worries and sharing them with you. Link: [How to Make a Worry Box](#)
- Contact a professional. Contact your child's case worker or a mental health professional if your child's anxiety is making it difficult for him to cope with daily life.
- Pray for your child and family. Pray for direction as you parent a child that has suffered multiple losses and is experiencing feelings and emotions that are difficult to navigate. Pray for God's protection and healing for your child.