
ANXIOUS CHILDREN

Even young children can feel down and depressed. As a parent, it is easy to be dismissive or annoyed when children don't seem to be themselves.

If your child is upset for a number of days - rather than just being moody for a short while - you need to take notice of it. Persistent stropiness can show that a child is troubled.

The key to solving the problem is listening to what the child has to say. It can be hard for a child to explain their problem to a parent, so you may want to involve a trusted relative.

Trying to empathise might help too. Think of the things that bothered you as a child. Remember that events or thoughts can linger in children's minds.

Encouraging your son or daughter to talk is not always about sitting them down and having a chat. There are easier, more informal ways, to bring the subject up: perhaps in the car, when you're out for a walk, or doing the shopping.

Some children will need a lot of reassurance that it is OK to express their feelings.

Once your child has opened up, you must accept what they are saying as valid and real. Don't be dismissive, and don't ignore an unhappy or anxious child. Seek further help if things aren't getting better.

Q:

I'm finding it really hard to get through to my 12 year old son, and I know there is something on his mind. He's never been much of a talker. What should I do?

A:

All sorts of things can trigger anxiety in children. As a parent, you are the one who will provide your son with care, comfort and attention - so don't give up!

You could try to discuss possible issues that might be upsetting him, so he can see how much you understand and empathise with him.

He might be more responsive if you use an example of what happened to you when you were young - perhaps how you were unhappy and how you talked to someone you trusted to sort it all out. But be careful not to overdo it.

If a child is holding back, sometimes a grandparent or close relative can be of great help.

