



The Worried Child

– a guide for the parents and adults in a child's life

Intro

Is your child worried about being rejected, doing poorly, being ridiculed or doing something wrong? Is your child afraid of isolation, an accident or someone getting hurt? Does your child avoid challenges due to worries such as, for example, having to sleep by themselves, meeting new friends, having to say something in class or participating in sports or leisure activities? Or do excessive concerns cause tension in the child's body or pain in their head and stomach?

With this leaflet, you will be equipped to support and have a conversation with your

child if he/she has multiple concerns that affect their mental well-being.

Your contact to and relationship with your child is very important. A conversation can create calm and provide a safe space for a child to express their worries and feelings. Remember that many of the emotions that a child has, can be perfectly natural for their age, and can be part of their development. As a parent, you need to be "the wall against which a child can play ball". You must be "the safe harbour" for your child. It gives the child security to know where you stand as a parent and as an adult.

Guide



Tell your child that it helps to talk to an adult. Provide a safe space for your child's concerns. Avoid putting pressure on them to perform.



Listen to your child's concerns and be neutral. Try to hear the story as your child tells it. Avoid saying: "Don't worry about that", even if it is well-intentioned. Your child needs you to acknowledge their concern, show interest and listen.



Limit the flow of news/social media.

Be cautious about letting your child see, hear and read news intended for adults. Especially disturbing and emotionally-charged news. If your child already knows about things happening around the world and/or in Denmark, consider watching 'Ultra Nyt' with your child instead. (In some schools the children watch 'Ultra Nyt' together with the teacher in class and talk about it afterwards). Furthermore, it is important to be mindful of what your child is exposed to on social media and for how long. Limit screen time and instead focus on good conversations and relationships in real life. Feel free to use the tricks from this guide. Start small. It may have a large impact.



Control your emotions. Your child's story may be distressing. Hold off on worrying. Manage your own emotions and, if necessary, save them for later when the child is not there. Listen and be neutral.



Put yourself in the child's shoes. See things through their eyes by identifying with their age group and what they say. Never make fun of a child's concerns, rather acknowledge and listen. Use sounds such as "uh-huh" or "I understand", as necessary.



Provide space for your child's worries and help your child sort through them: What is a healthy concern? What is excessive? What is accurate and inaccurate information? Take responsibility for these worries as an adult. Say, for example: "We'll take care of that" (e.g., mother and father).



Establish a safe evening routine.

Meditation for children, foot/hand massage, as well as sitting and talking for 10 min. on the edge of the bed can create a routine around the child at bedtime. Let the child sleep with their parents for a while if it creates security. Remember to have a fixed bedtime.



Remember the good things.

The brain can be geared towards remembering the negative, especially when under pressure. Therefore, return to the positive experiences your child has had, also with you. Appreciate them and let them know they are appreciated. Make it a routine, for example, by talking about three positive things that happened during the day. It can be anything from a teacher's smile, a beautiful flower, a fun game or sunshine. This will enable the feeling of calmness before sleep, "The safe harbor".

Mental well-being

Research shows that mental well-being is strengthened if individuals engage to a greater extent in something active, meaningful and shared. Find what works for you, whether it's a walk or participation in local sports, leisure activities, creative activities, voluntary organisations or something else. The important thing is to be active together or alone, depending on your situation. Do what makes sense for your family. You can read more about this here: <https://psychology.ku.dk/abc/>

You should pay attention to whether your child's behaviour changes at home, at school or during leisure activities over an extended period. If, for example, your child isolates themselves for a longer period or experiences very negative thoughts that are not helped by the above-mentioned strategies, it may be helpful to discuss the situation with your family doctor, with a nurse at school or with an adult in an after-school program with whom you or your child have a good relationship.