The Connection Between Anxiety and Stress

By The Understood Team

It’s common for kids who struggle in school to experience stress and anxiety. But are stress and anxiety the same thing? Many people use the terms interchangeably. The fact is, though, that stress and anxiety—while related—are different. And understanding the difference can help you find the best ways to help your child.

Read on to learn more about the connection between stress and anxiety.

Anxiety vs. Stress

Stress and anxiety are closely related, but they’re not the same thing.

Stress is a natural response to a challenge. Changes in brain chemistry make our heart pump faster and our palms sweat as we get ready to act. Stress can:

• Make us feel nervous, angry, and frustrated.
• Have a positive effect. For example, it can “pump up” a child to study for a test.
• Be overwhelming. Feeling stress every day for a long time can take a toll on your body and mind.

Not all stress is bad. There’s good stress, too. And there are many ways to help kids reduce different kinds of stress, like homework stress, back-to-school stress, and common high school stressors.

Anxiety is different. It’s a reaction to stress. It’s the feeling kids get when they don’t think they can handle the thing (or challenge) that’s putting pressure on them. That lack of control makes kids feel worried and afraid.

Continue Reading

Developing Coping Skills: 5 Ways to Help Kids Who Struggle with Self-Control

By The Understood Team

Kids with learning and thinking differences can struggle with self-control for various reasons. And when faced with everyday challenges, they might react in unpredictable or even explosive ways. That’s why it’s important to help them develop coping strategies.

1. Give words to feelings.

Strong emotions can be scary for kids. And they can fuel strong reactions. But when children are able to talk about how they’re feeling and what may be causing it, their emotions can feel more manageable. When she’s upset, gently ask your child:

• “How are you feeling right now?” Offer her the words to use, like mad, sad, frustrated, anxious, worried or embarrassed.
• “Where are you feeling it in your body?” She may say her belly feels tight, her heart is racing or her head feels hot.
• “What do you think caused it?” Help her think through what happened right before she started to get upset. You might be able to help her see a different perspective or better understand what occurred.

If your child struggles with language, she may find it difficult to talk about feelings. You can use a “How am I feeling?” visual chart to help her identify her emotions.

You may also want to read an expert’s tips for talking to your child about social and emotional issues. Find out how to respond when your child is frustrated. And if your child shares that she feels afraid of something, follow these steps to help her overcome a fear.

2. Find your child’s triggers.

Think about which situations are toughest for your child. Then consider how you can change your own behavior to help her cope with them. For example:
How to Give Praise That Builds Your Child’s Self-Esteem

By Amanda Morin

You know it’s important to praise kids. But it’s even more meaningful for kids to learn to appreciate their own efforts. Self-esteem comes from working hard toward a goal and feeling good about it. So when kids see that their hard work is paying off, it helps them develop the ability to self-praise. What you say—and how you say it—can help kids to recognize things that they should be proud of. Here are some suggestions.

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<th>SITUATION</th>
<th>TRY SAYING …</th>
<th>THE SELF-PRAISE CONNECTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>The project you’re looking at is good, but you know that more effort could have gone into it.</td>
<td>&quot;That’s a great start.&quot; &quot;How do you like it?&quot; &quot;Do you think it’s your best effort?&quot;</td>
<td>This approach helps kids reflect on whether their work measures up to their expectations. It also asks them to consider how hard they worked and whether they’re proud of the effort they put in.</td>
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<td>Your child has done something well, but is downplaying the positive actions and success of the effort.</td>
<td>&quot;You may not think it’s a big deal, but it was kind of you to stick up for your friend.&quot; &quot;It sounds like you’re proud. What about this makes you feel that way?&quot;</td>
<td>This approach points out what you think is worthy of praise and what you value. It also asks kids to think about what they’re proud of and what they value.</td>
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<td>You know your child worked hard still didn’t meet the goal.</td>
<td>&quot;I’m sorry you didn’t quite make it to your goal. You got close! Do you feel like you can do it the next time?&quot; &quot;It’s nice that you enjoyed the books you did read, even though reading can be hard for you.&quot;</td>
<td>This approach asks kids to reflect on what worked, not just what needs improvement. It also helps kids learn to be OK with doing things they like to do, but aren’t great at.</td>
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<td>Your child behaves according to the expectations you talked about ahead of time.</td>
<td>&quot;Thank you for listening/ following the rules. I know it took hard work to do that.&quot;</td>
<td>This approach gives kids specific feedback they can directly match to the expectations. It also allows them to start paying attention to how they’re measuring up to what’s expected of them.</td>
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Praise can help motivate your child. But self-esteem comes from working hard toward a goal. It’s important to give kids opportunities to find new interests to pursue and work at. You can help kids explore their strengths with a crafty and visual activity—making a strengths chain.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

* Praising effort—even when kids don’t meet their goals—can help build self-esteem.
* It helps to ask kids to explain what they did that led to success.
* Being specific about what you expect can help kids match their actions to expectations.