KIRSTEN ELLINGSEN, PHD

SEPTEMBER 10, 2022

What to do with Worry

What is worry?

Worry is the thought component of anxiety. Our thoughts can make us less anxious or more anxious. Learning to recognize worry and choose helpful, balanced, and realistic thinking can help us feel better and reduce anxiety.

How do we help children manage worry?

Worry can be helpful. It can motivate action and encourage us to prepare for upcoming events and solve problems. It can be useful to keep us safe by prompting careful decisions and consideration of negative consequences.

However, too much (excessive) worry can become a significant problem. When worry causes distress, is frequent, intense, out of proportion to real risk, not used to take action, is about something we cannot control, or limits enjoyment and participation in life activities it becomes a problem.

Strategies for Parents

Offer comfort and validate feelings. Address concerns with compassion.

Teach children that they can reduce worry and that **thoughts are connected to how they feel.**

Help children label feelings and identify their thoughts.

Guide your child to choose a 2nd more helpful, accurate or balanced thought.

Model healthy coping and tell how you manage worries.

Limit worry time. Set aside 20-30 minutes a day. Designate this time (but not near bedtime) to write down or talk about worries. Remind child to postpone thinking about worries until set time.

Challenge Worry. Ask "What is the evidence for this/against this"? Question "Is that a fact or feeling?" "Am I jumping to conclusions?" "Only considering worst case scenario?"

Take Action. Decide what is outside and within a child's control and problem solve to put together a plan to address worry. Work towards accepting uncertainty.

Steps to Managing Worry

1. Help children notice how thoughts can affect feelings.

2. Recognize self-talk and unhelpful worry thoughts.

3. Validate or reflect feelings without excessive reassurance.

4. Encourage a different "more helpful" 2nd thought.

5.Identify what is within a child's control.

6. Turn worry into action steps to help solve a problem.

7. Ask 3 "*what else*?" Questions for each "*what if*"