

ANXIETY

CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Preschool-aged kids exude joy, finding happiness in the simplest of pleasures. But as happy as they can be, they can be just as sad, often fluctuating between emotions on what seems a minute-by-minute basis. Talk about mood swings!

They're learning how to assign emotions and regulate their reactions based on how they're feeling. And this process is often difficult not only for them, but the adults in their circle, too. It's often hard to recognize signs of anxiety in preschoolers, but it does exist with studies revealing nearly 10-20 percent of preschool-aged kids suffer from anxiety.

It's so important for you to be a student of your preschooler. You know them best. You know who they are, their habits, and the nuances of their personalities. Because you know them best, noticing a shift in their temperament will be the easiest for you to detect. All that to say, every kid is different, however some warning signs of anxiety in preschoolers are thumb sucking, wetting themselves when they're potty trained, and being overly clingy.

Remember one thing: Don't assume they're not paying attention. Young kids have short attention spans, it's true. But don't let that keep you from attempting to establish a relationship and open communication with them, especially when talking to them about what's making them so anxious. You might feel like they aren't listening, but some — if not all — of what you're saying is getting through.



WHAT TO SAY

Validate their feelings, and use age-appropriate language.

- *“I’m sorry you feel like that. I’m sorry that happened.”*
- *“How about we pray to Jesus together?”*
- *“That sounds really hard. How did that make you feel?”*
- *“Sometimes, when I’m nervous, my tummy hurts. Does your tummy hurt?”*
- *“When Mr. Worry visits, we can take big, deep breaths.” (Personifying fears is a technique some therapists use to get kids talking freely about what makes them anxious. Try pairing this with artistic play.)*
- *“Thank you for telling me about that. I’m here to help you!”*
- *“Let’s draw a picture of how you feel.” (Try not to micromanage this process, but instead, guide them objectively to express their feelings.)*
- *“Do you want to take a walk with me outside? The sunshine and fresh air sometimes help me when I feel nervous.” (Being outside helps release those feel good hormones called endorphins, so take a nature walk or do an activity that makes them feel safe.)*

WHAT NOT TO SAY

Don’t minimize their experience. They need a safe place to express themselves.

- *“That’s silly. You shouldn’t be upset about that.”*
- *“That’s not a big deal. Don’t worry about that.”*
- *“You shouldn’t be afraid of that.”*

Fear is normal, but when those fears become all-consuming it may be time to call in some outside help. If you need help connecting with some professional help, please don’t hesitate to reach out to your church.