



## REMEMBER

- Parents often feel overwhelmed by their young person's anxiety because it seems irrational and repeatedly disrupts plans. Often parents wonder if their youth is just "over reacting". Help the parents to educate themselves and find support through the local Mental Health organization or online resources. Better understanding and talking with others can combat their own anxiety about their teen's anxiety.
- Anxiety tends to misrepresent the situation and cloud thinking. It can convince a young person that their fear is proof of impending danger rather than a subjective inner feeling.
- Getting teens to practice what they know reminds them that they aren't a powerless victim. Your supportive presence - rather than logic - in the face of high anxiety can help interrupt and calm raging emotions.
- The sword of truth has power. Suggest verses like these for their fight kit: Josh 1:9; Ps 118:6; 1 Peter 5:7; Is 41:10; Is 43:1-4.



## RECOGNIZE

- Anxiety is an "elastic word" describing everything from a situational worry to chronic incapacitating dread. Finding out how long the feelings have been present and how disruptive they are to everyday life can help us recognize the severity of impact.
- Anxiety is focused in future possibilities of harm and disaster ("...what if..."). Anxious teens tend to be fearful of their own anxiety yet cling to the worry as a means of protecting themselves through hyper-vigilance and overthinking.
- Anxious teens will often get stuck in a fight, flight or freeze response. This could look like aggression/agitation, distraction/avoidance or their mind going blank/concentration difficulties.
- Common signs of anxiety are quick breathing, sped up heart rate, shifting eyes, muscle tension, stomach problems, headaches, difficulty concentrating, withdrawal, and uncontrollable thoughts of doom. Things that might have been easy for them to do in the past feel impossible now.
- If these feelings persist over time, the teen needs to seek outside help. A visit to their medical doctor is the first step toward accessing supportive services.
- Anxiety disorders are highly treatable because young brains are still developing. New neural pathways can be formed over time through changing thinking patterns and practicing coping strategies to deal with stress and fear.



## RESPOND

- **Educate.** Help them begin to understand and "read" their own anxiety. Understanding what is going on can lessen the impact of intense emotion and combat powerlessness.
  - **Empathize.** Try to step into their shoes and validate what they feel. Let them know that what they are feeling is experienced by many people and they don't need to be afraid of it.
  - **Don't Rescue.** Trying to remove anything that could cause anxiety creates a dependence on us and is actually disempowering for the teen. Teach them that they can learn to move through their feelings. Be open to working with them to modify what is expected of them, without fully removing the challenges.
- **Take Small Bites.** If their anxiety is centred around doing an activity, break it into small steps and encourage them to take only the next small step. Remind them that facing rather than avoiding the anxiety helps lower it. And be sure to celebrate each success.
  - **Consider a "worry jar".** Encourage the teen to "park" their worries in a concrete place like a jar. Write the worries on slips of paper, and then worry about them at a designated time each week/each day. This gives a place for repeated worries to rest, knowing they will not be disregarded.
  - **Create a "Fight Kit"** Brainstorm together 4 things they can do when they begin to feel anxious. Collect the ideas on their phone/in a journal so they can choose from their options when anxiety begins to grow.
  - **Teach coping skills.** Look for ways of moving the focus to outside of their emotions when anxiety begins to take over. Ideas: (i) breathe slowly, deeply and repeatedly (ii) think of a topic and begin listing things in that category (iii) start at their toes and tense then release each muscle, moving all the way up to their forehead noticing the feeling of release each time.



# ANXIETY



## RESOURCES

**Mindshift** - An app to help teens work through anxiety when it hits.

**keltymentalhealth.ca/anxiety** - Information and links to more resources for teens and families.

**maps.anxietycanada.com/courses** - An online guide to help teens develop a step by step working plan for understanding and managing their own anxiety.