

How to Talk to Adolescents About Anxiety

Offering empathy, validation, and support while being non-judgmental and understanding of their experiences is crucial when speaking to a teen with anxiety. Listening actively and providing a safe, supportive environment can make a significant positive impact on their well-being. If you're unsure about what to say, expressing your willingness to listen and help is a good start.

Listen First

When interacting with a teenager experiencing anxiety, it's crucial to approach them with sensitivity and understanding. The words and phrases we use can significantly impact their willingness to open up and feel safe in expressing their emotions. Being equipped with the right questions to foster understanding is as important as being mindful of our language.

- Be mindful of your teen's challenges and emotions.
- Remain calm when they experience anxiety.
- Reiterate that anxiety does not define them.
- Acknowledge and celebrate their accomplishments and bravery in dealing with their anxiety.
- Assure them of your presence and support, emphasizing that you'll get through this together.

What Not to Say	Say This Instead
"Just relax" or "Calm down"	"I'm here for you, what can I do to help?"
"It's not a big deal" or "You're overreacting"	"Your feelings are valid, let's work through this together."
"You're being too sensitive" or "Toughen up"	"It's okay to feel this way, I'm here to listen."
Avoiding situations that make it worse	"Let's take this one step at a time, I'll be with you."
"I know how you feel" if you don't truly understand	"I may not fully understand, but I want to hear about it."
"You'll grow out of it"	"It's important to address this, how can I support you?"
Offering unsolicited advice without understanding	"Would you like some suggestions, or do you just need to talk?"
"You're just seeking attention"	"I see you're struggling and I'm here to help."
"You're making excuses"	"I understand this is difficult for you."

Conversation Starters



"Can you tell me more about how you've been feeling lately? I've noticed some changes and want to understand what's been going on."



"What thoughts or worries have been on your mind recently? I'm here to listen and support you through whatever you're facing."



"What aspects of your life—school, relationships, or other areas—do you find most challenging or overwhelming?"



"Have there been any recent changes or events that have been tough for you to handle? I'm here to talk if you want."



"In what ways can I or others provide better support for you during times when you're feeling anxious?"



"When you're feeling worried or anxious, do you feel comfortable confiding in someone about your feelings?"



"Would you be interested in exploring options or talking to someone who specializes in helping with anxiety or stress?"