

## Resource Article

# Helping Children Cope with Worry

Carey Sturgeon

### What Is Worry?

Worry is sometimes called anxiety or fear. It is any uncomfortable feeling of being tense, nervous, or panicky. Worried people often have faster heart rates, fluttering in their stomachs, sweaty palms, shaky hands, dizziness, headaches, and stomachaches. Some children and teens develop nervous habits, such as nail-biting, hair-twirling, knuckle-cracking, or fidgety legs.

### What Do Children and Teens Worry About?

- Performance—how they are doing at school or as part of a team
- Appearance—how they look
- Social problems—making and keeping friends, being bullied, or feeling left out
- Safety—of self and loved ones
- Security—family situations, financial hardships, or concerns about health and well-being
- Death
- Global issues—war, terrorism, and natural disasters

### When Is Worry a Problem?

You may need to seek professional help for a worrying child or teen when:

- The child or teen worries about something that is inappropriate for his age, such as an older child who has a fear of monsters, the dark, or thunder and lightning.
- The worry is so strong that it is very upsetting to the child or teen.
- The worry affects the child's or teen's relationships and daily activities.

### How Can You Help Children and Teens Deal with Worry?

Listen and use empathy—Children's and teens' worries are very real to them, even if they seem trivial to adults. Before children and teens can deal with their worries, they need to feel supported and understood.

**Share the facts**—Sometimes children and teens worry because they do not understand something. For example, a child may be afraid of thunder. Explaining that it is only a loud noise may lower the child's worry. When children and teens have questions about big issues, such as war, provide them with correct information and calmly explain what adults are doing to help.

**Share the larger perspective**—When children and teens worry about small things, such as a failed test or embarrassing themselves, tell them that many problems are temporary and solvable. Tell them that they will have other opportunities to try again. Teach children and teens to be strong and hopeful.

**Problem-solve**—Talk through problems and help children and teens come up with solutions. Be sure that you do not solve their problems for them.

**Offer comfort and reassurance**—Sometimes when children or teens are worried, they need a hug, someone caring to talk to, or some time to do something fun with friends or a trusted adult.

**Relax**—Teach children and teens how to slow their heart rates and relax their bodies through deep breathing, imagining a favourite place or memory, or tensing and then relaxing the muscles in their arms, legs, neck, and shoulders.

**Help them think in positive ways**—Teach children and teens to be positive about their worries. They can tell themselves why the bad thing probably will not happen or why it is not a big deal if it does.

**Face fear**—Do not cater to fear or allow children or teens to avoid the things they fear. Build their confidence and encourage them to try new things.

**Read the Bible and pray together**—Talk about God's promises and pray for children and teens to let go of their worries and give them to God.

**Be a good role model**—Set a good example with your responses to problems and setbacks. Show the children and teens in your care that you are confident and trust God to help you with your problems.