Understanding Anxiety

What is fear and what is anxiety?

Historically there has been a bit of debate about this. Many parents think that being fearful is not bad as being anxious. This is simply not the case.

Fear can be located outside of oneself. For Example fear of flying, fear of dogs, insects or rain.

Anxiety can be seen as a more general, global term but it can affect your child physiological state, thoughts, feelings and behaviour.

Anxiety and fear are natural feelings and affect us from time to time. Its important to understand all of us can feel sacred or anxiuos.

Even in the best of situations your baby, toddler and teen suffer from anxiety from time to time. It's perfectly normal to feel dread, apprehension fear or distress when faced with new situations, taking tests, be frightened of the dark, monsters and ghosts.

Normal Anxieties of Children

As a parent, be reassured that your baby, toddler, and teen will feel anxious from time to time. There are even times in their development when they are more likely to express worry. They may need to rely on you more and seek retreat into the home. In toddlers, they may be scared when they leave you, in school age children, they may become worried when they start a new school or move.

Research shows that in normal children,35% of children can be overly concerned about competence, 31% may need excessive reassurance and 19 % can have somatic (physical symptoms) taken from Help for worried Children, Cynthia Last 2006 This means that your child may have these and be perfectly normal and grow out of it without long lasting impact.

Common Fears and how to understand them

Infancy

Babies can differentiate from familiar and unfamiliar faces, so they notice strangers and may cry and cling to you. It's normal around 7-9 months.

they don't like objects or people looming in on them

Early and Middle Childhood

As your child feels safe and starts to develop a secure attachment, they may become upset, cling, cry say they have a tummy ache when you are apart, it's called separation anxiety, it normally fades. Between 3 and 6 children are mastering what's real and not. At this age, they are struggling to determine what's fact or fantasy. They are afraid of the dark, monsters, snakes, ghosts. This can be why children at this age can develop night-time fears.

From 6 onwards, they continue to develop their cognitive capacity, they become more conscious of their peers. They can become more preoccupied with social acceptance, academic and physical performance. They understand that we can die and can be affected by what's on the news.

How to help your child

- **Remember your child may yet be developed an emotional language for anxiety.**
- **They may express anxiety by in physical symptoms such as tummy aches, headaches, self-harm, skin picking and pulling hair.**
- **Talk about feelings, read them books about feelings and emotions.**
- **Accept and validate your child's worries**
- **Listening to worries with full attention and gently help to them to distinguish between fact and fears.**
- **Asking them what you can do to help them feel safe. Do not avoid situations.**
- **Patiently encouraging your child to face the situation one step at a time and repeatedly so they feel safe and the situation becomes manageable.**

When do you need to worry

If the symptoms cause your child considerable distress
If they interfere with your child's capacity to function

What to look out for

- Excessive worry most days of the week, for weeks on end
- Your child seems tense and unrelaxed for most of the time
- Your child cannot sleep
- Has a lot of physical symptoms such as headaches, tummy aches
- They engage in endless repetitive behaviours such as checking and washing.
- They are avoiding social situations or other normal day to day activities

If you do need help, contact me for a consultation, i hope this helps. With love Catherine

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