

A Parent's Guide to Supporting the Anxious Adolescent

- As a parent, be mindful and aware of your own anxiety and how it manifests in parenting. Every individual has anxiety, but it is critical that as a parent you understand how your anxiety impacts your responses to your child
- Identify goals and objectives for parenting (e.g. assisting your adolescent in becoming more motivated, self-confident, independent)
- Set and review clear weekly expectations, privileges, and goals
- Develop a plan with your spouse and/or other caregivers...be consistent in your approaches to parenting!
- Attend support groups and/or seek out therapy for your adolescent and your family if you feel overwhelmed and need additional help

Tips for Supporting the Child with School Anxiety/School Refusal

- Write out clear expectations, privileges, and consistent consequences and review them with your child (keep expectations simple and consistent)
- Stay calm-be aware of and manage your own anxiety, look confident (practice your game face!)
- Avoid a lot of talking and reassurance, especially around expectations
- Avoid power struggles- remember: don't put your hands on your adolescent as this can escalate the situation quickly!
- Give choices
- Be mindful not reactive, practice good emotional management, appear confident
- Focus on outcomes and goals for parenting
- It is alright if your child becomes upset, they need to be held accountable for how they manage being upset, and still need to be held to expectations. Avoid excessive talking and power struggles: state expectations and walk away, do not feed into somatic symptoms
- Be clear about acceptable reasons to miss or be tardy from school (for help, check guidelines in your child's school handbook-fever above 100 degrees, etc), remind your child how they can cope with symptoms and manage discomfort without avoiding school
- Always update school personnel if there are any significant concerns or events that have happened outside of school

- Let school personnel know if your child is reporting any significant problems regarding medication(s) that he or she is taking

Strategies to Implement At Home

Write out the expectations, privileges, and routine. Review these guidelines daily to ensure consistency, discuss progress at that point. Discuss obstacles and ways to problem-solve obstacles. Be aware of strategies that will support implementation, as well as aid success. Do not engage if your child is not using appropriate communication skills and age-appropriate behaviors (i.e.: a teen crying and screaming), cue the child to take some time and resume communication when he/she has calmed self-down. The child/adolescent has a choice in how he/she manages his/her emotions. Allowing inappropriate behaviors continues to foster emotional immaturity.

WARNING: AVOID EXCESSIVE TALKING AND REASSURANCE, especially in morning and in route to school. Children and teens do not respond when parents spend too much time “talking at” them. BE CONSISTENT AND KEEP EXPECTATIONS CLEAR AND CONCRETE.

Script Examples (start planning the night before school, especially on Sunday nights)

- “The expectation is that you attend school daily and on time”
- “I will wake you up at 7 am tomorrow and give you a 15 minute warning, then I will come in again. At that point you have 30 minutes until you have to leave for school”
- “If you choose not to get up, then (the privilege) will not be earned”
- “I would like to come up with a plan so that we can keep track of the homework you are completing and help you stay organized”
- “If you refuse to go to school, I will have no choice but to call 911 for assistance”
- “I expect you to go to bed at a specified time so that you can be awake and ready for school”
- “You are not allowed to text me from school to discuss going home. If you choose to bring your phone to school, you will not utilize phone to seek reassurance”
- “You cannot call me during the day to pick you up if you are upset. If you are sick, then you can seek out the nurse to get your temperature taken. I cannot pick you up unless the nurse gives me permission to”
- “It is expected that you will work through experiences that make you uncomfortable and elevate your anxiety, but the more you do the activities that you fear, the more able you will be able to handle difficulties at school”

For more information, call 855.383.2224 or visit AMITAhealth.org/behavioral