

# CHILDREN AND ANXIETY



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**ANXIETY IN CHILDREN IS OFTEN UNRECOGNISED AND MISUNDERSTOOD, YET IS AFFECTING MANY CHILDREN ON DIFFERENT LEVELS OF INTENSITY.**

Any child using any unwanted behaviour is experiencing symptoms of anxiety!

Anxiety is a word that we must learn to understand and certainly not ever judge. Anxiety is not limited to those who have panic attacks or other extreme anxiety-related behaviours. Rather, anxiety is experienced by most people on a daily basis in varying levels of intensity.

It is also important to note that all unwanted behaviour, which is simply any behaviour we would prefer not to be using, is preceded by anxiety first. So let's first understand what is anxiety?

Anxiety occurs when a person is presented with any aspect of life they do not feel like they have the required skills to respond to.

Life is happening to all of us, all day every day ... including children. When there is any part of life that we do not feel like we have the skills to respond to then our anxiety levels will increase and our behaviours will deteriorate.

The fact is, we do not have the skills to know how to respond to all aspects of life. Our school curriculum may teach us to read, write, calculate numbers and master other school-based skills, however there is much more to life than we are required to learn in an academic setting. For example, many children struggle with what I call 'perfectionism' and when they don't feel like they are able to do any aspect of life 'perfectly' according to their picture of

perfectionism there is going to be guaranteed anxiety. At Fabic, children have presented with anxiety around:

- Losing
- Not being first
- Dealing with corrections
- Being given feedback
- Conflict with peers, siblings, teachers, parents
- Misinterpreting messages they receive and thus receiving a different message
- Dealing with the illness or death of a pet, friend, family member or something else
- Knowing how to deal with what they've seen on TV or heard adults discuss
- Responding to life when it doesn't happen the way they expected it to
- Change of any sort
- Not meeting the pictures they create for themselves of how they should be or how life will be.

There is an endless list of examples because life is happening all day every day. The simple fact is, sometimes children of all ages (and even adults) will feel like they are equipped to respond to life and other times they will not.

Society as a whole is not meeting our potential as we are not embracing our roles as 'teachers and students of life'. We are not embracing the fact that there are many aspects of life that need to be taught and learnt and not simply expected that people know how to respond to. This is a significant contributing factor to the ongoing deterioration of our population's psychological wellbeing (e.g. increase in mental illness, crime, addictions, self-harming behaviours, depression, uses of unwanted behaviours, anxiety etcetera).



As we teach at Fabic, the simplicity with reducing symptoms of anxiety is to simply be teaching, learning and applying the skills to respond to any aspect of life that any individual does not yet feel completely equipped to respond to.

When we commit to learning to self-master life, the symptoms of anxiety will continually be reducing.

When we see any child using any unwanted behaviour including low-grade symptoms of anxiety we simply need to ask:

I wonder what aspect of life this child does not feel like they have the skills to respond to?

I wonder what skills can be taught to this child so they have the opportunity to self-master this aspect of life?

$$\begin{aligned}
 &\text{NEW SKILLS LEARNT \& APPLIED} \\
 &= \\
 &\text{FEELING MORE EQUIPPED TO} \\
 &\text{RESPOND TO LIFE} \\
 &= \\
 &\text{REDUCED SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY}
 \end{aligned}$$

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