

Stay calm. As a parent it is important for you to act confidently as a guide to your child. If you become anxious when your child becomes anxious, then their anxiety level is going to continue to increase. As guides, it is our job to remain calm and composed during stressful situations. It is important for you to model for your child how to behave calmly and not overreact.

Be quiet. During moments of anxiety, adults tend to cope with the stress by talking more; however, this is not helpful in relation to reducing anxiety for children, especially those with neurodevelopmental delays. Language can take quite a bit of effort to process; and if someone is already anxious, it is going to take even longer and may exacerbate the situation. By remaining calm and using as few words as possible, you can support your child in a more effective manner.

Slow down. When a child is anxious, he or she may not be able to process information as effectively as normal. For children with neurodevelopmental disorders, processing can be significantly altered when feelings of anxiety are present. It is important for you to remember that as the guide, you need to slow down everything that you are doing and saying in order to give the child time to process. If you tend to wait 5 seconds for a response during typical interactions, then wait 20 to 30 seconds during moments when anxiety is high.

Be observant. When a child's level of anxiety is increased, there is some reason for the mental state change. As the guide, it is your job to take a step back, look at the situation, and try to figure out what may be causing the anxiety. Is there a transition approaching? Does the child need more sensory input? If you can pinpoint the source(s) of anxiety, then you will be better equipped to help the child cope.

Know your child. As individuals, we all have different forms of relaxation that we enjoy. For some it is reading a book, for others it may be bouncing on a trampoline. Whatever the preferences are, it is important to know what strategies help your child to relax and calm down. Examples are physical activities, swinging, dancing, deep breathing, progressive relaxation, massage or just quiet time in their own space. These are just a few of the different strategies that can be used with children during anxious times.