

Worries Are Not Forever



free spirit
PUBLISHING®

By Elizabeth Verdick
Illustrated by Marieka Heinlen

The world is a big,
beautiful place.



But BIG sometimes feels a little scary. Your heart beats faster.

Your tummy feels like it's full of butterflies.



And you start to *worry*.

Tips for Parents and Caregivers

It's normal for toddlers to feel anxious. By now they've had a little experience out there in the big world, and they know that things sometimes go wrong. You can help your child handle life's curveballs by teaching self-soothing skills and being a supportive role model.

Be patient. You might notice that your child is clingier than usual, finds separation difficult, and has new fears about everyday things (the bathtub drain, the vacuum, the space under the bed). Is your child asking "What if" questions? ("What if something bad happens?" "What if the dog bites?" "What if I fall?") Be reassuring and show that you know how to stay calm and cool. *You* are your child's best teacher.

Talk about fears. Young children often have trouble describing their emotions. You can help by asking questions: "Did the loud bark surprise you?" "Do you feel jumpy inside?" "Is your heart beating faster?" Let your child know you understand: "We all have worries. Worries are not forever." Speak in soothing tones, and be open to questions.

Take it slow. Toddlers are busy people, running, playing, and exploring. But they also enjoy taking time to observe the details of the world and experience what their senses show them. Your day will naturally slow down with a toddler in tow. Make time for observations and questions so you both enjoy each day more.

Rely on routines. Toddlers thrive on structure. They need predictable meals and snacks, naptime, playtime, and bedtime so they know what to expect and more readily go along with the plan. Plus, children who get plenty of sleep, healthy meals, an adequate nap, frequent exercise, and daily outdoor time *feel* better—and this makes them stronger in the face of worry and fear. Healthy routines promote good physical, mental, and emotional health and may decrease stress levels.



Limit screen time. Young children are highly reactive to visual stimuli. What they see on the screen has a greater effect than you may think, increasing their stress and worry. Limit your child's exposure to screens. Monitor what adults or older children view when your toddler is in the room. If possible, allow only slower-paced educational programming made especially for the very young.

Teach self-soothing techniques. Know that you can't get rid of your child's fears and worries, but you can help manage them. Teach your child to recognize the physical symptoms of stress, such as a racing heart, sweaty palms, or a tickly tummy. Practice self-soothing skills: using the body and hands to distract from worry, taking deep breaths to feel calmer, and asking to be held when overwhelmed. Soothe your child with a hug, a stuffed animal, and supportive words such as, "I'm here for you. I'll help you. Worries are not forever. Thanks for telling me how you feel."

Think before you speak. Sometimes parents make the situation worse by using negative words or expecting their child to "tough it out." Avoid phrases like "Stop being such a baby" or "Don't be a worrywart." Be patient and boost your child's confidence. Notice when your child tries something new or has fun without worry. Say, "Wow, look at you go," or "Good job!" Your role is to provide a sense of security and safety, even when your own frustration level is high.

Seek help. How do you know when a child's anxieties are cause for concern? Watch for sleep disruptions, increased tears or tantrums, frequent stomachaches, thumb sucking or hair chewing, and an inability to enjoy being with family or friends. If your child appears to be in distress, consult your pediatrician. Get support from other parents. Let your child's caregivers know what's going on, so they can help, too.

