

When You Have a Worrier in the Family

Michael Gross

Do you have a worrier in your family? Do you have a child who worries or over-thinks things? If so, it's worth remembering that rumination is the ruination of a peaceful mind.

If you've ever spent a sleepless night worrying then you'll know how problems always seem bigger when you keep tossing them around in your head.



It can seem like everything is stacked against you. When this happens you've got to find the off switch so you can get away from your worries for a while.

The same principle holds for children and teenagers when they worry. Their problems just seem to get bigger and they need to turn them off or tone them down so they can ease their anxiety.

Here is a range of strategies taken from our [Parenting Anxious Kids](#) online course that you can teach your kids to prevent them from ruminating – going over the same thoughts and worries over and over again.

Sometimes it takes a wise adult to remind children and young people about what really is important to them.

Broaden their vision

Kids get tunnel vision when they worry. They often can't see the bigger picture. For instance, a young person may fret over minor work matters such as getting the exact font match for an assignment they are working on, and neglect to get the sleep necessary for good learning the next day. Sometimes it takes a wise adult to remind children and young people about what really is important to them.

Put their attention elsewhere

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Placing attention away from worries is an age old technique for parents and teachers. Commonly known as distraction, the act of focusing attention on something other than what causes them distress is vital for good mental health. Examples of distractions include – going outside, playing a game, shooting some basketball hoops or listening to music.

Give the worry a name

Somehow giving a worry a name makes it feel less scary and more manageable. A wonderful picture storybook for toddlers called *'There's a Hippopotamus on our Roof'* by Hazel Edwards personifies fear of the dark as a friendly hippo. Much more friendly and easier to boss around if you're a child.

Put their worries in a jar

Wouldn't it be great to put all your worries into a safe and throw away the key? As an adult you may do this when you take time out to watch your favorite TV show; or lose yourself wandering for hours online. Children need something a little more practical. They can write their worries on some paper and lock them in away in a jar by the side of the bed at the end of the day. It's good to know that their worries can't get out because they are locked up tight.

Limit talking time

It's good if kids can talk about what's on their mind but talking needs to be contained to prevent their worries from dominating their lives. Set aside ten minutes a day to talk about their worries and then put worry time aside until tomorrow. This is not about shutting kids down but teaching them they can change tack in their thinking rather than go over the same old thoughts again and again.

Normalize rather than lionize their anxiety

Anxious kids are very sensitive to their parents concerns and worries. One way we build their concerns is by continually reassuring them that things will be fine. One reassurance should be sufficient most of the time followed by *"I've already talked to you about that."* Continually going over old ground can allow worries to linger longer than necessary.

Give them the tools to relax

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Some people can relax in front of the TV, and it is enough for them to take their mind off their worries. Some people need a bigger set of tools including mindfulness and exercise to help them neutralize our worries. Talk with your kids about how they relax; share what works for you and help them explore relaxation techniques that will fit their interests, age and lifestyles.

Move baby move

Get kids moving. Physical exercise is not only a great distraction but it release feel-good endorphins that help children and young people feel better and more optimistic about the future.

Let their subconscious minds solve their problems

A wonderful strategy is the notion of allowing the sub-conscious mind solving problems. There's a good body of research that points to the power of the sub-conscious mind solving problems when we are asleep. If you've ever woken at four o'clock in the morning with an 'aha!' moment, where everything seems clear, then you'll have experienced the sub-conscious mind at work. Talk about the sub-conscious mind with your kids and let them know that they can give their sub-conscious permission to go to work. "Okay, I'm not going to think about this any more. My sub-conscious can solve this now."

Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's the author of 10 books for parents including *Thriving!* and the best-selling *Why First Borns Rule the World* and *Last Borns Want to Change It*, and his latest release *Spoonfed Generation: How to raise independent children*.