

Worry Box Activity

Materials Needed:

- + Shoebox or any small box with a lid.
- + Art supplies: coloured pencils, markers, crayons, stickers, or any decorative materials.
- + Sheets of paper.
- + Scissors.
- + Glue or tape.
- + Markers or pens.
- + Small pieces of paper for drawing our worries

Explain to your child that everyone experiences worry or anxiety at times, and it's normal to have these feelings. Introduce the concept of a "Worry Box." Explain that it's a special box where they can put their worries, so they don't have to carry them around all the time.

How to make a worry box

(Coyne, M. [2020] 'Love in, Love out: A compassionate approach to parenting your anxious child'. Harper Collins Ireland.)

Worries overwhelm us when too many of them get jumbled up in our minds. Asking your child to make a "worry box" gives them an opportunity to share their worries with you in a safe and contained way, which works to calm their minds from unnecessary worries.

Suggested steps:

1. Use a shoe box, jar, or any other type of container. Some children like to decorate it and really make it their own. If welcomed, don't be afraid to help out yourself!
2. Ask your child to write down a few worries on little pieces of paper. If your child agrees, feel free to write down a few worries you think your child might have. Fold the pieces of paper and put them into the worry box.
3. Ask your child to keep their worry box in a safe place outside their bedroom (e.g., your bedroom, or anywhere discreet).
4. Build in "worry time" into your routine where you are alone with your child and with few interruptions. Keep a time limit on it, for example 10-15 minutes, which you both make time for a few times a week. When the time is over, move on and explore it further the next time.
5. Make sure to create the emotional space within you to feel calm and able for your child's worries. Show a sense of calm and patience with your body language and words.
6. Ask your child to pick a worry from their worry box and share it with you. If they pick your piece of paper, explain to them what prompted you to write it down (e.g., "I noticed that you seem to tense up when X happens").

Big Feelings – Fear

7. Gently discuss the worry with your child and really listen to what they have to say. Try not to reassure them. Unpack why they may be feeling this way and reflect your understanding back to them. Speaking their worry out loud often takes some of the charge out of it.
8. Ask your child what they think might help with their worry or share your wisdom on what you think may help to ease it. If there is something you can do to help, ask them if this would be all right. Empower your child as much as you can and praise any small brave step.
9. Following your discussion, let your child decide the following: If the worry is no longer a worry, encourage them to tear it up and put it in the bin. If the worry is still a worry, ask them to re-post it into the worry box for another time and rate it if you like.
10. If it's helpful, ask your child to rate the worry out of 10 on the back of the piece of paper, where 1 is slightly worried and 10 is extremely worried. Add the date, too, so that you can track your child's worries over time and hopefully really see an improvement. Good luck!

