

# TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF: HOW TO AVOID PASSING ANXIETY ON TO YOUR CHILDREN

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP  
FEBRUARY 2019 RESOURCE SHARING

We have focused on anxiety in children the past two months. This month we focus on parent anxiety and how we can avoid passing it on to our children. Your children take cues from you. If you seem consistently anxious and fearful in certain situations, your child will determine that those situations are unsafe and may begin to display anxiety as well. If you are dealing with anxiety and start to notice your child displaying anxious behaviors as well, the most important thing is not to beat yourself up about it. Passing anxiety on to your children is avoidable. You can practice the strategies below to minimize this from happening. It is a matter of learning to manage your own stress and helping your children manage theirs.

1. **Learn stress management techniques.** You can always seek the help of a mental health professional to manage your anxiety. As you learn to tolerate stress, you will in turn be teaching your child how to cope with new or difficult situations. A big part of treatment for children with anxiety is actually teaching parents “stress tolerance”.
2. **Model stress tolerance.** Try to maintain a calm, neutral demeanor in front of your child. Be aware of your facial expressions, the words you choose, and the intensity of the emotion you express because your children are “reading” you. They pick up on everything.
3. **Explain your anxiety.** While you don’t want your child to witness every anxious moment you experience, it’s okay—and even healthy—for children to see their parents cope with stress occasionally. However you want to explain why you reacted the way you did. If you lost your temper due to anxiety, you can talk about this with your child when calm and explain there are better ways of managing anxiety other than yelling. This gives your children permission to feel stress and sends them the message that stress is manageable.
4. **Make a plan.** Come up with strategies in advance for managing specific situations that trigger your stress. You may even involve your child in the plan if appropriate.
5. **Know when to disengage.** If a situation causes you too much stress, you might want to plan ahead so that you don’t have to participate and so that your children will not interpret it as unsafe. In general, if you feel yourself becoming overwhelmed with anxiety in the presence of your child, try to take a break. Keep a list of tips with you that you can do when you become anxious.
6. **Find a support system.** Rely on people in your life who will step in when you feel overwhelmed, or even just offer words of support. Those people can be a therapist, another parent, co-workers or friends. Some people even find support on blogs, online forums or social media.

<https://childmind.org/article/how-to-avoid-passing-anxiety-on-to-your-kids>