

## Mental Fitness News and Tips

January 2016

### When Thoughts Get Stuck on Scary

From toddlers to teenagers, almost all children have occasional worries and fears. Not only is this normal, it can actually be an important protection in certain situations. Each stage of child development has its own expected and helpful fears.

But sometimes worries and fears last for weeks or months, grow bigger, and get “stuck” instead of going away. These stuck thoughts are called **anxiety**.

When thoughts get “stuck” on scary, the resulting stress can lead to headaches, stomach aches, nausea, vomiting, and trouble sleeping. Children may start avoiding certain situations. They may become very critical of themselves. Some anxious children become overly “good.” Anxious children are easily agitated and don’t respond to logical arguments or “common sense.”

The good news is that anxious, scary thoughts can get unstuck.

### How Can Parents Help?

#### Step 1: Empathize. Resist trying to “fix it.”

“I can see you’re really upset. Tell me about it.”

#### Step 2: Get Specific

“This feels really big; let’s try to figure out the one thing that started the bad feeling.”



#### Step 3: Switch Perspectives

“Your worry thoughts are telling you that this is scary. Is that how you want to see it? Is there another way to think about this?”

#### Step 4: Take Action

“What do you want to do first to make things better?”

#### Step 5: Normalize

Show your child that worries are a normal part of life by letting them see you talk yourself through your own worries.

Adapted from the [WorryWiseKids Newsletter June 2010](#) by Tamar Chansky, Ph.D.



### How Can School Help?

**If your child seems stuck in a downward spiral of stress, worry, and fear, don’t be afraid to ask your child’s school for help.**

**Classroom teachers can work with you and your child to make changes that will help him or her feel safe and confident at school.**

There are many ideas for teachers (and parents) on the [WorryWiseKids.org](#) website.

**School psychologists, counselors, and social workers can help you figure out if counseling might be helpful. Connect by calling school and asking to talk to a support staff member.**

This newsletter is provided by the School Community Partnership for Mental Health, of which MPS is an integral part.