

# ANXIETY & DEPRESSION: OVERVIEW FOR PARENTS & CAREGIVERS

## WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is a survival response, and in general it is normal and helpful – anxiety is what tells us to look both ways before crossing the street, or to leave situations that aren't good for us. When anxiety becomes a problem, our minds start to think that our feelings are dangerous and we react to them as if they were a life threatening emergency that we need to avoid. So when we feel something uncomfortable – if we're nervous or disappointed or sad – our mind focuses on finding a way to make those feelings go away. This is why when we're anxious, we become fixated or worried about something that needs to happen, or we start dwelling on what we could have done differently.

## WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression is closely linked to anxiety, and often the two go together, but it is also separate and can be experienced on its own. Depression also comes from experiencing overwhelming emotions, but with depression our mind goes numb to avoid the emotion. This leads to apathy, not caring about things, not enjoying things we used to, thinking the future is hopeless.

## HOW CAN I SUPPORT MY CHILD IF THEY ARE ANXIOUS OR DEPRESSED?

We want to help them see that anxiety and depression fall on a spectrum, that most people experience it to various degrees throughout their lives, and that they can help themselves by soothing their own emotions in the moment. We want to focus on being their coach, not their rescuer. If we fix the "problem" for them, they won't learn this skill of responding supportively to their own feelings. When we help them soothe their emotion and do things for themselves that boost their mood, they become more empowered with their experiences, and this will help them cope with any future hurdles they may face.

## TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD WITH ANXIETY:

- "I'm so sorry you're struggling. What you're feeling is normal, and I'm here to support you"
- "What can you do right now to help you feel a bit more calm – then it will be much easier for us to think this through"
- "Try taking 10 breaths, counting in five counts and out five counts"
- "Why don't you write in your journal for a few minutes about what you're feeling"

## TIPS FOR SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD WITH DEPRESSION:

- "I'm so sorry you're struggling. What you're feeling is normal, and I'm here to support you"
- "I can see you're a bit low today, I wonder what you're thinking about?"
- "It's normal to have negative thoughts – even about ourselves!"
- "I'm so sorry you're thinking that. I know how hard it is to have those kind of thoughts!"
- "Can we look for evidence why that thought might not be 100% TRUE?"
- "Can you come up with a new more helpful thought that gives you a different perspective?" (eg. 'Things might be difficult but I am cared for and I am going to get through this')
- "What can you do to boost your mood right now? (eg. Going outside, doing something creative, talking to a good friend, cooking, playing a game"