



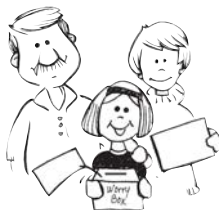
## 10 ways to help children cope with worry

None of us wants to see our children frightened or worried, even when we are anxious ourselves. Yet coping with worry is an important life skill children need to acquire. Try these ideas to give comfort and help develop healthy coping skills:

**1 Calm your own fears first.** Children get anxious when they see parents worry. Controlling your own anxiety and calming your moods are great first steps toward helping your children feel safe.

**2 Make a worry box.** Cover a shoe box with nice paper and let children decorate it. Cut a small slit in the top of the box.

Whenever children express worry, write concerns on a slip of paper and put it in the box. Before bedtime, pray over the box and ask God to take care of all the concerns it contains.



**3 Stick to normal routines.** Children feel safe when they follow their usual patterns. Keep mealtimes and bedtimes consistent. Continue with normal after-school activities. Attend Mass as a family every Sunday and offer your concerns as an intention.

**4 Talk about your situation** – even with young children. If someone is sick, there has been a job loss, or finances are a concern, start a discussion but don't insist your child talk if he or she isn't ready. Give the same reassurance over and over.

**5 Be honest but gentle.** Answer questions honestly but in age appropriate ways. Statements like, "We are running out of money," or "I may lose my job," are too tough for even older children to handle. Better to say, "We have enough money to pay for our house and food but have to avoid extras, like eating out, for now." Always follow with, "God will provide," because he always does.



**6 Limit TV and media exposure.** News coverage can be depressing for adults and downright upsetting to children. Limit their access to it by limiting TV or computer time.

**7 Hold family meetings.** Healthy communication is especially important when families are facing challenges. Regular family meetings are a good way to share information in a neutral way and great opportunities for family prayer.

**8 Watch for signs of stress.** Children show their worry by changes in the way they act. They may change the way they eat or sleep, be more irritable than usual, have nightmares. Younger children may wet the bed, use immature language, or change their speech patterns. Sit your child down for a comforting talk if you spot these symptoms. Consult your pediatrician if you become concerned.



**9 Whistle while you worry.** If money is a concern, make a game out of saving it. See how much fun you can have on as little as possible. Simple dinners eaten on a blanket in the living room put focus on fun, not deprivation. Give awards for the one who turns out the most lights or who spends the least amount of time on the computer. Make a game out of gathering up all the loose change in the house. Letting children help address the family concerns gives them the feeling that they are contributing to the solution.

**10 Play.** Bring out board games or cards, draw pictures or read books together. Large motor activities help worried children (and adults) use up anxious energy. Play tag. Throw around a ball. Ride bikes. Have some fun so you can redirect everyone's thoughts to something more pleasant than worry. Laughter is still the best medicine.