

# What is anxiety?

While many children and young people worry about school or home circumstances from time to time, around 1 in 10 experience anxiety severe enough to make it hard for them to get on with the things they want to do in life. This may signal an anxiety disorder. Children and young people may feel anxious in particular situations, such as speaking in class or socialising with peers, and may want to avoid these scenarios. They may find themselves worrying a lot and not being able to stop. They may also experience physical and visible symptoms, such as panic attacks.

## What can school staff do to support a child or young person who experiences anxiety?



- 1.** The best way to help children and young people dealing with anxiety is to **find ways to face feared situations**. Help plan ways for them to test out their fears gradually and set specific goals (e.g. speaking in class at least once a week).

- 2.** **Stay calm but supportive** and try not to get drawn into their emotions. It helps if you are supportive but stay practical.



- 3.** **Instead of reassuring the child or young person** that nothing bad will happen, ask things like 'what has happened in this situation before?'

- 4.** **Help the child or young person think through** what they learned about their fears and about themselves (e.g. did their worry come true, did they cope?). Teachers can help pupils to rate their anxiety levels on a scale of 1–10, and notice that when they face their feared situation repeatedly the anxiety level goes down.

- 5.** **Praise and reward** small (and big) successes when the child or young person faces their fears. It can help them if you remain positive.

- 6.** **We're all different.** Remember that anxiety can come and go, and that what helps one person may not work for another.

