Nadine Briggs, Director of Simply Social Kids, holds dual graduate level certifications in Coaching Children & Teens and Coaching Children and Teens with ADHD. She is also certified in the Girl Meets World curriculum and has had training through the Child Anxiety Network. Donna Shea, is the Founder of the Peter Pan Center for Social and Emotional Growth and holds a BA in Behavioral Science from Lesley University in Cambridge and is a pioneer in the concept of a non-clinical approach to social emotional learning. She’s award winning programs have been helping children achieve social success for over fourteen years. Briggs and Shea are also certified in bullying prevention through the Massachusetts Aggression Reduction Center.

Both Briggs and Shea are parents of children with special needs that include Down syndrome, ADHD, Anxiety, OCD and Sensory Processing Disorder. They are passionate about helping kids make and keep friends and together formed How to Make and Keep Friends, LLC. Each facilitates community-based social learning groups at their centers in Massachusetts and have created the Social Success in School initiative. This comprehensive group of programs for students, educators, and parents is designed to foster positive social skills and interactions at school and among students. Their focus is to proactively prevent bullying before it happens with a focus on strategies and tools to build confidence, promote kindness and empathy, accept differences and teach conflict resolution.
What do kids worry about?

- Too Loud
- Friends
- Touch
- Think Differently

We need fear to survive but some kids are in survival mode when there is no danger.

If fear isn’t dangerous, ride the wave until feelings pass… longer for kids on spectrum

Parent Tips

- Teach kids not to be fearful of feelings
- Teach kids to identify feelings as they are coming on
- Don’t ask something of your child that you aren’t willing to work on too
- Anxiety presents as behavior
- Perfectionism- drop an egg
- Talk through your worries out loud with how you found a solution
- Break worry down into manageable parts
- Don’t diminish someone else’s worry
- Don’t say “don’t worry” say “I can see you’re really worried about that”
- Hidden worries “afraid I’ll swallow my tongue”

Hidden worries “afraid I’ll swallow my tongue”

Ask kids to draw what it worry feels like…

- Blushing
- Blurry Vision
- Lump in throat
- Smothered
- Butterflies
- Raging in ears
- Pain in the chest
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Tightness in chest
- Irritable
- Mean

Sweaty palms
- Headache
- Stomachache
- Dizzy
- Heart beats fast
- Tearful
- Tingly
- Cold
- Weak
- Nausous
- May feel like vomiting
- Shaky
Your worry is too hot to handle and you do or say something you will feel bad or sad about later.

You are feeling very worried, disappointed or frustrated.

Use our tips here.

Don’t communicate in this zone – wait it out.

Authoritarian response to a child’s anxiety could escalate the situation.

Worries can control most of your thoughts. “What if????”

- What if I say something embarrassing?
- What if I get into trouble?
- What if I break the rules?
- What if I get hurt?
- What if people don’t like me?
- What if others get mad at me?
- What if I don’t know what to do?
- What if I get laughed at?
- What if I’m afraid to ask a question?
- What if I’m not as good as everyone else?
- What if I get laughed at?

What if thoughts aren’t always bad. They can help work through scenarios and make you feel prepared.

What’s your child’s “what if?” What’s yours?
"I can and will control the thoughts in my brain."

Kids have the power to make worries stop.

Coping thoughts can help to put all the "what if" thoughts into perspective. Teach kids to fight off worries like a ninja!

"It's OK if I'm not perfect, who is?"
"What's the worst that can happen?"
"After all, no one has ever really died of embarrassment."
"I'm strong and powerful."

"If something happens, I'll just laugh it off."
"I wouldn't have been invited if people didn't want me here."
"I always worry but my worries never really happen."

Some kids might need help to learn what they are feeling. Games to teach emotions:

- Emotions charades
- Describe emotions in detail
- Feelings collages
- Emotion wheel — pebble lands on emotion then child describes an event that caused that emotion
- Teach facial features — ex. Question eyebrows — what they look like and feel like
- Watch TV with sound off — examine facial features
Teach kids that even though they might feel small and powerless at times, that everyone has personal power on the inside.

Create Coping Thoughts

For each area of worry (or pick the top few if that feels overwhelming) and list coping thoughts.

Common worries:
- Doctor visits with shots
- Schedule changes
- Playdate with new friend
- Perfectionism

See examples in I Feel Worried: Tips for Kids on Overcoming Anxiety

Create Coping Thoughts

Do the math:
At 10 years old, been alive around 3,650 days
Days stung by bee = 1
Day not stung by bee = 3,649

Create a Tool Kit of Coping Strategies

Try a few and save some for when these no longer work.
Scavenger Hunt – find the facts

List facts that prove this is likely to happen:

- Tornadoes have killed people in the past.
- I saw it on the news.

List facts that prove this is unlikely to happen:

- I have never had a tornado come close to my home.
- I do not live in a tornado-prone region.
- If tornadoes are suspected, we always get a warning first.

Tool Kit

- Choice = Power
- Worry warriors
- Encouragement Cards
- Breathe slowly, deeply, softly
- Voice Activated Brain – change the channel and imagine good things
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation – relax a body part at a time
- Worry Box

Tool Kit

- Make a “Comfort Zone” poster
- Reward yourself (marble jars)
- Worry tube – toss worries in and shake them up for an attitude adjustment
- Change in Routine Cards
- Calming Kit
- Create social stories
- Create/Read your happiness list
- Mental imagery
- Coping Cards

5 Count Breathing

- Comfort Zone!
Focus on Calm

Keep score on your bedroom door

My worry happened today
My worry DIDN'T happen today

Teach kids to show confidence (even if they don't feel it)

- Walk Strong
- Shoulders back
- Head up
- Strong steps
- Confident facial expression

Talk Strong
- Lower voice
- Speak with certainty
- Look right at people when you talk to them

Schedule Changes/Transitions

CHANGE IN ROUTINE CARD

Notice: ___________________ will be changed on
________________ because ________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________
The new _______________ is __________________

If this worries you:
1) Tell yourself it’s OK;
2) Breathe slowly and deeply;
3) Tell yourself you are strong and powerful;
4) try ____________________________ (fill in your own idea)
How to Create a Calming Kit

Create calming kits for use at home, in the car, or anywhere else you might worry or feel overwhelmed. The calming kit should include things that make you feel good and calm. Below are some ideas but be creative and put things that work for you into your kit:

- Chewing gum
- Modeling clay
- Notebook or pad to write down feelings or doodle in
- A soft, cuddly stuffed animal
- A blanket or earphones to block out annoying or loud sounds
- Something to fidget with such as a rubber band or worry ball
- Weighted blanket
- A favorite book
- Music and headphones
- Video games
- Snack
- Scratchy toy about activity or where you might be going
- Coloring book and crayons or markers
- Lavender-scented pillow

Calming and Increasing Optimism

- Exercise
- Mindfulness (we suggest Headspace and Mindful Powers
- Gratitude journal and jars
- Nightly jot down 3 good things that happened that day and why
- For every bad thing kids say, counter with 3-5 good things

Recommended Resources

BOOK: I Feel Worried: Tips for Kids on Overcoming Anxiety By Nadine Briggs and Donna Shea
BOOK: What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety (What to Do Guides for Kids) by Dawn Huebner
CD “I Can Relax” and Growing Up Brave by Donna Pincus
Coping Cat
Scaredy Squirrel book series by Melanie Watt
Joy Stories “Buddy & Buster”
Child Anxiety Network at Boston University (http://www.childanxiety.net/)
GoZen.com
The Optimistic Child by Martin Seligman