Transcript

The Resilient Kid Podcast

Season 7 - Episode 8

Reversing anxiety in our kids.

Reversing anxiety in our kids. Now, I don't know about you, but it feels like, those children who are struggling with anxiety, certainly in my line of business, they're getting younger and younger. My youngest client that struggles with worry and stress and things like that is four years old. Yep. You heard that right?

Four. So today in the podcast, what I'm going to do is we haven't got a guest, it's me. I'm gonna give you some top tips. We're gonna talk about what anxiety is. How it helps us because it actually does, how that affects kids' bodies, and as you know, a lot of the stuff that I'm talking today is about primary kids, but it is still the same for us as adults, some of it, and also teens.

Next week I'm gonna do you a teen podcast just for how do we manage anxiety in our teens? I'm gonna say, how does it show up? And then I'm going to give you some top tips on how to reverse anxiety in our kids. Now, I'm Ashley Costello, psychotherapist here at The Resilient Kid. Most of you who already listen will know I talk about our kids because collectively I think we are responsible for them all.

I work one-to-one. We have a bunch of coaches now who are absolutely lovely, and if you haven't heard their podcast, go back and listen to their various different experiences that they come to the Resilient Kid with. So, let's get cracking. Let's get cracking. What is anxiety? Well.

For me, anxiety is a word that we overuse a lot now, the, the, the actual literal term of anxiety is a physical response in our bodies to a worry or a stress that we have in our brain. And so that's kind of handy, isn't it? Because once we know that's what anxiety is, it's not as scary as it sounds. I am going to use worry and anxiety interchangeable in the podcast for the simple reason is that that is how it's used in society.

So you know what I mean? But actually anxiety is a physical response in our bodies and, and when I work with kids and tell them that, they're like, oh, it's not as bad as I thought. No, it's not. But we also know the extreme of that is panic attacks and worse. So, you know, but we will use that interchangeable.

Transcript

So. Anxiety and worries. They, they set off a little alarm system that we have an alarm system in our brain that keeps us safe, you know? And the problem for many kids is that alarm. 'cause our brain doesn't know the difference between a real threat, like, I'm gonna get run over crossing this road. Or a perceived threat, that person doesn't like me.

Our brain will perceive both of those exactly the same. Now, the way I talk about to younger kids about this alarm is we talk about our guard dog. So our fight and flight center for us adults, our amygdala, but for our kids, we talk about our guard dog and we talk about the guard dog barking when it's scary, safe and scary, dangerous.

So there's things that can still make us feel unsafe. Feel like a perceived threat, like a friend not texting you back, or, you know, someone snobbing you in the playground or getting in trouble off a teacher. None of them are a dangerous. None of them are dangerous. None of them are a threat to life.

However, our brain, our guard dog, perceives it exactly the same way. They don't know the difference between real and imaginary. It's why we jump at scary movies. So when that alarm sounds in our fight and flight center in our guard dog, then what happens is, you know, we often get racing heart. The tummy gets upset, they might get sweaty palms, they might start to breathe really fast or shallow, shaky legs, you know, wobbly knees, they can't concentrate.

Things like that. This is absolutely fight, flight freezer or fawn in action. And what we do know is quite often, you know, you'll have, you'll have heard it whether you're, you're an educator, whether you're a parent, you'll have heard a child say to you, I've got tummy ache. I don't feel well, I feel sick.

My tummy sore. And actually what we know from research now is, when that fight and flight alarm signal goes off, that actually releases cortisol and adrenaline into our body. That's the physical response of a worry, that physical response is anxiety. And what we know is if we don't do something with that, it sits in, in their tummy or ours and causes physical pain.

We've actually done research now and we know that it actually causes physical pain to them. And it's, as a parent, I, I know I've done it, you know, years ago and I've gone, oh, you'll be okay. You're just a little bit worried. But actually now we know it does. So, you know, it's really important that we hear them and we listen to what they're saying because it is causing them pain.

Transcript

It is uncomfortable for them at that time. So, you know, I think as adults it's really easy for us to dismiss it knowing that they're worried, but not realizing actually that it can cause them quite uncomfortable sensations in their tummy. So, okay. How does anxiety show up for our kids? Well. The kind of things that I see and speak to parents about is school refusal, don't want to go to school, or actually I'm not going to school.

And actually I think sometimes we think, you know. Oh, you know, just get to school. But actually sometimes they really feel like they can't, school might be a threat for them, and actually it's going against their survival system, their fight and flight system to go into school. So there's lots of things that we can do to help ease that transition.

Other ways would be overthinking. That, that kind of rumination constantly, you probably see this kind of bedtime or a quiet time you know, where suddenly everything's quiet or, or they're just getting ready for bed and all these worries. They've suddenly not got any you know, distractions around.

And you are like kind of, you know, it's the end of the day for you guys and you are literally getting them in bed and you're thinking, you know, five more minutes and I can just sit down and relax or whatever. And that's when it all comes out, isn't it? And actually it's really hard as a parent sometimes, 'cause you've had a long old day to actually sit on the end of the bed and listen.

But the more that we kind of do that to, and, and giving them, you know, boundaries and guidelines, then the quicker we will get our adult time. So, yeah, so we usually find that that overthinking, that rumination may be something that's happened during the day. Maybe something that happened a few days ago or something they've overheard on the radio quite often comes up now.

That was particularly kind of during the. You know, when the Ukraine conflict started, that was a lot of what was happening. Something they might have watched, seen on YouTube. Those kind of things really, you know, will feed in and you know your child best. You know, if anybody knows me, you are the expert with your child.

What I will say to you is. With tech and we had a really good Heather from Healthy Tech Families on last week as a guest. Go back and listen to that if you haven't. It's brilliant. She gives

us really good kind of guidelines around technology and how to be healthy. And she's not one of these like ban, like, absolutely not.

But what I will say to you is if your child is more susceptible, more sensitive to the kind of information coming in for them, be aware of that.

How else does it show up? Outbursts, angry outbursts, and actually we think, oh. Well, if they're worried, why are they so angry? And, but actually it's kind of two sides of the same coin for me. You know, that frustration, building up that fear, you know, that is the other side of it. Anger is the other side of anxiety.

Absolutely. For me you know, I will often see. Kids explode. They might have held it all together during the day because they know what's expected at school. They know how their teachers want them to behave, and they're trying their best and they get home and you get it in the neck, you know? And and, and often, you know, there's a real fear behind that for them.

So again, it's about us being patient, but actually. We don't often associate anger with worry. And actually it really is. Another one. Perfectionism. They're constantly trying to be perfect. You know, they, they look at what they've done wrong rather than what they've done, right? So they might get 19 out of 20 in a spelling test, but then the one is what they're worried about rewriting work because it's not neat enough.

Those kind of things. The hair, I, I notice a lot of. And this is not, this is girls and boys. Suddenly the hair needs to be, or cuffs, things like that. Any kind of sign of perfection is them trying to control some kind of worry for themselves. The other thing is as well is, is kind of. Separation anxiety.

Now this can come out in various ways going into school, they don't want to leave you. And also for educators, you, you know, we all know those kids who hang off you all day. And when you are going for your lunch, like it's quite hard sometimes for them to transfer to like a lunchtime supervisor, you know, one of the dinner ladies and, and they just want to be with you because they feel safe.

You are their safe person, which is beautiful, isn't it? That you know that. But actually as well, you know, as parents, it is trying to get them into school. They don't want to leave you. Maybe

they don't want to go to after school clubs. Maybe they don't want to do extracurricular, you know, like try new sports, dance, that kind of thing.

Don't wanna do parties. Or if they do, they, they're hanging off you like a little limp. Bless them. Sleepovers, they don't wanna do sleepovers. And sometimes I've had it where they don't wanna do sleepovers with grandparents. And the grandparents take that really personal, but why don't they? And it's like, it's not about you.

It's not about you, grandma. You are amazing. You know, it is about just making them feel secure and safe and things like that. So yeah, that separation anxiety is kind of a kicks up another level. And then another one, watch out for the what ifs. But what if that happened? What if that happened? What if somebody broke in our house?

What if you got run over? What if you didn't come home from your business trip? You know, things like that. That's. That's hard, you know, because they're constant, they're, they're little questions that are running around their head constantly on a loop. Those kind of rumination thinking patterns. I'm gonna give you kind of a really good example, like an example that I've worked with to, just so you can see it.

Probably, let's take it, let's take it to the extreme. So. I had a young student who was crying on the way in, was really, really difficult. Didn't want to leave mom at the school gates. And it was really hindering kind of them, their school experience, you know, which we always want to be a positive one.

It was hindering mom and dad. Mom and dad couldn't really go out very much. Because it was always that constant, I don't want you to go and, and, you know, and things like that. And then again, sleepovers, sleepover with grandparents and it was really impacting the family. They were constantly looking out for their child and, and

walking on eggshells around what kind of things they were all doing together. And it was such a shame and it was, it really attached to mom. The, the student was really attached to, to the mom. And actually they came to me and said like, you know, they, they're not very old. They're still in primary.

We really need to kind of get this started. Do you think you can help? And we, you know, we did various different things, but I actually, and I was reminded of this last week, I rocked up to a

school that I work in every week with various different students. And I, I just happened to go a little bit early at traffic, wasn't bad, pulled into the car park and seen this person, this little person skip into school.

When I say skip, I mean literal skip into school, smile on the face. With the friends, there is no issue at all. Now you take that back 12 months ago, I no longer see them 'cause they don't need me. But you take that back 12 months ago. We had a TA go out and meet them. They were having weekly sessions with me.

I was having sessions with parents and actually the shift was just heartwarming. It was absolutely beautiful. And they'd done hard work to get there, you know, as had the parents, as had the school support, you know, it was really great. They all took on the advice that I gave. And I, and I think what I would say to you is.

With anxiety, I'm gonna give you some tips, but actually we are the holders of their anxiety often, and I'm gonna come on to tell you a little bit more around that. But let's give you some tips to reversing anxiety because we know anxiety can be crippling. When children worry and they're getting themselves stressed, you know, it can be crippling, not just for them, but for the family.

So let's kind of go through a few little tips to help. So, first of all, name it. Okay. So it looks like the way I talk to the kids who've done work with me because they've, I've gone, you know, I teach 'em about the brain. I teach them what is happening in their body. We look at their thinking patterns, et cetera, et cetera.

So, you know, but there is no reason why you can't talk to them about their brain. It's something all our coaches do, and it is fundamental for the way that we work with kids, because once we know how our brain works, it actually all makes sense to them. And we've done this as young as two and three, so you know, anyone can do.

But what I would say is it looks like you are really worried today. It looks like your guard dog is barking loud today. You know, really name it. Tell me what your, you know, you initially, often kids don't understand what, what they're feeling. And you can say, are you okay? You look worried. You, you seem like you know you are breathing fast.

Transcript

You are clenching your fist. Name it, tell them. That what's happening or what your, your perception is. And then they will either agree and they can recognize it or they might say, no, I just feel really angry. Or, you know, so it's really good that if you start to, it's what we call kind of that emotional literacy.

Talk about how they feel and expand that vocabulary around their emotions. So naming it to tame it is a really, really good way of doing that. The other thing is if they are very worried in the moment, like then what I always suggest to parents or educator is you start to breathe really deeply. So we know that, that, fight and flight center is calm down the fastest if we breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. So I often, and this doesn't matter what age my client is, you know, this could be, they can be 84, which I do have clients that are 84 breathe in through the nose. And out through the mouth, I will exaggerate my breathing because innately as humans we can't help but copy.

And that just starts to bring our children back down a little bit because in that moment when they are worried, when they are angry, we cannot talk to them. You know, we need to get them to calm down before we do anything else. They, their brain is not talking to it. Each department of the brain, the prefrontal cortex, where we make our rational decisions, where we regulate our emotions.

We know if you've listened to this podcast before, that doesn't develop until they're in the twenties. So actually at that moment when they're so upset, it's not even connected to that fight and flight center. It's not connected to the, the part of the brain that holds there. Experiences, their memories.

We are just literally living on survival of fight or flight. And so what we want to do is get them to calm down so that we can reconnect those departments of the brain and then we can have that conversation whether they've been angry, whether they've been upset, or it does not matter. Wait until they're calm.

Now, one thing I will say to you is it takes a young person, if they have been angry, if they have flipped their lid, which is the technical term, when their brain is not engaged in all departments. it takes their body physically to get rid of that adrenaline cortisol and completely calmed down 60 to 90 minutes.

So you imagine if somebody has flipped their lid for whatever reason in class. It is more likely to happen again in the next hour. If we don't do something about those super fuels running

around their body, that adrenaline and cortisol, they are more likely at home to be wound up by, you know, siblings in that next hour.

If we don't do something about getting rid and dispersing those super fuels. A really calming down and, and helping them regulate. And it is up to us as adults to help them regulate. That's our, that's our job. Keep 'em safe, help them regulate. That's our job. And it's funny, I had a conversation yesterday with a parent, and this is a question I ask a lot of my parents.

What do you want for them? And they say, oh, we just want 'em to be happy. And I say, happy or safe? And they go, well, both. And I go, it's not your job to keep him happy. It's their job. It's their responsibility. We have no responsibility other than our own happiness for that, but it is our job to keep them safe.

It is our job to help regulate them. Of course we can do lots of things that might influence their happiness, but it's not our job to make them happy. It's theirs, and actually we need to teach that to them. So that's kind of, you know, I think that's really important that we, we think about the physical effects.

So when they've calmed down, when we've kind of done some deep breathing, when we've, you know, and, and there's various different things that you can do. And we are just about to, we've just finished a. Booklet, a freebie booklet with loads and loads of tips of what you can do. So like one of my biggest things, if I can, if I've got a child that's really, really upset, I am gonna deep breathe in front of them.

I am gonna check in with them. I am probably gonna give them a hug if they're open to it, I will ask, do you need a hug right now? Because that physical touch between two will calm them down really quickly. If you are calm, you are not calm, don't go near them because they will pick up on you immediately.

So it's really important as our responsibility is to stay calm. But if I can, I get them outside, I get them doing something physical. Even if I just get them to put the wrist under cold water, all of that is a reset for the nervous system. Then we can move on to how, why this has happened. What is the, you know, what can we do to make sure this doesn't happen again?

And how I do that really is evidence gathering. So I get them to play like little detective. Okay. Is that true? Tell me what's the evidence? Where's the facts around that? Because is this just a

thought that has led to this feeling? Can we change that thought? Is there evidence? Is there evidence that your friend has fell out with you?

Is there evidence your teacher doesn't like you? You know, okay, tell me what that is. Okay? Have you talked to them about this? You know, really get them to kind of really problem solve around it. What's the worst that could happen? Okay, I get that. And oh, I could see why you're really worried about that.

What's most likely to happen? Oh, okay. So really looking at the evidence, because quite often what happens is those thoughts are running around our head that sets off that anxiety in the body. And actually it's just a thought. And can we change that thought? Can we reframe that thought? Have we got evidence?

If it is that a friend is being horrible, okay, what are we gonna do about that? You know, let's go and speak to him. Let's go and speak to a teacher. It is really important that they look for evidence because the brain will look for evidence in both directions. It will always, if their thought is, people don't like me, I'm not good enough, their brain will look for evidence to back that up.

So what we do is reframe it and, and look for the facts, and then reframe that. Well actually. Was your teacher just stressed today? Shall we have a chat with her? Was your friend preoccupied? Were they just playing with somebody different today? You know, and then reframing that for them, and then the brain will look for the positives.

It will look for those opportunities. So it is really important that as adults, we teach them that reframing as well. The other thing that I would say to you is. Routine is really important. Any child that is susceptible to worry a lot or, or get anxious is often because they don't feel safe and routines and looking after basic needs, like have they eaten?

You know, have they drank enough today? Have they got enough sleep last night? For me, I always look at basics first. Always, always. And actually having a snack or having a drink really helps just ground the nervous system as well. So that's a good little top tip. If somebody is, let's get you a drink, let's get you a drink of water, let's get, you know, let's have a snack, sit down, think about, and then we'll have a chat.

Transcript

But just to calm them down. So I always look at the basics for sleep is massive, has a massive impact on, on worry. But being predictable in our routines helps kids feel safe. So for in, and I'm not saying five o'clock every night, you have to have your dinner. Of course not. But if you do regularly have it at a certain time, do they have like a, do they know what's coming?

Is there. Can they preempt it? Okay, we're gonna set the table, then we, you know, somebody's gonna get the water, then we're gonna have dinner. That is a predictable routine for them. That's what keeps them safe. They're gonna have a shower or a bath. They're gonna get in bed, they're gonna read a story that is a predictable routine.

Doesn't matter so much usually that the timings might change a little bit. It's having that predictable routine that is really important and because it helps them feel safe. They can predict it. Our brain is just a predicting machine, really. And when it is thrown a curve ball like tonight after school, we're gonna go to Nanas and we're gonna have dinner there.

Then you pick 'em up and go, oh no, we're not going to Nana's now. And that's it. 'cause we think, oh, well we can't go because you know, Nana's going out or something's happened or whatever. They then start, that's, if they're sensitive to worry, that's when they start to panic. You know, so it's things like that.

Yes, absolutely. And things change, but talk them through that process. Do you know what, we can't go to Nana's tonight because guess what? The cat has had to go to the vets and Nana's not gonna be in. So I'll tell you what we can do. We're gonna rearrange it and let's have a look at what night we can go.

So, I'm sorry about that. Shall we go home and make dinner? So you're kind of walking 'em through that process of why that's happened and what's next. So you, they've kind of got it and you're walking 'em through and then on to the next step. So. Okay. So that's really that predictable routine is important.

Now, what I will say to you, and this is probably the most important with any, anybody who is struggling with this, but particularly our youngsters as we finish the podcast today, is. They look at us to see if they're safe, and if we wobble, they think they're not safe. So for instance, one of the biggest, I told you about that student before, one of the biggest kind of things I said is to the parents, you need to not hesitate at the gate.

Transcript

It has to be matter of fact. Because the minute you hesitate, the minute you start this bargaining between going to school and I'll get you a treat later, or you know, the minute that we start kind of going, oh, don't worry, stay here, blah, blah, blah. You need, they then think, but I'm not safe because, because you are, if I was safe, you'd just, you would just take me in.

You would just let me go. You know? And they start to question then, and so what I would say is we need to be. Very firm. So that predictability is really good. This is what's gonna happen today. I'm gonna hand you over to your TA or I'm, you are going to meet your friend and then you are gonna go into school.

I'm gonna go to it, but guess what? I'll see you after school. I'll pick you up, whatever it is. But you have to be quite matter of fact because the minute we hesitate, and it is totally understandable that we do by the way, because we hate to see our kids upset. It feels personal. It feels like, why can't I take this away for them?

But actually. We need to do this themselves. And you do that smart by small steps, you know? Okay, I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna walk you to the door, but you're gonna go into the classroom yourself. I'm gonna walk you into the playground. You're gonna go through, you're gonna walk across yourself with or with your friend, you know, so you can do it in small increments, things like that, in that particular example.

But anything at all that they're worried about. So for instance, I think a really good one to help with this is when you are in a restaurant and we order for our kids, and I think we just do that automatically sometimes, but actually it's really important that they order for their kids. So, for example, I always, if they're a little bit shy or they don't want to, you know, or they're, they're nervous about it.

Okay. Well point. Tell, tell the waiter, waitress what you want. Point on the menu. If they, if they can do that. Or you say, I'll order your food. Do you order your drink? You know, that's the next kind of step. And then, okay, you can order now. I'm gonna order you order. You know, so you are giving your order so they can see that they're absolutely safe.

Because as an adult, as a safe, trusted adult, and this goes for in school or at home, they will look to us to see if they're safe. We need to model that. We need to make sure that we are confident, we need to make sure that they know they're safe and that they can try these scary things while they're with us.

Transcript

They're safe person, so it's really important that we make sure we are giving off that air of you can do this. Absolutely. Of course you can. You know, and that's not saying that we don't give them a big cuddle. Oh, you are being really brave today. I know this is hard for you, but guess what? You can do it.

You know? And that doesn't change. That does not change no matter how old they are. And I will come onto the teens next week, you know? But even my 17-year-old, she's got a tough few months, she's got A level, she's got driving tests, you know, and it's hard. And so what I'll say to is, I know this is tough, darling.

I know this is hard and this is gonna be a really hard three months, but I know you can do this. And I'm here, I'm here for you every step of the way. So it doesn't change from when the, you know, three, to young adults. Okay. Let's do a little quick recap and then I'll tell you kind of what we've got coming up next for you.

So we've talked today about anxiety and how it is a physical reaction in the body. We've talked about that fight and flight center, or what we call guard dog with our kids and how it's really important that they recognize what's happening in their body and also how they can do something about it. I talked a little bit about the kind of ways that can show up, whether it's anger, perfectionism, avoidance overthinking or, or you know, those kind of negative thinking patterns.

And then also how we reverse anxiety in our kids. And it's really important, you know. Deep breaths in through the nose, out through the mouth. Really important. Getting outside in nature is a reset, so if you can walk to and from school, that helps. You know, physical trampolines are brilliant. Anything that's getting moving, that cortisol and adrenaline

out of the body is absolutely brilliant, water is amazing. And then also look for the evidence. Get them to, once they've calmed down, get them to have a look at the evidence and then reframe it for them, you know? And. Make sure we are checking their basics because there is nothing worse than getting in from school.

They're hungry, they're tired, they've probably not drank enough today, and they just flip their lid really quickly and we know that happens. So the base get the basics covered and that will really help make their, you know, fight and flight center feel safe. And then lastly, they're gonna look to us. To make sure they're safe and we need to reinstill that they are and they can take these brave steps while we are in their corner cheering them on.

Transcript

Okay? So if this resonates with you and you'd love more tools and strategies to help your kid build confidence and really reverse that anxiety, then keep a lookout for the freebies that's coming. We've got a brochure download and also then we've got a course coming up, reversing anxiety for kids. I'll be diving all of diving deep into all of this over the course, but get your hands on the freebies.

So have a look at the link underneath. We've got a brochure there that you can just download for free. There's loads of tips, goes into more detail than I could do in half an hour. And yeah, thanks for listening. If you have any worries at all, if there's any kind of you know, situations that are coming up with your child.

Hit reply on the newsletter, make sure you're on the newsletter. Hit reply on the newsletter. It comes straight to me. It doesn't go to Chantelle, our VA, or any of the coaches who come straight to me. We'll answer that. Check out the Facebook group you can go in there that's the Resilient Kid Facebook group

if you want some, like just loads of resources in there. But click on the link and get your free download. Top tips for reversing anxiety in your kids. Lots of love from us to your family. Take care.