

# BASC<sup>TM</sup>-2

*Behavior Assessment System for Children, Second Edition*

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Were you afraid of the dark as a child? Many people were, even though most of us had little to fear. Being afraid of the dark is very common, and children often grow out of this fear quickly. Sometimes, fear or stress can be healthy. For example, being afraid of getting hit by a car helps us pay close attention when crossing a busy street. But for some children, fear or stress can begin to disrupt daily activities.

Children who have too much fear or stress may be suffering from **anxiety** problems. These children may be overly nervous or fearful in many different settings. They may constantly worry about many different things or may seem to take things too seriously. Too much worrying can cause restlessness or trouble sleeping. Too much worrying can also cause a child to feel very critical of himself or herself. In extreme cases, a child may resist or refuse to go places.

*Anxiety can sometimes be caused by:*

- a fearful experience
- a major life event
- a generally nervous temperament

*Teaching new coping skills is key to helping your child deal with his or her anxiety.*

Children can become anxious for a lot of reasons. Some fears can be traced back to a specific event. For example, your child may be afraid of dogs because he or she was once chased by a neighborhood dog. Children can have trouble understanding that not all fears are reasonable and that one scary dog doesn't mean that all dogs should be feared. Another cause of anxiety might be a stressful time in a child's life. Moving to a new city or a change in the family, such as a divorce or a death, can cause a child to become worried about the future. Whether the causes are known or unknown, anxiety usually leads to feelings that are quite real and that need to be dealt with.

Too much anxiety can harm children in many ways. They may experience problems in school because their anxiety makes it hard to concentrate on class work or ask others for help. They may be unwilling to try new things or to spend time with friends. For other children, feeling anxious or nervous can result in a need for things to always be "perfect." This expectation can make children become extremely critical of themselves. These children may need a lot of extra praise and reassurance from you or others that everything is okay.

## Dealing With Anxiety

*Anxiety in children can appear as:*

- nervousness
- fearfulness
- worrying
- acting too serious
- constant need for reassurance
- muscle tension

*Strategies that can help your child include:*

- positive storytelling
- rewarding brave behavior
- evaluating the worst-case scenario
- teaching self-relaxation



## Tracking Your Child's Progress

When working with your child to improve his or her behavior, it is important to track the progress being made. Use the following chart to track the number of times you worked with your child on teaching new behaviors and to track how often your child engages in both new behaviors and problem behaviors. Be sure to record both the behavior to change (e.g., getting tense) and the newly learned behavior (e.g., using relaxation techniques). Also, determine the number of times during each week the new behavior should be practiced or used, and set a reward that will be given if the goal is met. Talk with the person who gave you this form to determine if or when it should be returned or replaced.

Child's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Child's Age \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Goal: \_\_\_\_\_ of 7 boxes checked per week will result in a reward of: \_\_\_\_\_

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5
<b>Dates:</b> <b>Behavior to change:</b> <b>New behavior to use:</b>	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
<b>Parent</b> Today I taught a new strategy or practiced a strategy with my child.	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Child</b> Today I used or practiced my new strategy.	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>
Today I used a behavior I was trying to change.	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>	Mon <input type="checkbox"/> Tues <input type="checkbox"/> Wed <input type="checkbox"/> Thurs <input type="checkbox"/> Fri <input type="checkbox"/> Sat <input type="checkbox"/> Sun <input type="checkbox"/>

Place a check mark in each box as needed.

It can be difficult to have a child with anxiety problems. A child's fears can often seem strange or silly to an adult. Dealing with your child's fears can be frustrating, especially when the things you say and do to comfort your child don't seem to work. Your child probably doesn't know that his or her fears are unusual or that they can be controlled. You can help your child learn to recognize the difference between real and imaginary threats.

This tip sheet provides information that might be helpful for changing your child's anxious behaviors and emotions. You and others can help your child understand and manage feelings of excessive worry or fear.

The following pages discuss approaches that will give you the tools you need to help you change your child's behavior.

## Working With Your Child

Talking with your child about his or her anxiety can be difficult. However, it is an important step to understanding why your child has too much tension and stress and what may be the best way to help. Your child may not be willing to talk much about his or her feelings. Starting a conversation shows your child that his or her feelings are important to you. Listening and developing a plan to help shows that you are committed to making things better.

When talking with your child about his or her anxiety, make sure to:

- choose a place that is free from distractions
- keep the conversation brief
- maintain a positive and calm attitude
- focus on one situation at a time

## Did you know?

- Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental, emotional, and behavioral problems to occur during childhood and adolescence.
- About 13 of every 100 children and adolescents, ages 9 to 17, experience some kind of anxiety disorder.
- Nearly half of children and adolescents with anxiety disorders have a second anxiety disorder or other mental or behavioral disorder, such as depression.

There are many things you can do to help make the conversation easier. For example, talking with your child during a time that is **unhurried** and **free from distractions** shows your child that the conversation is important.

Try to **keep the conversation short**. You will be the best judge of how long your child will be able to pay attention to the conversation, but you might want to keep your first conversation to no more than 10 minutes.

When speaking with your child, try to maintain a **positive and calm** attitude. Try not to judge your child's thoughts and feelings. If you become frustrated and upset when talking with your child, he or she may be unwilling to talk to you about his or her feelings. Instead, **stay relaxed** to provide a good example for your child to follow.

During the conversation, pick one situation at a time to discuss. Focus on talking about your child's anxious emotions rather than your child's behavior. Keep in mind that your child may misinterpret his or her behavior as a personal weakness. Your child may be feeling like "everything's wrong," so listen to what your child is saying. Avoid interrupting, even if what your child says seems unrealistic to you. Following these suggestions will help you and your child stay focused on the solution.

With the following strategies, it can be helpful to **provide examples**. Make sure the examples you use are meaningful to your child. Use examples of situations or behaviors that your child has experienced. The conversations you have with your child about his or her anxiety may help you decide what kinds of examples will be helpful.

## Positive Storytelling

Children have powerful imaginations. Using this creative thinking can help build a story in which your child is stronger than he or she feels in real life. You can encourage your child to use this imagery any time fears arise by following the steps below. This strategy may be especially helpful for younger children.

1. Choose an activity, topic, or character that your child likes. Think of things your child talks about a lot or a favorite TV show or cartoon character.
2. Find a quiet time to talk, ideally when your child seems calm and happy. Avoid talking during a time when your child may become fearful (e.g., at bedtime or at night if he or she is afraid of the dark).
3. Tell a story about this favorite topic describing your child as the hero. Use as many details as you can. Ask your child to imagine with you what he or she is doing, feeling, or even wearing. The more real it feels, the more the story can help your child have positive feelings.
4. In the story, describe how your child's fear appears and tell specifically how the hero (i.e., your child) reacts with confidence and courage. Be sure to choose an example that is not too uncomfortable for your child.
5. Teach your child to think of this story when he or she starts to feel upset in another situation. Provide positive feedback when your child uses this story.

### Example:

When Josef hears thunder, he hides in his closet. Josef's father sat with him after dinner and told a story about space travel. Josef loved any story with stars or planets. His father asked Josef to imagine himself in his own spaceship, with its curved windows, its dials and levers, and the black space and stars outside. Josef's father asked him to imagine a planet exploding. It was loud, like thunder, but Josef wasn't afraid because his spaceship kept him safe. Josef's father had him imagine his spaceship during the next storm, and Josef felt braver when he heard thunder.

## Rewarding Brave Behavior

When your child feels anxious about an activity, he or she may find ways to avoid the things that are feared. Sometimes it helps to encourage your child to face these situations by using rewards. Even if your child really wants to change fearful behaviors, the extra motivation provided by a reward can be helpful. You can encourage positive action by following these steps:

1. Make a list of brave behaviors with your child. For example, if your child is afraid of water, it might be brave just to put in one foot at the edge of the pool. When possible, do the activity with your child at first; then gradually withdraw, encouraging your child to go more on his or her own. For each behavior, include some smaller and greater steps that seem reasonable to you.
2. Choose rewards for each behavior. If your child is older, let him or her suggest what feels like a reward worth the risk. Be sure that the rewards are realistic, available immediately when your child earns them, and of great value to your child.
3. Set a time frame. Discuss how soon your child is willing to try at least one behavior. If he or she hesitates, consider setting a target date yourself and offer a special reward for one specific behavior.
4. Be generous with your praise. When your child earns a reward, tell him or her that you are proud and encourage taking the next bigger step. When the new behavior becomes more common and rewards are no longer needed, your child will still appreciate your praise.

### Example:

Nadia has always been shy, and her eighth-grade teacher asks every student to make speeches. Nadia often complains of a headache and misses school on days when it's her turn to talk in front of the class. Nadia's mom talked with her about feeling the same way in high school. They agreed on some rewards for taking small steps and facing her fear. If she agreed to go to school without complaints on speech days, she was excused from washing dishes that night. When she gave a speech, she could spend extra time with her friends at the mall. When she passed the class, she could choose a new music CD or a DVD.

## Evaluating the Worst-Case Scenario

Anxiety can lead your child to think that things are either right or wrong, even though many things land in the middle. Predicting the worst outcome is one way to show your child how unlikely it is and to reassure him or her that anything can be managed if it occurs. This approach can also change a fearful situation into a temporary problem, helping your child regain a sense of control over his or her situation. You can help by following these steps:

1. Listen to your child talk about a situation or fear. Try to catch any all-or-nothing statements about the bad things that might happen (e.g., saying, “Everyone will hate me,” or “No one ever believes me”).
2. Encourage your child to tell you more about his or her feelings by asking, “What’s the worst thing that could happen if this situation occurred?” Encourage him or her to be realistic and tell what really could happen next.
3. Describe your child’s concerns using less extreme language, or discuss how likely something is to happen. For example, if your child says, “If he won’t answer my call, I’ll die of embarrassment,” you might suggest, “I don’t think you’ll die, but what would actually happen next?” Give ideas for more realistic outcomes if your child is frustrated or upset.
4. Continue until the worst-case scenario becomes something your child can manage. If you end up with a positive outcome instead of a negative one, remind your child how this is the result of his or her approach to the situation.

Listen carefully and try not to judge your child’s responses. The goal is to help your child to discover that even the worst outcome can be endured and won’t last forever.

### Example:

Deshaun complained a lot about his after-school job and was critical of himself. He said that the other workers at the library didn’t like him. “What is the worst thing that could happen if all your co-workers don’t like you?” his father asked. He suggested Deshaun could ask for tasks he could do by himself. What if he couldn’t work alone? Deshaun realized that he could find another job. What if he couldn’t find another job? Deshaun and his father agreed that was unlikely but that he could do volunteer work instead. Once he saw that staying at the library was his choice, Deshaun decided to stay on and see what happens.

## Teaching Self-Relaxation

When feelings become overwhelming, the body can feel bad too. Your child may have a sore neck or shoulders, a stomach ache, quick and shallow breathing, or feel overly tired. Teaching your child how to be nice to his or her body during stressful or anxious times can be good practice for managing stress. Once these reactions are under control, a child can often get through the rest of the day without more trouble. You can help your child learn when and how to relax by following these steps.

1. Ask your child to remember the last time he or she felt anxious. Explain that your body sometimes gets ready for danger, like feeling a sudden urge to walk or run away from something, even when you’re really safe from harm.
2. Choose a relaxation signal. For example, when your child feels anxious, he or she could make tight fists. Then, your child could try to relax, starting with the hands, while taking slow deep breaths. Tell your child to notice if it is hard to feel afraid and relaxed at the same time.
3. Practice when and how to use relaxation. If there are times of day, such as before school, when fears set in, talk about how things will be different with this relaxation plan. Ask your child to act it out, like being in a play.
4. Give positive feedback about specific changes in your child’s behavior. If your child is young, you might give a small reward for helpful changes. Older children might value writing about these changes in a private journal or notebook.

Concentrating on relaxing may also distract your child from his or her fear for a few minutes. After this distraction, your child may see other choices more clearly and react differently to a stressful situation.

### Example:

Whenever Carly had to go to the doctor, she couldn’t sleep the night before her appointment. She would cry getting into the car, and in the waiting room she could feel her heart beating fast and her shoulders tensing up. Her mom helped Carly make a plan to relax when these feelings came on. Whenever she started to feel scared, she would make a tight fist. Then she would relax her hand and take some deep breaths and try to feel any other tight muscles, relaxing them as well. She could keep her eyes closed until she felt calm. Carly still doesn’t like the doctor’s office, but she can practice being calm at every step.

## When should I expect my child to feel better?

The time it takes for feelings and behavior to change depends on both the severity of the anxiety and how long your child has been feeling this way. While the child may begin to understand how to manage his or her feelings, it can take time for actual changes in behavior to occur. Don't be surprised if you don't see an immediate change. One way to ensure change is to be consistent. It can be hard to find a quiet time to talk about how your child is feeling. But it's important to keep practicing the positive and calm thinking that will lead to change. If you don't notice a change, your child may need more help. Remember that there will always be times when your child feels frightened by events or situations in his or her life. This fear is normal for all children. As your child learns to face his or her fears, you should expect the difficult times not to last quite so long and that your child generally seems more at ease.

## What should I do if I don't notice any change or if my child's behavior gets worse?

Think about how consistently you and your child have been about using a particular technique. Consider using different examples, or try asking more frequently how your child feels about his or her own progress. If your child's anxiety becomes worse, immediately consult with the person who gave you this tip sheet, even if you have a future appointment scheduled.

## Where can I get more information?

Many books have been written for parents and teachers about how to understand and manage children's anxiety problems. The person who provided you with this tip sheet might be able to recommend books relevant to your child's age. If you have access to the Internet, the websites of the following organizations are good sources of information.

### **www.apa.org**

The American Psychological Association's website has a public information section that can help you understand your child's problems or locate a psychologist.

### **www.nasponline.org**

The website of the National Association of School Psychologists contains information about how to get help in public schools and about the role of school psychologists in the diagnostic and treatment processes.

### **www.ed.gov**

Many handouts, booklets, and online resources for parents, teachers, and others who care for and teach children can be found on the Department of Education website. Information about school-based intervention services is also available.

### **www.aap.org**

The "Parenting Corner" on the website of the American Academy of Pediatrics has useful information on a variety of topics related to children's growth and physical and mental development.



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