

7 IN-THE-MOMENT STEPS FOR YOUR ANXIOUS CHILD

- STEP 1** **LISTEN** to your child's concerns and worries.
- STEP 2** **REFLECT** back to your child what you hear him/her saying by summarizing and repeating back what you heard.
- STEP 3** **EMPATHIZE** with your child by identifying the feelings you hear being expressed. This is how you build your child's feeling vocabulary. It might go something like this: "It sounds like you feel really concerned about going to sleep in your own bed tonight." You are not only building your child's vocabulary, but you are making connection a priority. Empathy is about connecting.
- STEP 4** **VALIDATE** your child's concerns: "Many kids feel concerned about going to sleep in their own bed after they have seen something scary like you did." This helps them see they are not alone in this struggle and that they are not weird or strange for having these concerns.
- STEP 5** **OFFER A JOINT SOLUTION.** Refrain from imposing a parent solution. This is what most parents and adults do because we think our ideas are better. This is a problem because then we are communicating to our children that they don't know how to solve their own problems, nor do they have the ability to do so. We also invalidate their feelings, ideas, and opinions when we make a one-sided decision. It should not sound like: "Well, what you need to do is just go to bed and forget about your fears. They're not real and you're a big girl. This is ridiculous. None of your friends are this scared of this silly stuff." Instead, your response should sound more like: "What do you think is the best solution for this problem?" or "What do you need from me?"
- STEP 6** **REASSURING STATEMENT (INCLUDE STEPS 1-5):**
"I'm listening (head nod, eye contact, listening attentively) [Step 1]. What I hear you saying is _____ [Step 2]. Oh, okay. It sounds like you feel very scared about _____ [Step 3]. You know, many other kids get scared in these situations, too [Step 4]. So, now that I've heard you and I'm understanding what you're saying, what do you need from me/what do you think is the best solution for this problem? [Step 5].
- STEP 7** **NO MORE REASSURANCE.** Once you have listened to your child, reflected back their concerns, empathized, validated, offered a joint/collaborative solution, and provided your reassuring statement, you are done. Any other attempts from your child to voice their concerns or to gain further attention from you for their concerns should not be met with more reassurance. You are doing a disservice to your child when you continue to over-reassure them. You are essentially communicating to them, "You should be worried about this, so I will keep telling you not to worry until you believe there is nothing to worry about when there actually is." You are communicating a mixed message when you talk too much about the issue. Also, as you continue to provide more and more reassurance, you will find that both you and your child will become more and more frustrated. Your child will become more frustrated because you are not giving them what they want (which is to sleep in your bed, for example) and you will become more frustrated because she is not feeling better with your constant reassurance and still not getting what you want (which is for her to just be quiet and go to sleep in her own bed).