

# THE RESILIENT KID PODCAST

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## Season 3 – Episode 1

### Anxiety In Our Kids

Hello, and welcome back to The Resilient Kid Podcast with me, Ashley Costello, psychotherapist of over 25 years helping children and families out there just build resilience. So welcome back, new season. How excited. So, if you follow us on the socials, you'll have seen that we did a poll about the next topics for podcasts, we always, you know, whether you're on our newsletter, our socials, we always want that feedback.

We always want you know, what do you want? Because our content for us has to be answering those parenting, educator questions, so that you have. You know, more knowledge, more ideas of how we can help our kids. So, yes, let's, the first topic off, fresh off the press, freshly voted for by you, is anxiety in our children.

Now, anxiety can look very different for various different children. Now, I have said that this year, there will be a lot of topics around teens because last year it was, you know, it was a mixture of both, but it was. Predominantly, I would say primary age or kind of a year seven below. So, we really want to concentrate on teens, but with anxiety, it's going to be both.

It's got to be both because I'd love to say that you know, primary school children don't struggle with anxiety. That's not true. I don't often use the word anxiety around my students. We'll talk about worries. We'll talk about, you know, what's on their mind, things like that. Because. I,

I once had a four-year-old who told me they struggle, they're very anxious and they have anxiety.

And I think sometimes that's not always useful to give it a label. As adults and as professionals, yeah, of course it's useful. But then it almost becomes a batch. And actually, what we don't want to do is focus on the label. We want to focus on the solution with the child. So, I'm not saying don't use it.

Absolutely. Whatever, whatever you word or whatever term you want to use. But I do think that if we talk about. Worries are very specific. If we talk about anxiety, it can be quite vague and arbitrary for the child themselves. So that's why I talk about worries. Today, we're going to talk about anxiety as a capture all.

So, let's get started. Really excited to have you back here, by the way. Thank you for listening. And I know there's some of you that literally wait for the next podcast to come out. And I appreciate you from the bottom of my heart because as well doing this really is for us to share knowledge with you guys.

It isn't, we don't make money off it. It takes up time. if you see it's like. It's 6 a. m. here for me, so you know, this is something that I do before my kids get up and, and before I start my working day, so it's really lovely that we have regular listeners, so please always feel free to email in.

Ashley@theresilientkid.co.uk. If you want something else on the, on the podcast, if you want another topic. So, let's crack on. What is anxiety? So, anxiety is it's when we feel scared or worried or panicked about something. It's absolutely normal as a human being. It's our body's natural response.

And. It's in usually in response to stress or danger and absolutely anybody can struggle with it. We all feel anxious from time to time and that could be, you know, as a parent, it could be, you know, our child's going off to residential. We're a little bit worried. It could be something in our working day.

It, you know, for children, it can look like worried about friendships. Sleepovers, exams, money, anything at all. Absolutely anything at all. But it usually passes. It is usually a very small, um, window. If it is longer than that, if it is longer than just a situational, a very short situational, then you need to, you know, you need to seek help.

If a child is worrying about one thing for more than two weeks, then we always recommend that you take them to a doctor or seek help professional. Persons such as a psychotherapist, counsellor, even schools, you know, a lot of schools have got really good counsellors nowadays. So, yeah, if it is more than two weeks, then absolutely.

If you have a child who is what we call a worrier, you know, that is their natural, that they start to worry about lots of things all the time, then absolutely make sure

you do that. And you know, there just is some, especially some little people, they worry about lots of different things. So, have a look at, you know, when you're talking about anxiety with your child, is it just a very sharp, sharp?

Or is it a longer is it a longer stress? Now, what I wanted to say is kind of what happens in our bodies because it isn't just, we worry about something and that's it. As humans, our brain has this inbuilt system, our amygdala, our fight and flight system. And when the alarm goes off through a worry or a stress, it releases hormones and those stress hormones help us either fight, flight, freeze.

Okay. And if, for instance, we've got an exam or a presentation coming up, you think, you know, that can be work or can be school for our teens, you know, even SATs for our younger ones a little bit of those stress hormones really helps us focus, really help us concentrate and focus. Okay. It's really good for us to have that.

However, if it is that our brains then, um, that continues and we have a higher level of those hormones, it can be really difficult because then they sit in the body and we haven't run. We haven't, you know, hidden ourselves away. And so, they're sat in our body. So, we actually will come on to that in a little while of how we get rid of those hormones just sat there, but it is a natural, normal response.

The kind of caveat I'm going to say to you is. That and I talk about this in the book all the time that when our brain perceives a threat, perceives a threat it will, it will fire off. It will trigger those stress hormones. Now that perceived threat is not necessarily a real threat. So, for example, if we use the exam, exams are not going to kill us.

We will not die, whether we take them or whether we don't show up for them, we won't die. So, it isn't a real threat, but our brain doesn't know the difference between a real or an imaginary threat. It is just a perceived threat. This is really important to think about that for our children, because as far as they're concerned, it's real in their brain.

It's real. Their body is responding exactly as if it is a real threat. And so, it's really important that we don't dismiss it. Because all the reactions in the body are already set off. And also, that sometimes as adults, we don't realize what the threat is. So, if we've used exams as a teen example, if we think about a sleepover for a younger

person, the threat might not be the sleepover because they're all excited about setting up their friends.

But actually, the threat might be. What am I going to have to eat there? Will I like it? Will I have to eat it? Yeah, that might be the underlying threat for them. And their brain has clicked off, triggered those stress hormones. And so yeah, so we have to really think about, is this a, is this a perceived threat for them?

And is that why they're going into it? So, what causes anxiety? There's lots and lots of things. We've talked about exams. We've talked about you know, sleepovers or new challenges. It can be, you know, for me, I always think about is anything that doesn't feel safe or feels uncertain is definitely something that would potentially trigger anxiety.

And also, what might make them feel anxious or worried, we might not think is an issue at all. And so sometimes it's difficult for them to say, and it's difficult for them to identify it. And it can, as a parent, be difficult for us to identify it because we wouldn't be worried about something like that.

So, think about things like you know, friendships. Coping with loss or grief, and that doesn't necessarily mean somebody's died in the family. That could be the loss of a friendship. That could be a loss of a teacher when they move from class, you know, up to the next year, things like that. Trauma, and also what, what we perceive as trauma and what they perceived as trauma is different.

So just being aware around that. The news, absolutely. The news, social media. I know that when the war in UK, that caused huge anxiety across absolutely massive. Age range of students, things like changes to their physicality. So, you know, if they're, if they're changing hitting puberty, sometimes if they are unsure around sexuality or gender identity things like if they overhear you talking about maybe money worries or you know, anything to do with the house often. And it's funny because I think sometimes it's not always parents who talk about this kind of thing. Sometimes it can be grandparents, you know, and they don't realize. And I, I was actually with a little person the other day in a nursery and talking, chatting to one of the teachers.

And, I, I happen to say, you know, just be aware of what you're talking. Now, they weren't talking about anything, but it was as we were observing this little person and although we didn't use their name at all, you could, they were playing, but I

could tell they were listening. And I said, watch this because you'll see this with other children.

And they were like really taken aback and they were like, oh, but there, you know, they're busy, they're chatting to the friends. I went, but now, and I whispered their name really quietly, turned around really fast. So, it is sometimes just being in their presence and talking about things that might be worrying you.

Children take that on and they won't necessarily say that to you. So just be aware of that. So how do we know if our children are worried? So, let's have a look at the symptoms and signs of anxieties that we might notice, starting with physical signs, so physical signs in their body. So, stomach issues I feel sick, might be diarrhea, could be I've got tummy ache, you know, things like that.

And that is often if the fight and flight hormones, usually they sit in the tummy. Racing heart, you know, heart really beating fast. They're sweating more than usual or a little, you know, they can be shaking or trembling, that kind of thing. Grinding their teeth, um, quite often happens if they feel dizzy or if they feel faint.

And also look at their breathing. Is it, is it fast? Is it shallow? They're the kind of physical. Now, when I have a student that, you know, struggles with this, I, that is the first thing I get them to do is identify that when they're worried, what kind of things do they see in their body? What kind of things can they feel in their body?

Because then that's their first indication that there. starting to worry about things. So, they're all kind of the physical signs. Let's have a look at the emotional. How do they feel? So it could be that they're a little bit nervous, on edge, can't relax, you know, they're not sat still. They feel like something bad's going to happen sometimes, which is awful, you know, to watch a young person think like that.

They might be tired and grumpy. Now, if that's a teen, that could just be an everyday occurrence. And do be aware of that, you know, just the average teen behavior because there's a lot of hormones running through their body. And sometimes that feels very overwhelming and they can't, can't quite control that.

And also, is it different? And this is what I would say to you for all of your Kids irrespective of age for this and for their behavior. So, so how they feel and their behavior, it isn't comparing them to the siblings is comparing to what's their usual state. And then going, Oh, actually that's more or that's less.

So, um, just to continue with feelings, they can be tired and grumpy. They might need reassurance. They might be worried they've upset somebody. They seem to become very self-conscious again. Typical teen behavior typical teen feelings, should I say. And then let's have a look at the behavior signs. And that would be, can't focus, they might eat more or less, they might be going to the toilet more or less, they might be really tense, can't relax, or they might be really fidgety, can't sleep or even going to their, you know, even to that extreme where they might be having panic attacks.

Now, the reason I said compare your teen to their normal behavior, what they usually like, if you have that kind of baseline, is that because if your child is suddenly eating more, that could be a growth spurt. However, if they've started to eat more and you're not kind of sure why or out of their usual pattern, then that is something you need to be aware of.

If they are more tired than usual, if they, you know, can't sit still more than usual then that is a sign that there might be something more going on there. So, how do we manage anxiety? And this is, this is really getting kind of to the crux of it. How do we manage anxiety? And just before we go to that, I wanted to just slip in.

There is lots of types of anxiety disorders. You know, general anxiety disorder, health anxiety, academic anxiety, can go into phobias. I am not going to go into here. into those here and the reason being is that yes, it can help you the students explain it, but it's very easy for us to start to label anxiety and give ourselves a disorder, give our kids a disorder.

And that's not that that isn't useful, but actually it's kind of only really useful when you're talking to professionals because they are professional labels. And actually, what we want is to focus on the solution rather than the actual specific disorder. Now, and it has to be, you know, it has to be more than worrying for a couple of weeks to be into one of those labels.

And actually, I think if we can catch anxiety at the beginning, then it wouldn't get there. So that's why today I want to be having a look at how we manage anxiety. So, there's lots of, you know, there's lots of different ways that we can do that. We can first one. is, as a parent, is kind of acknowledge, you know, acknowledge what they're saying to you, really listen to them.

You know, and I always say to my parents, I give these, when you're listening to a child, have an agreement in place. Do you want me to listen? Do you want me to help you problem solve? Or is this something you need me to do? So, say for instance, they come to you and it was like an issue with bullying, then that is something that you would need to do.

Okay. But really the aim is for us to listen without interruption, without trying to jump in and problem solve it is around. For me is if we can listen to them, reflect back what they're saying, oh, it's, it sounds like you said you feel like this, or, you know, reflect back what your, what exactly what they've said.

So, they know you're listening and really give them that attention. Don't be. You know, still making tea or doing emails or whatever. And that's not to say that they aren't important. Of course, they are. I say, let me finish this and then I can give you my full attention. But it's really important that we allow them to talk because quite often that really helps just to talk that out.

You know, yourself, if you're with a friend and you're talking things through, you don't want them to solve it for you. You just want them to listen. So yeah, that's really important. Allow them to listen. Don't dismiss it. I have a little person at the moment who is worried only little worried about having a car crash when they learn to drive.

And it's very easy for us to dismiss that. Now, obviously, I do some work with them on that, but it is those future worries, and we find that children, you know, usually it's a, for me, it usually falls into one of three things on an, you know, on an everyday basis. Not if it's an anxiety disorder, but if it, if every day.

It is either something that is running the mill every day that they've come across there and then. So, Tommy didn't speak to me or you know, I forgot my lunch. I'm going to get in trouble because I've not done this. Things like that. Next one is that kind of future. worry, like worrying about driving when they're only small and they can't actually drive yet.

Or the third one is something that's kind of out there where they start to worry about, say, the Ukraine war and the impact that it has. And you know, it's, so it's important because as much as yes, they probably don't have to worry about the Ukraine while, and they definitely don't have to be worried about driving just now.

It's really important not to dismiss that and say, oh, you don't have to worry about that just now. Because that's not helping. They've already released those stress hormones. It's already a worry. So, talking it through will really, really help. So rather than dismiss it. Meet them where they're at, let them talk, and just be ready to listen.

The kind of second thing that I would say to you, tip, is remind them that lots of children worry. That this, you know, it is normal for worry, but kind of try and avoid labelling them as anxious or you know, shy. Because I often hear that is when parents talk about their children. That's how they describe them.

And actually, it's not useful for the kids to hear that really. I'd say the biggest thing is try not to avoid the worrying because I find that what happens is parents tend to take, try and take the, the worry away rather than allowing them. Now, this is a big thing for me in resilience. Is that if we take them, take away that opportunity for them to learn and for their brain to learn that this isn't a real threat, they will be okay.

So, like the younger example we used before around going to a friend for a sleepover. Yes, you can manage that situation to a certain extent by saying to, to their friend's mum, they're a little bit worried about what you're having for tea. Have you got any ideas yet? You know, um, and that's not saying that if it's something that you don't normally make for them, ask them to make something else. It's actually just exposing them to something. One of my parents, really lovely parent if she wants her child to try something new, she gets the friend's mom to make it because they usually eat it there. And then they come back and have a new dish at home.

So, it's really, you know, which is a great way of doing it, isn't it? Really? But. So don't try and take that away. Just prepare them for it. Absolutely prepare them for it. Because if we take away those opportunities, how are they going to learn that they're safe? How is their brain going to get that feedback that they're safe if we have taken that away?

So, start, you know, give them a slope. You don't have to expose them to loads of risks, but we absolutely. Should start with a level of exposure and slowly work up to that so that they get that positive reinforcement re-enforcement and kind of particularly if it, it's like social activities that they're worried about, we need to give them the opportunity to, to learn and to know that they're safe



I guess another one for me would be on an everyday basis is take time to talk to your child every day, every day, without distraction, without them being distracted, without you, that doesn't matter if it's, you know, straight after school or when they get into bed, because I get a lot of, oh, the minute that they get into bed, the minute they're supposed to be going to sleep, and I don't know about you, I mean, it's a bit different for mine now, because mine are teens, but I don't know.

It used to be the minute that they'd be getting into bed, they might start. And that's the minute that you are thinking, I'm nearly done. They're nearly done. I can just sit down for an hour now and just chill. And actually, as the day gets quieter, as they start to, their mind starts to get quieter, they start to the worries start to rise to the top for them.

And actually, what I would always recommend is if they're younger, is, is getting them upstairs or up to bed earlier. Build in that time to chat when it's just the two of you sat on their bed. I do it with my teens after school or after college. I really try to be around at that time. So even though I have a, quite full working day. And if I'm not kind of, if I'm not around, because sometimes, you know, I am working, then what I will do is I will build in at some point, either a phone call if I'm not actually here, if I'm working away. I'll build in a phone call with each of them. Or I will make time in the day to just. Sit and go, how was it? How was today? You know, and the first reaction, the first kind of answer is always, Yeah, it was fine. And then I go, Oh, anything interesting?

And then it starts to come out. So, you know it's not about going, did anything bad happen today? Or it is about just giving them that time and space and letting them fill it. I think, you know, they might fill it with something they've watched on YouTube. They might fill it with, you know, an issue they've had with a friend, but it's about giving them that time and space without distraction as well.

The other thing the next kind of. I guess tip I would say is real, really encouraged healthy diet and physical activities because again, those stress hormones, they sit there during the day. And if they haven't, you know, bearing in mind those stress hormones that are released when our brain perceives a threat uh, for us to fight, flight or freeze.

And if we haven't, if we're, if we're kind of all coiled up. And we've not been able to release them by, you know, younger ones running around the playground or

things like that. And then actually what happens is it sits there and it can just make them feel rubbish. So actually. You know, any kind of exercise really helps.

Also, shower or bath really help. Kind of that water. Getting outside, even if it's just a walk around the garden. A stomp around the garden for younger ones. And tea sometimes. You know, that kind of thing really helps just disperse that. I was talking to a teacher yesterday and I, and They do yoga with their kids, and that's, you know, it's brilliant.

And I said, do you know that kind of doing row, row, row your boat kind of exercise? So, I think it's called we, I call it boat pose. But whereas if you're rowing a boat really helps disperse them. Downward dog. really helps things like that. So, teens are quite good. Some of them will do yoga and younger ones are really love yoga mostly.

So that's, um, you know, but a couple of poses that just really help disperse that. But if, if say you're in class even just running their wrists under cold water really helps. Food helps for sure. Food and water really help because what it does and just be careful what food. So, when we eat, we're telling our brain that we're safe because if we had to run from a threat, then We wouldn't eat and if we feel very anxious and very stressed, our body actually holds.

stops all digestion of food, and that's quite often why kids won't eat because everything's shut down because it's got to save all its energy to run from this threat because our brain is, you know, it is still very cave times in that as evolved as we are. That is very, very still very like it was in cave times.

So, eating really helps. Drinking water really helps. It just really helps to ground them, makes kind of them come back down a little bit. But just be aware of what they're eating, because too much sugary foods will spike their insulin and stuff. So just be aware of that. And keep that, you know, really keep that conversation and communication up with not only your teen, not only your younger child, but actually with teachers or coaches that are around your kids as well.

So, you know, I'll quite often check in with rugby coaches or, like, my youngest goes to, like, a drama club. I'll check in with them, everything okay, how they're doing, you know, just keep up that. I always say, listen, they seem to be struggling at the minute, so just keep your eye on them. And that's really, you know, it's

lovely that you've got eyes and ears on your kids that are not there if they do extracurricular stuff.

Now, you can You know, there is, there is things other things that you can do, um, if you think that actually they are going beyond those two weeks, you know, seek out a therapist, absolute, but seek out a therapist that is child trained or teen trained. So, for instance, I have Kathy who does some work for me is absolutely brilliant, but she doesn't do below 13.

Unlike me, who I do from three at the moment. And yeah, they, you'd want them to have that. You want them to have that experience. You want them to have the knowledge around the age group that you're seeking for. So, you can do that. You can go to your GP and they might recommend my first port of call would always be with school.

Before GP, for sure. Because quite often if they're teens, they do have either learning mentors, or they might have a counsellor in school. They'll have pastoral for sure, no matter what their age. And sometimes they have like ELSA programmes, things like that, that just help with those emotions that they can talk through the worries to somebody who's not their teacher.

And that's really useful. You know, for the child to have that, they often go through workbooks or go through a certain program that just helps them learn how to manage, you know their anxiety and, and their worries. Now, what I would say to you is, um, have a look. Are you the kind of person that worries like are you that person that worries and passes it on because we do, you know, I know that I remember having a conversation with a mom who was really scared who came to me and their child was really scared of bees. And actually, when I, when we talked about it, so was mum. And she'd pass that on, obviously, unknowingly. We do these kinds of things all the time, don't we? We don't realise, and that's fine. Don't, you know, don't beat yourself up around it. But what I would say to you is, you know, be aware of the language that you're using.

Around, around you being worried, things like that. Now if you have a look on, um, my academy website, so the Resilient Academy, if you have a look on there, there is kind of a little journal for the older primaries that will help just go through some worries and things like that. For the younger ones, we have like an album that helps with worries, helps sleep, stuff like that, all kind of around a fiver.

And then for the older ones, kind of. Exam stress and support. So, there's things there already in place. And for the really young ones, we have like a little course that's free that just helps with confidence and anxieties and things like that. So, so check them out if you need any additional support.

But yeah, so really have a look at the kind of things that keeps them grounded. eating, drinking, getting outside, physical activity stuff like having a shower or bath that really helps disperse those. Listen, listen, listen, listen to them. You know, that is the biggest thing that you can do. Repeat back what they're saying.

So, they know you're listening. Give them that eye contact. Give them that uninterrupted time. We often talk, and I've probably mentioned this on the podcast before, so Goldie Hawn did some massive research and got loads of funding. I mean, millions of pounds spent on funding Goldie Hawn, the actress for, to help kids who have been through trauma and kind of worry and anxiety.

And what she found what the research has found that if we spend 10 minutes, literally just 10 minutes, timer, everything, 10 minutes with our kids every day, uninterrupted, that really alleviates any feeling. And that doesn't matter what age they are. So, you know, think about that 10 minute. I know we're busy, and often we're, you know, they come in from school, they get a snack, we've got to get them changed, they're going somewhere else, but that 10 minutes, build it into your day really helps alleviate that kind of any worries and anxieties.

And the fact that they have you to talk to is lovely, isn't it? I often find teens, it's in the car. That's when you're going to get your best. If you're in the car or you're walking beside them so that you have not got that eyeball to eyeball feeling for them and they can talk without feeling embarrassed is a really good way.

I sometimes set out a jigsaw or colouring for when one of my young clients comes in and I'll just be doing it and they'll join in. And that is the quickest way to get them to talk. And they, and they love it because it keeps their conscious mind where they're feeling embarrassed or the conscious mind where they're thinking, what's she thinking of me?

Is somebody going to judge me? It keeps that busy while you can actually get in there and really see how they feel. Thank you for joining us on the podcast today. And feel free to reach out. If there's any topic at all that you want us to cover, we'd love to. Can't wait for you to see the new guests coming up on this season.

## Transcript

This season? I don't know. Is that even a thing? Is that just an American thing? Anyway, we are on season three. So yeah, take care everyone. Lots of love from my family to yours. And see you all soon.