

How to help a child who is experiencing a panic attack or intense stress

If a child is experiencing intense stress or panic, don't make them fight these feelings and do not attempt to stop or suppress these feelings forcefully. First, try to connect with the child, be close to them and talk to them in a soothing voice.

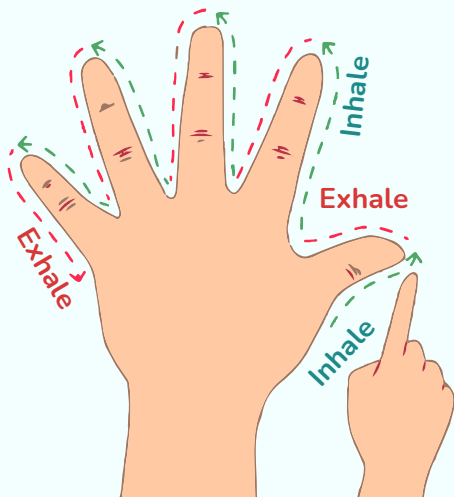
Focus on breathing



It is common that in stressful moments accompanied by panic, the child will begin to hyperventilate. During hyperventilation, there is rapid breathing, gasping and rapid exhalation with exaggerated deep breaths into the chest. Therefore, it is essential to bring the breathing rhythm back to a more restful rhythm so that there is no excessive inhalation of oxygen. Excessive inhalation of oxygen only works to worsen the discomfort in the body.

First, focus on your breathing. Don't hold your breath, try to breathe slowly and deeply through your nose and encourage the child to do the same and breathe with you.

Try the five-finger breathing technique. Spread the fingers of one hand so that you have space between each finger. Place the index finger of the other hand on the outside bottom of the prepared palm. As you trace the outside of your thumb upwards with your index finger, inhale slowly, and as you begin to trace downwards towards your palm, exhale. This way, you can trace the palm of the child and once again ask them to breathe with you. This will also give the child gentle physical contact that can have a grounding effect.



Redirect attention to your surroundings

Try the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique with your child. This technique involves using all five senses to help them focus on the present moment and distract them from unpleasant thoughts and feelings. Together with the child, look about you and slowly name:



5 things you can see



4 things you can touch



3 things you can hear



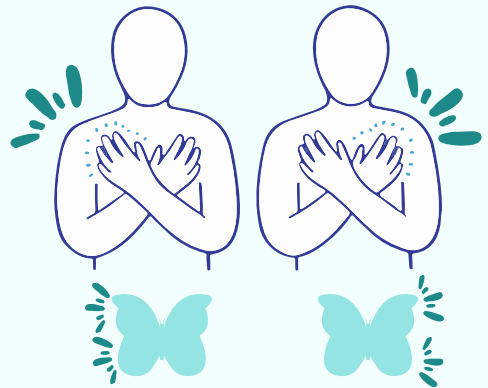
2 things you can smell



1 taste you can taste

The butterfly hug

The butterfly hug is another way that can help you ground yourself and calm your body when you feel anxious or panicky. Cross your arms and gently tap 25 times in alternating rhythms with your open palms on your chest or the outside of your arms. Breathe deeply and slowly as you do this.



Try cold water or ice

Rinse your hands and face with cold water, or reach for an ice cube and hold it in your palm. Cold water and the sensation of cold can help us to reactivate our senses and redirect our attention from intense anxiety and fear back to our own body, which will actively calm our thoughts.

Offer the child a helping hand or a hug

If the child is in a state of intense stress, you can also help him with a gentle touch or a hug. Not everyone will be comfortable with physical contact with another person, so it is important to ask the child first or to offer to hold hands or give them a hug. Never force the physical contact, stay close to the child and provide a calm and safe space for them.

Remember: Every child experiences intense stress and panic differently. Therefore, not every technique will suit everyone. For some, it will help to focus on their breathing, but for others, this technique may be uncomfortable. The most important thing is to stay with the child and give them a safe space not only for the duration of the intense emotional state but also afterwards, as the child may well feel exhausted and frightened.

