

WHY CONSTANT REASSURANCE KEEPS ANXIETY STUCK

WHY REASSURANCE FEELS SO NECESSARY

When a child is anxious, their brain is in protection mode. Seeking reassurance is the nervous system's way of asking, "Am I safe right now?" Adults respond instinctively, wanting to calm, soothe, and remove distress. In the moment, reassurance often works — breathing slows, tears stop, the worry eases. That relief is real. But it's short-lived, because reassurance calms the feeling without teaching the brain how to tolerate uncertainty.

WHAT THE ANXIOUS BRAIN LEARNS INSTEAD

Each time reassurance arrives immediately, the brain links worry with rescue. The message becomes: "I can't cope unless someone tells me I'm okay." Anxiety then needs more reassurance, more often, and with greater urgency. Over time, worries escalate rather than shrink, because the brain never practises sitting with discomfort. This isn't defiance or manipulation — it's learning through repetition. The brain is doing exactly what it's been trained to do.

WHAT HELPS INSTEAD (WITHOUT WITHDRAWING SUPPORT)

Support doesn't mean silence. It means changing how we respond. Acknowledge the feeling without answering the worry: "I can see this feels really scary." Gently delay reassurance: "Let's sit with this together for a moment." Offer predictability through routines like a Worry Hour, and teach phrases that build internal safety, such as "I can handle this feeling". Over time, the brain learns that worry is uncomfortable — but survivable.

WHY REASSURANCE KEEPS ANXIETY STUCK

Reassurance interrupts the learning process anxiety needs to loosen its grip. For anxiety to reduce, the brain must experience worry rising and falling without external fixing.

Constant reassurance removes that opportunity. It also shifts power away from the child's internal coping system and into adult confirmation.

The result is a loop: worry appears, reassurance is sought, relief is brief, and the worry returns stronger next time.



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