

ELEMENTARY

ANXIETY



CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR SGLs

Your elementary school students are in a big transition: They're learning to engage with their peers more, forming friend groups, and having and understanding more thoughtful conversations. With this transition, however, may spark some anxiety as they're learning to navigate this new, social world.

But anxiety in this age group may be difficult to spot.

These kids often suffer in silence for fear of scrutiny, only to end the day in a major meltdown when they get home — none of which you'll be able to witness during ministry times. What you may see is a disengaged student keeping to themselves, all the while battling internally some pretty heavy stuff.

Remember that the best thing you can do is connect with parents. Many kids will suffer with their anxiety in silence while they're with you, only to have a complete breakdown once they get to the safety of their homes. Build and maintain a relationship with parents and check in with them regularly about your students' behavior outside ministry times.

WHAT TO SAY:

Encourage them to talk about their anxiety openly.

- *"Anxiety isn't wrong. Don't feel bad about feeling this way."*
- *"I've struggled with these kinds of feelings too. You're not alone. And I'm sorry that you feel this way."*
- *"Thank you for sharing this with me. I hope you know you can always talk to me."*
- *"Let's take and walk and keep talking. Do you want to go outside?" (Exercise has long been used as a method to decrease symptoms of anxiety, and using that time to have a genuine conversation with your elementary school-aged students may be helpful in learning the source of their anxiety.)*
- *"Something that helps me is taking really deep breaths. Let's try taking deep breaths together." (A good practice is inhaling for four seconds, holding that breath for two seconds, and exhaling for four seconds. This practice will help slow down their heart rate and decrease the feelings of anxiety.)*
- *"When I've felt anxiety in the past, something that helps me is . . ." (Take some time to share your personal experience with anxiety and what you did to help ease some of its symptoms. By doing this, you're affirming to your students it's totally normal to feel anxious and that there are ways to manage anxiety.)*

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY:

Don't minimize what they're feeling. They need to feel they have safe spaces to run to.

- *"[The thing they're feeling anxious about] isn't a bit deal. You just need to calm down."*
- *"Don't be afraid of [the thing they're anxious about]."*
- *"You have be braver and stronger."*

If you notice your students are showing signs of anxiety for more than a week or two, consider encouraging their parents to seek the help of a professional. And be prepared to help.