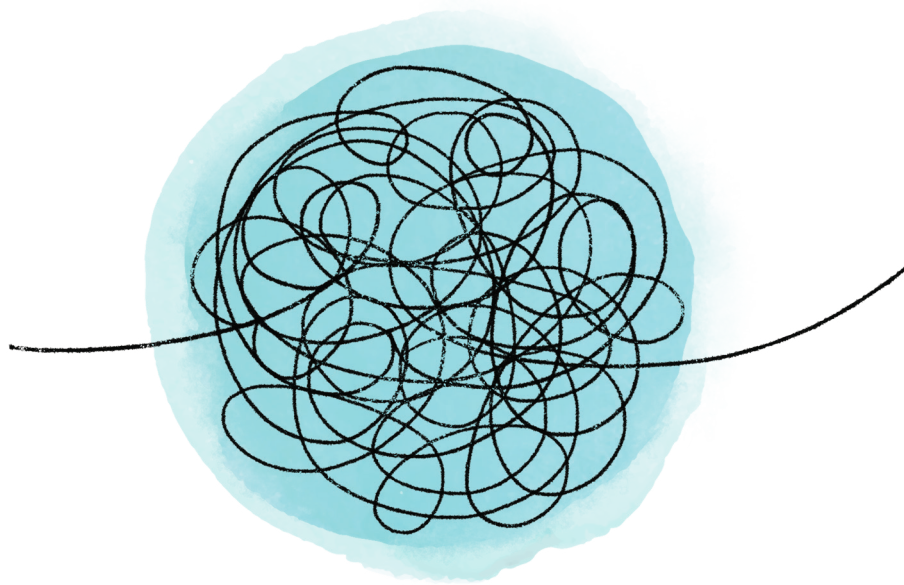


MINISTRY LEADER & TEACHER
TRAINING GUIDE FOR

calming your anxious child

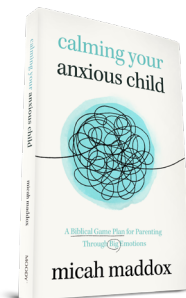
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WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU CALL THE PARENTS

This guide is designed and thoughtfully put together for churches and ministries to use for training leaders and teachers on how to communicate and be equipped for children with big emotions. For deeper understanding and conversation around this topic, have your team read and discuss *Calming Your Anxious Child: A Biblical Game Plan for Parenting Through Big Emotions* by Micah Maddox.

LINK TO BUY
THE BOOK
ON AMAZON >



Often children who struggle with anxiety are either easy to see because they act out or they blend in and hide because they are afraid. When a child has an outburst or retreats and will not cooperate, it can be easy to let them sit in a corner or call their parent to pick them up.

This guide will give leaders and teachers a few ideas to consider before calling a parent or letting a child sit in isolation or become an example of bad behavior. This is not designed as a crisis intervention for moments of complete chaos when a child is hurting themselves or others. It is a guide to hopefully help guide children who are acting anxious or defiant to calm before chaos sets in.

WHAT LEADERS AND TEACHERS CAN DO BEFORE CALLING THE PARENT OR CAREGIVER

1. START WITH PHYSICAL NEEDS:

Sometimes simply meeting a physical need or changing the child's physical location in the room away from what is bothering them can be a game changer. Here are some things to consider:

- Does the child need a drink?
- A snack?
- Fresh air or a change of scenery?
- Bathroom break?
- Space away from the big group?
- Need to move?
- Need a visual distraction?
- A fidget toy, puzzle, or craft?
- A listening ear?
- To talk?

The goal is to reassure the child that you care about them, that you see them, and that you are happy to help them. Consider whether the child feels unsafe and offer the assurance that you will stay with them and help them.

While you might not be able to meet all of the child's needs in this short time together, you can help the child by offering a few opportunities for coping by simply offering to meet the physical needs that they might not be able to articulate.

2. THINK ABOUT THE MENTAL NEEDS OF THE CHILD AND WORK TOWARD MOVING BEYOND THE MOMENT:

- Ask the child what they like to do, play, or eat.
- Help them think of something they are thankful for and share back and forth a couple of blessings.
- Encourage them to use their imagination and pretend with a stuffed animal or other toy that you can "talk" to each other through. This lowers the pressure for the child

to speak directly to you and gives them a little bit of a cushion of social safety. Rather than saying, “let’s pretend...” Just take the toy and begin talking to the child through the toy. This almost always brings a smile and eye contact from most children.

- Assure them their parent/caregiver is coming back soon. While this time might be short, it can feel long for a child who is struggling.
- Don’t force them to answer questions and cause more anxiety. Instead, make the time low-pressure and enjoyable. Fun and games go a long way with most children.

3. THINK ABOUT THE SOUL NEEDS OF THE CHILD:

- Give them Jesus through story, reading aloud, song, crafts, books, screens.
- Give them love through a calm, gentle conversation, high five, gentle shoulder pat or side hug. Read the room. If the child is clearly making distance between you and themselves, give them space. Do not get in their personal bubble.
- If a child is acting out, first keep everyone safe but then evaluate if the child just needs attention. The “I see you, I hear you, I’m with you,” script will go far to help a child move from acting out and attention seeking to feeling seen and heard.
- Don’t automatically categorize a child as disruptive or bad. Give them Jesus, give them love, give them a chance to be seen and heard first. Connect with them on a personal, low-pressure level.
- Be aware of diagnosis and encourage children to be kind. Do not allow bullying or unkindness from anyone.
- If a child is disengaged and will not participate, move slowly and calmly toward the child. Sit beside first, rather than face-to-face. Then slowly interact with toys or words depending on the child’s age and ability. If the child engages, keep the interaction going and praise the child. Smiling and calm body language will work better than forceful interaction.
- If a child is disruptive and will not comply, have another worker try a slow, calm voice and stance to approach the child (assuming everyone is still safe and the child is not physically acting out). The goal is to de-escalate any fear and help the child acclimate to the group and activity.
- If the child is acting out, speaking profanity, or being unsafe, use your protocol for your church or organization. The tips and ideas found in this guide are for situations that can be handled slowly and calmly. Not for crisis intervention.

Here is a simple guide you can post in your classroom or meeting space for leaders and teachers.



BEFORE YOU CALL THE PARENTS:

Calm, slow movements.

Deep, slow breaths.

Low, slow words.

Then wait.

Give the child time to process what you said.

The fewer words, the better.

Connect with a smile and work towards a high five.

...

Not every child needs their parents called. And not every child needs a time-out. Sometimes they need to be seen, heard, and loved.

