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[Training For Parents Could Help Child Anxiety Disorders](#)

Special skills workshops for parents of anxious young children could offer a breakthrough in addressing this difficult problem, according to psychologists at The University of Manchester

Providing psychological treatments for children under ten with anxiety disorders is problematic for health professionals, as the approaches that are most successful with teenagers and adults are difficult to apply to the very young. According to researcher Dr Samantha Cartwright-Hatton: "A treatment like cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) relies on the patient having highly-developed verbal skills, and needs them to understand and reflect on the causes of their symptoms. This is very difficult for younger children, and there is not much evidence that it works with them." The team is therefore investigating a new approach, which allows parents to be much more involved. "Parents raising an anxious child need a very special set of skills which nobody ever teaches you," Dr Cartwright-Hatton explains, "so we're trying out a course which helps them develop the skills to give their child the best chance of becoming a confident, mature adult." The team is eager to hear from parents of children under ten who display symptoms of anxiety, such as extreme fears, phobias, frequent worry or distress at separating from their parents. If they participate in the study they will either undertake a weekly two-hour session for ten weeks (starting September) at the Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Facility on Grafton Street in Manchester, or receive a thorough assessment and detailed advice on how to get the right help for their child. Helping parents develop strategies to both manage their children's problems and help them overcome them has already proved very successful with behavioral problems, with even TV 'infotainment' programs being shown to be a valuable aid. In adapting the approach for anxiety disorders, Dr Cartwright-Hatton hopes that similar benefits will result for the children suffering from them. "Parents who have already completed the course say they have found it enjoyable and useful, and would recommend it to others," she says. "The therapists are very easy to talk to and the course is designed to be fun - there's no point in being all 'doom and gloom' about these things as people learn new skills best when they are relaxed. So we make sure that we have plenty of laughs along the way." The course covers techniques for raising children's self-esteem and dealing with fears and worries, as well as offering strategies for managing difficult behaviors like tantrums calmly. "Child anxiety can carry on into adulthood and stay with people throughout their lives, so we are starting to realize how important it is to sort it out early," Dr Cartwright-Hatton concludes. "Successful treatment could significantly reduce adult anxiety and depression and the behaviors associated with them, which would bring huge benefits for the health and happiness of the population as a whole, as well as for the workforce and economy."