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UCLA CARES Contributions from our Experts to the Mattel Playroom

Since 2015, the UCLA Center for Child Anxiety Resilience Education and Support ([CARES](#)) has been transforming childhood anxiety prevention and early intervention within families, schools, communities, and health care systems. Through thoughtful collaboration with other universities, nonprofits, and school districts, we are able to help disseminate best practices. Where best practices are not widely used, we develop, implement and evaluate innovative, tiered community-based approaches to promote resilience and reduce anxiety.

Using a strengths-based, trauma-informed and culturally adaptive approach, the CARES team provides programs for children, school staff and parents while supplementing these efforts with trainings and resources for primary care providers and mental health clinicians.

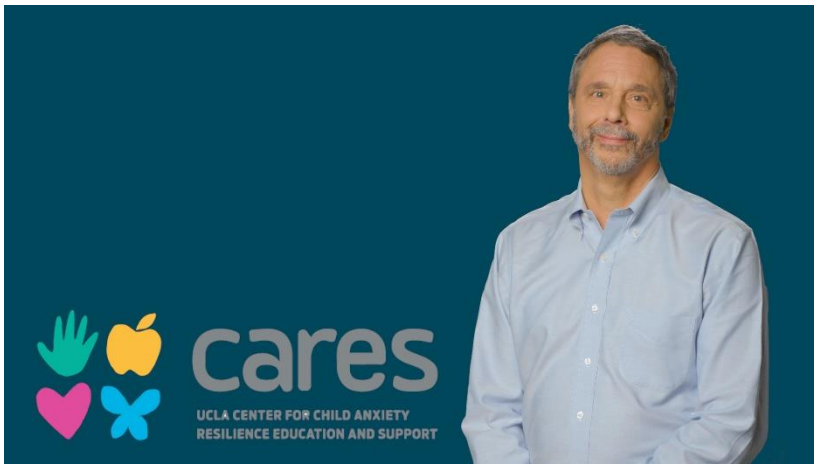
Keep reading for tips from our experts!

John Piacentini, PhD, ABPP

Kate Sheehan, LCSW

Monica S. Wu, PhD





John Piacentini, PhD, ABPP is a board-certified clinical child and adolescent psychologist and Director of the UCLA Center for Child Anxiety, Resilience, Education and Support (CARES). Dr. Piacentini is an expert on the impact of stress and anxiety on children and families, and through UCLA CARES, works with parents, teachers, and other community leaders to develop and test more effective methods to prevent and treat child anxiety and related disorders.

John's Tips

Use shared storytelling to engage and teach your child. Like play, shared storytelling is a great way to foster your child's imagination and creativity. You can do this with two or more family members or even remotely with friends or relatives. Start by coming up with a topic and then each person takes turns describing what happens next in the story. You can be as silly or serious as you want. Since younger children often reflect themes of anxiety or uncertainty in their stories, especially in times like this, shared storytelling is a great way to provide your child with examples of healthy coping and support in a fun and engaging manner.

Organize remote playdates for your child. Social distancing can be especially difficult for an only child or a child without close-in-age siblings because it reduces opportunities for cooperative play with peers. Cooperative play is especially important since it is one of the primary ways that young children learn to take turns, share, follow instructions, and work together - all critical skills for later in life. Organizing remote tea parties, turn-taking games, crafting, and other cooperative activities with classmates, friend, cousins and others can be lots of fun and help your child's social and emotional development.

Use reward charts to support your child's sense of self-efficacy. Children love to earn stickers or small rewards for their efforts – so do most adults! With your child, select 2-3 simple tasks to target over the coming week. These can be almost anything, including certain chores (picking up clothes or toys), bedtime routines (brushing teeth, turning out the lights on time), or completing schoolwork. You and your child can make and decorate the chart together – just make a grid of the targeted tasks and the days they are to be completed. Each day your child completes the task, they get to put a sticker on the chart, and at the end of the week, they can “cash in” their stickers for a special reward or extra privilege. Privileges need not cost anything: kids can pick a favorite meal to make together, or a child can select what movie the family watches, or maybe just a walk together with one parent.



Kate Sheehan, LCSW is a licensed clinical social worker sharing a strengths-based approach to wellbeing. She is the Managing Director of the UCLA Center for Child Anxiety, Resilience, Education and Support (CARES). A psychotherapist with a Masters of Social Work from Columbia University, she facilitates *Mindful Self Compassion* workshops, the *Daring Way* work of Brené Brown, and other evidence-based practices to support thriving individuals, families, and communities.

Kate's Tips

Make use of pets, stuffed animals, or Barbie to discuss feelings with young children. Often younger children may feel more comfortable discussing their pet's feelings than their own. Caregivers can ask a child, "What do you think Barbie dreams about?" Or "Do you think your teddy bear ever gets scared? Why?" With **older kids**, you can ask about characters from a favorite tv show or book to explore their emotional world.

Soothe a child with Butterfly Breath. With your full hand, trace the shape of a butterfly on your child's back as they fall asleep or need a little soothing. As you trace one side of the wings, breath in slowly and encourage your child to breath to the pace of your "wing." As you trace the other side of the wings, breath out slowly and again encourage your child to match you. This is an example of co-regulation. Butterfly Breath can be done anytime, anywhere: [here's](#) a copy you can print for your child.

Tap into your senses for natural stress relief. We don't need anything from the store to help our nervous system reset after a fright or stressful event. We can use our [senses](#) to settle ourselves, for example:

touch a favorite fluffy blanket or notice the warmth of a ray of sunlight coming through your window onto your arm

smell a fresh herb growing by your back door or windowsill by rubbing it between your fingers or play a game with your child to see if they can recognize the smell of their shampoo, soap, or bubble bath compared to the laundry detergent or dish soap.

taste a variety of fruits and vegetables with your eyes closed. Without opening their eyes, can your child name what color they taste? Or what shape the taste has?

see how many colors are in the fridge. Maybe allow your child to organize the food by color, then encourage them to choose at least three different colors for a snack or meal.

hear a favorite song and dance together. Caregivers can encourage attention to different sounds in a song by tapping along with the drums or trying to sing the bass line. This helps build our child's attention and takes awareness away from any troubling thoughts.



Monica S. Wu, PhD is a clinical psychologist specializing in the care and research related to childhood anxiety and related disorders. Part of the UCLA Center for Child Anxiety, Resilience, Education and Support (CARES) team, she is particularly interested in raising awareness about childhood anxiety, enhancing the accessibility of evidence-based care, augmenting existing treatments for maximal benefit, and facilitating a family-based approach for supporting youth.

Monica's Tips

Add some structure to your day. In this time of uncertainty, it is important to harness control whenever we are able to. By creating some agenda for the day (whether it be play time, school time, or meals), setting expectations can help families experience comfort in routines. It is also a great time to practice some flexibility – although there is an agenda, it's okay if a couple items get left off – there's always tomorrow!

Have kids take on "helper" roles. With families being quarantined together, it's a better time than ever to have children help you out with daily tasks! Have them be the "dough roller" when you're baking the cookies, the "placemat setter" when you're preparing for dinner, or the "captain of choosing board games." This will give your child a sense of control in these uncertain times, as well as build up their self-efficacy, confidence, and skill set.

Indulge in new hobbies. Has your child always wanted to learn how to bake a cake, fold origami, or read that book they've been putting off? Given the current increase in unscheduled time, it's a great opportunity to learn a new skill, hobby, or finish something they started a while ago. Whether that be a 1000-piece puzzle that was only a quarter of the way finished, or picking up an entirely new skill like knitting, families can capitalize on this time for these activities.