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5 STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS TO
**Free the Anxious
Generation**

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A Guide from Good Inside
and the Anxious Generation



5 Strategies for Parents to Free the Anxious Generation

Here's what we know: Our kids are suffering from a mental health crisis. The shift from a "play-based childhood" to a "phone-based childhood" has led to social isolation, disrupted sleep, diminished focus, and expectations of instant gratification. At the same time, the rise in intensive parenting has created a harmful paradox: Kids have been overprotected offline and underprotected online, as Jonathan Haidt writes.

Something else we know: All is not lost. Parents can help turn these patterns around. If you feel confused or overwhelmed, you're not alone. You deserve support. And you've come to the right place.

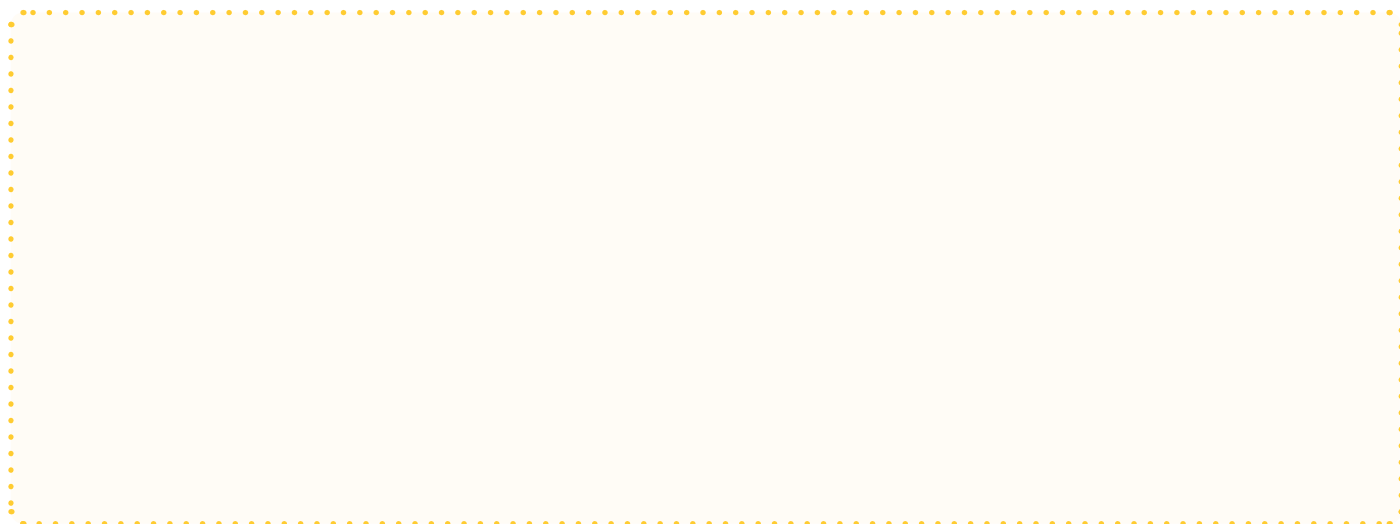
Hi, I'm Dr. Becky Kennedy, clinical psychologist, #1 *NYT* bestselling author, and founder and CEO of parenting company Good Inside. Our mission at Good Inside is to give parents the knowledge and tools they need to raise resilient, confident children. That's exactly why we've partnered with Jonathan Haidt, author of *The Anxious Generation*, to create this guide of five simple, actionable steps you can take to see positive change—fast. By downloading this guide, you've already taken a big first step to getting there: You've moved from focusing only on the *problem* to putting effort toward a *solution*.

Ready to make the Anxious Generation a little less anxious? Let's jump in.

5 STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS TO FREE THE ANXIOUS GENERATION

Cue: Family Jobs. In every family, you and your kid have separate responsibilities:

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To be clear, your child will *not* say: "I get that. Thanks for being such a sturdy parent." No way! Your child will... do their job. Your child will express their disappointment and frustration. Over time, as we tolerate tough feelings in our kids, they'll start to learn how to tolerate those same feelings in themselves.

2. Strengthen Your Boundary Muscle

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Anxious Generation is a generation of kids desperate for boundaries. In fact, a lack of boundaries is one of the main contributors to today's poor mental health outcomes.

When we don't set boundaries, it's as if we're letting our kids take charge. As much as they might protest our decisions, the truth is they don't want to be in

"Hey, I've been thinking and we're going to be doing snacks differently in our family: There will be no more snacks right before dinner, because your body gets full on snacks and it's not getting all the good food it needs."

The next day, if your kid pushes back, reinforce the boundary:

"I know you want a snack, and I know you can wait half an hour until dinner. That's our new family rule. I get that you're upset."

The more frequently and more clearly you communicate your boundaries, the less often you'll find yourself having to say "no"—because your guidelines are already established! And the more confident you'll eventually feel when it comes to enforcing tech boundaries.

Once you've built up your boundary muscle, try it out with tech:

"In our family, we prioritize connecting around the dinner table. I know you're excited about the new game, but we can't play it at the table." (10/15/23)

you imagine if the pilot announced, “Hey, is it okay with everyone if we make an emergency landing? It’s okay, right?” or “Ugh, we probably need an emergency landing, but we already decided we are landing in LA, and so it just is what it is, nothing I can do... plus, the passengers would be so annoyed!” No way! A sturdy pilot would say, “My number one job is to keep you safe and right now, I’m seeing rough conditions and we need to change course. I know that’s inconvenient for all of you and I get that. Here’s what’s going to happen...”

Similarly, you need to give yourself permission to change screen time limits, take away a phone for a period of time, or remove apps or games you had previously approved—not out of spite or power, out of love and protection. You’re the parent. You’re the sturdy pilot.

Setting boundaries while staying connected to a child is the essence of “sturdy leadership”; this is the same model that’s effective in the workplace or on a sports team - a leader who can stay true to their principles and who cares about other people’s feelings without being taken over by them.

You can care about your kid’s feelings around these changes *and* you don’t need your kid’s approval, because—this idea should sound familiar by now!—*your job is to keep them safe, not happy.*

WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN DAY-TO-DAY LIFE?

Before you hand over a device or set a boundary, remind yourself:

“I have the right to change these rules whenever I need to for my kid’s safety.”

Prepare your kid for flexibility, too:

When it's time to change a boundary or rule, communicate it directly and honestly. For younger kids, you might say:

"We need to change some things about how we use screens in our family. I know this isn't fun to hear, and I know it's important to keep you safe."

For tweens and teens, you'll want to share more details:

"I've learned some new things about [specific app or behavior], and I'm going to change phone rules. I know this is frustrating and I know it's important for your safety. I get that this feels annoying to you and will take some time to get used to."

4. Competence is the Antidote to Anxiety

WHY THIS MATTERS

As Jonathan Haidt writes in *The Anxious Generation*, we are underprotecting our kids online and overprotecting our kids in the real world. In other words: our kids need more protection online (hence our focus right here, in this guide, on boundaries!) *and* our kids need more freedom in the real world. After all, a key protective factor for kids - and a factor that counteracts anxiety - is feeling competent and capable. And competence is only developed as kids watch themselves navigate challenges, struggle, try things on their own, and eventually figure things out. In fact, when we "rescue" our kids by stepping in too fast and doing things for them that they can do for themselves, we end up building our child's anxiety and fragility, because our kids never experience themselves as capable of coping and getting through tricky experiences.

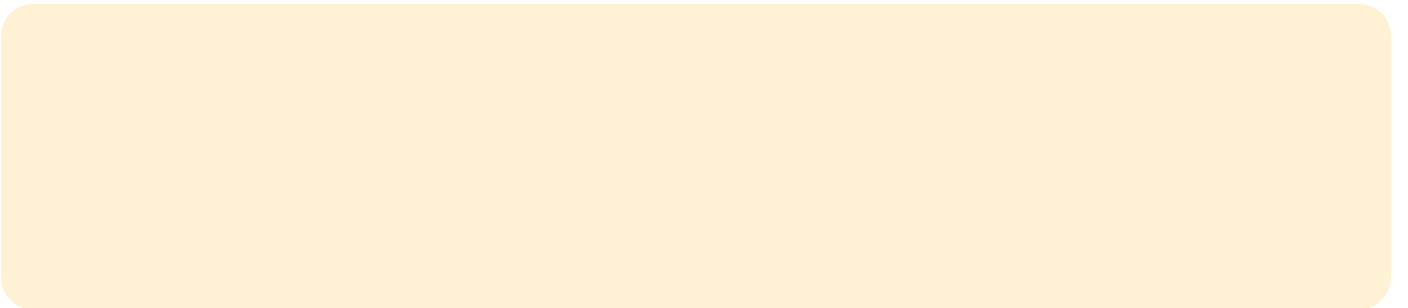
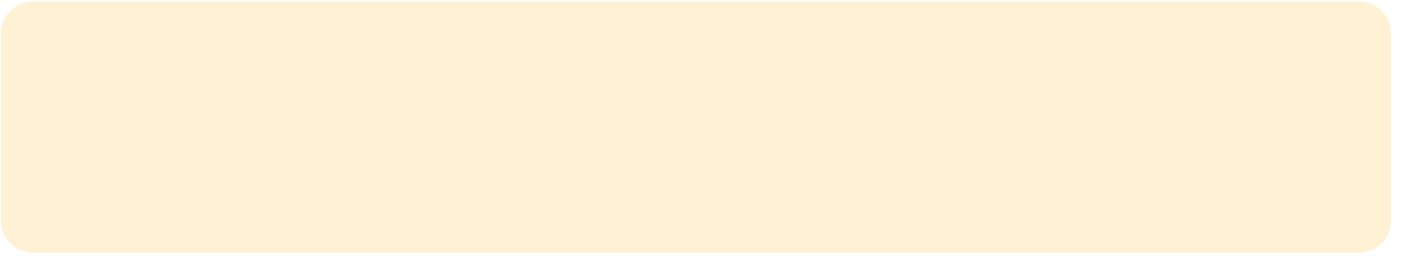
Think about it this way: the world is full of bumps and twists. If, during childhood, we are constantly "smoothing" over the road for our kid, then we actually make our kid *more fearful* of the natural ups and downs of life. Does this mean we should just release our kids into the wild without any oversight? Of course not. There's always a better answer than two extremes. It does mean we need to let

one specific challenge where your child can experience themselves as capable and independent. Some examples: "I've tended to reach out to your coach when you're running late to practice, and I realized that this is something you can manage on your own. Starting today, I see that as your responsibility, as you're definitely capable of texting on your own!" or "I wrote a small list of items for the store and today I want to wait in the car while you go in and grab them on your own. I know this is something you haven't done before, and I also know you're a capable kid who can take on that responsibility."

5. Take Collective Action

WHY THIS MATTERS

Collective action is the idea of collaborating with other parents to turn *individual family action* into *community action*. Connecting with other families often makes



Every group will be different, and suggestions might range:

“Ok, so we all are going to empower our kids to do grocery shopping for the family this weekend. Amazing. I think it’ll be so much easier for our kids to start doing these things knowing that their friends have the same challenge!”

Thinking “I don’t really have another parent or group of parents to talk to”? We’ve got you. That’s exactly why we created a private, safe community within the Good Inside App—a place with no judgment or shame, just support from parents in the trenches with you.

You did it.

You just spent precious time and energy thinking about how to replace anxiety with resilience and confidence. Wow! We really mean this, your kid is lucky to have you as a parent. Take a moment to acknowledge yourself: “This is hard work and I am doing it.”

Looking to bring these ideas to life and get reminders of what to do when? Check out the Good Inside App—your 24/7 parenting coach. You can get personalized, age-based support (that takes less than 5 minutes a day!) and a Good Inside Chatbot to answer your in-the-moment questions. From screen time to phones to



About Dr. Becky and Good Inside

Dr. Becky Kennedy is the visionary founder and CEO of Good Inside, a transformative global parenting movement that disrupts conventional parenting practices by empowering parents to become sturdy, confident leaders and raise sturdy, confident kids. Good Inside currently has members across more than 100 countries and millions of followers across social media platforms, including nearly 3M followers on Instagram alone. In August 2024, Good Inside

