

Anxiety

These resources cannot take the place of counseling, but you may find that they offer helpful insight into the dynamics of anxiety. For more support, or with assistance in finding a local counselor, please contact your child's school counseling department.

Fear is the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat, whereas anxiety is the worry of a future threat. Some worry is normal for children and adolescents. However, when worry is extreme, or out of proportion to the actual threat, and/or lasting longer than 3-6 months, it may be important to have your child evaluated. This is especially true if the worry is making it difficult for your child to function well at school or at home. Some common symptoms include:

- Thinking about the worry for long periods of time
- Physical complaints (sore muscles, upset stomach)
- Difficulty sleeping
- Avoiding (not wanting to go to school, not wanting to leave parent, not wanting to be in the situation causing worry like taking a test or going to the doctor, etc)
- Feelings of impending doom (feeling like something bad is going to happen to themselves or someone they love)
- Feeling restless, keyed up, or on edge
- Irritability
- Difficulty concentrating

There are some types of Anxiety Disorders that are more common in childhood. These include:

Generalized Anxiety: The key features include persistent and excessive anxiety and worry about many different areas of life, including work and school performance, which the individual finds difficult to control. The worries cause the individual significant distress, and interfere with their ability to be successful in daily activities. In addition, the individual experiences physical symptoms including restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge; being easily tired or worn out; difficulty concentrating or mind going blank; irritability; muscle tension; and difficulties falling and/or staying asleep.

Separation Anxiety: When a child is fearful or anxious about being separated from a loved one, typically a parent, and the level of fear or anxiety is beyond what is developmentally appropriate for their age. There is persistent fear or worry about harm coming to the loved one, or events that could lead to the loss of the loved one. The fear of separation can cause extreme panic, nightmares and physical symptoms of distress.

Specific Phobia: Sometimes individuals develop an extreme fear of or anxiety about a specific object or situation. The fear, anxiety, or avoidance is almost always immediately induced by that object or situation, is persistent, and out of proportion to the actual risk posed. There are various types of

specific phobias including animals (spiders, sharks, etc), things in the natural environment (heights, large spaces), blood-injection-injury, situational (driving, flying), and other.

Social Anxiety: The individual is fearful, anxious or avoidant of social interactions and situations that involve the possibility of being scrutinized or evaluated. This can include meeting new people, eating or drinking in front of others, or situations in which the individual performs in front of others (public speaking, test taking). The individual worries about being negatively evaluated by others, being embarrassed, humiliated or rejected, or of offending others. The fear and anxiety is excessive beyond typical “shyness” and is out of proportion to the actual risks involved.

If you are worried that your child may be struggling with anxiety, you can take the following steps to seek help:

- **Talk to your school counselor:** School counselors can talk with students about what they are experiencing, help them develop positive coping skills, and offer parents community resources for further support.
- **Talk to your family doctor:** Doctors can evaluate children and adolescents for anxiety and recommend further steps.
- **Seek outside counseling:** a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) or a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) can evaluate children and adolescents for anxiety and provide counseling and support to address it. Counseling is typically covered by health insurance, and your insurance company should be able to give you a list of in network providers. Your school counselor can also provide a list of counselors in our community.
- **Learn more about anxiety and help your child develop positive coping skills in order to manage their worries in healthy ways.**

For more information on anxiety, you can explore the following resources:

Calming the Anxious Child

Worry Wise Kids This site is written for parents of children and adolescents who are struggling with anxiety. It includes information about a new **online resource** as well as a list of **do's and don'ts for parents**.

National Institute of Mental Health This site provides basic and helpful information such as the definition of anxiety, as well as symptoms and treatments for anxiety.

Psychology Today This site provides basic and helpful information such as the definition of anxiety, as well as symptoms and treatments for anxiety. Tips to reduce your child's anxiety can be found **here**.

National Alliance on Mental Illness This site provides basic and helpful information such as the definition of anxiety, as well as symptoms and treatments for anxiety.

How to Help Your Kid Calm Down This site provides some age-specific strategies.

Source: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Fifth Edition. American Psychiatric Publishing: 2013.