

My Child Has Anxiety: What Can I Do?

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Presentation Outline

What is anxiety?

Characteristics of an anxious child

When is anxiety a problem?

What causes anxiety disorders?

Types of anxiety disorders

What can parents do?

Resources

What is anxiety?

- Anxiety is a normal reaction to many stressful or threatening situations or to uncertainties in life
- Is an aroused state of alertness in response to perceived danger/threats
- Feelings of distress are typically accompanied by physical symptoms

Characteristics of an Anxious Child

- Physical or somatic complaints
- Difficulties with sleep, nightmares
- Can be moody, irritable
- Shy, cautious, socially timid
- May tend to be ‘perfectionistic’
- Most secure in predictable environments
- Constantly seeking reassurance
- Avoidance

Other symptoms that are often overlooked could include:

angry outbursts, oppositional behaviours, temper tantrums,

Common Fears in Children & Adolescents

From Dr. Foxman's book 'The Worried Child'

Age	Common Fears
0-6 months	Loss of support, loud noises
7-12 months	Strangers, sudden movements or large/looming objects
1 year	Separation, toilet, strangers
2 years	Separation, dark, animals, loud noises, large objects, changes in house
3-4 years	Separation, masks, dark, animals, noises at night
5 years	Separation, animals, "bad people," bodily harm
6 years	Separation, thunder & lightning, supernatural beings, dark, sleeping or staying alone, bodily injury
7-8 years	Supernatural beings, dark, fears based on TV viewing, staying alone, bodily injury
9-12 years	Tests, school performance, physical appearance, thunder & lightning, bodily injury, death
14-15 years	Family & home issues, political concerns, preparation for future, personal appearance, social relations, school

When is anxiety a problem?

- Are your child's worries so severe that they interfere significantly in their life?
- Is your child showing excessive avoidance for activities or school?
- Is he or she easily upset and is his or her distress out of proportion to the situation?
- Do you spend a lot of time comforting your child and urging him/her to participate in regular activities?

What causes Anxiety

- Arise from a complex mix of genetic and environmental factors
- Tend to run in families
- Child's temperament plays an important role. Being extra sensitive or prone to anxiety is often a lifelong characteristic
- Stressful life experiences (e.g., media, death, moving, divorce, school)
- Can be learned behaviour



*'Into the house, children, there's
a gentle breeze brewing'*

RESILIENCE MODEL



Temperament

- Early ideas/teachings about temperament assumed that all babies were the same
- Later research (Dr. Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas) revealed 3 distinct temperaments in infants
 1. The Easy Child (positive mood, adaptable, positive to novelty)
 2. The Slow-to-Warm-Up Child (negative response to novelty, mild intensity, gradual adaptation after repeated contact)
 3. The Difficult Child (irritable, intense)

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health condition in children and adults. Roughly 6 percent of children and youth have an anxiety disorder that is serious enough to require treatment.

Separation Anxiety

- Refusal to attend school or other activities without parent or caregiver
- Unable to sleep without a parent being present
- Tantrums, tears, clinging when left at school by parent or caregiver
- Excessive 'homesickness' during overnight stays
- Clinging to teacher
- Physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, fidgeting

FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL



FIRST DAY OF COLLEGE



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Generalized Anxiety

- Child has many worries and fears which are constant
- Child finds it difficult to control their worries
- Has physical symptoms such as tense muscles, restless feeling, tired easily, problems concentrating, sleeping
- Often irritable

Social Anxiety

- Occurs more in older children and adolescents
- Involves worrying and fears about social situations, like having to go to school, being observed, or having to speak in class
- More than shyness
- Concern is with being evaluated by others



"I suffer from test-taking anxiety, brought on by lack of studying."

Other anxiety disorders

Specific Phobia – marked fear or anxiety about specific object or situation (e.g., heights, enclosed spaces, animals)

Selective Mutism – consistent failure to speak in social situations in which there is an expectation for speaking (e.g., school) despite speaking in other situations

Panic Disorder – recurrent unexpected panic attacks
(prevalence in children is very low)

What can parents do?

- If you are very concerned, see your child's doctor
- Encourage your child to come to you with their worries
- Listen and validate their feelings. Acknowledge that your child's fears are real
- Education of anxiety – that it is normal and why we need to have it
- Read books with your child about anxiety
- Help your child problem solve

- Do check in at end of day
- Maintain good physical health and routines
- Manage your own anxieties – model appropriate ways of coping
- Teach your child positive self-talk and express confidence in their abilities
- Encourage relaxation – e.g., take 3 deep breaths
- If anxiety occurring primarily occurring at school, speak to your child’s teacher to see if academic or other concerns
- Emphasize positive aspects of anxious situations (e.g., birthday party)

- Have child write a coping journal or cards with things that he/she can do when anxious
- Time out – when overwhelmed may need a few minutes to calm down and relax
- Role play situations that be anxiety provoking
- Reinforce exposure by allowing your child to work through his/her fear or fears in **small** steps
- Reward child for displaying skills in managing their anxiety

- Help child with unhelpful thinking styles. In other words, restructure thoughts so they are more realistic and positive
 - all or nothing thinking
 - magnification (catastrophizing)
 - overgeneralising
 - disqualifying the positive
 - jumping to conclusions

Oh, god... these fights
are too tight. i think i'm
gonna die!!



ANXIETY GIRL!
able to jump to the worst conclusion
in a single bound!

Natalie Dee.com

- Encourage your child to be in the present
- Reduce exposure to traumatic events (e.g., in the news)
- Build resiliency
- Be patient and expect setbacks, particularly with new situations or stressors

Resources

www.anxietybc.com/parenting/parent-child

The Worried Child: Recognizing Anxiety in Children and Helping Them Heal by Paul Foxman

Helping Your Anxious Child, A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents by Ronald M. Rapee etc

When Something's Wrong – Anxiety Disorders – Ideas for Families by the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation (in your handout)

Keys to parenting Your Anxious Child by Katharina Manassis