

ANXIETY FACT SHEET

All children experience anxiety. Anxiety in children is expected and normal at specific times in development. For example, from approximately age eight months through the preschool years, healthy children may show intense distress (anxiety) at times of separation from their parents. Young children may have short-lived fears, (such as fear of the dark, storms, animals, or strangers). Anxious children are often overly tense or uptight. Some may seek a lot of reassurance, and their worries may interfere with activities. Parents should not discount a child's fears. Because anxious children may also be quiet, compliant and eager to please, their difficulties may be missed. Parents should be alert to the signs of severe anxiety so they can intervene early to prevent complications.

Anxiety disorders are the most common type of mental health disorder in childhood, affecting approximately 8% of all children and adolescents. There are many types of anxiety disorders that affect youth, the most common being Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Panic Disorder, Separation Anxiety Disorder, and Phobic Disorders.

Anxiety disorders are treatable! Studies have shown that cognitive behavioral therapies (CBT) and medication treatments are both effective in treating anxiety disorders in youth. Parent involvement in treatment has also been shown to improve outcomes in some children. Early treatment can prevent future difficulties, such as academic or social difficulties and low self-esteem.

There are several different types of anxiety disorders:

1. **Generalized Anxiety.** With this common anxiety disorder, children worry excessively about many things, such as school, the health or safety of family members, or the future in general. These students also may have physical symptoms, such as headaches, stomachaches, muscle tension, or tiredness. Their worries might cause them to miss school or avoid social activities.
2. **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder.** Children with OCD have excessive preoccupying thoughts (obsessions) and repetitive actions done to try to relieve their anxiety (compulsions).
3. **Phobias.** These are unrealistic and excessive fears, such as a fear of dogs or enclosed spaces. Phobias usually cause people to avoid the things they fear.
4. **Social Anxiety.** This anxiety is triggered by social situations or speaking in front of others. A less common form, called selective mutism, causes some students to be too fearful to talk at all in certain situations.
5. **Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.** This results from a past traumatic experience.

Symptoms of anxiety disorders can include:

- Recurring fears and worries about routine parts of everyday life
- Physical complaints, like stomachache or headache
- Trouble concentrating
- Trouble sleeping
- Fear of social situations
- Fear of leaving home
- Fear of separation from a loved one
- Refusing to go to school
- Being overly clingy

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