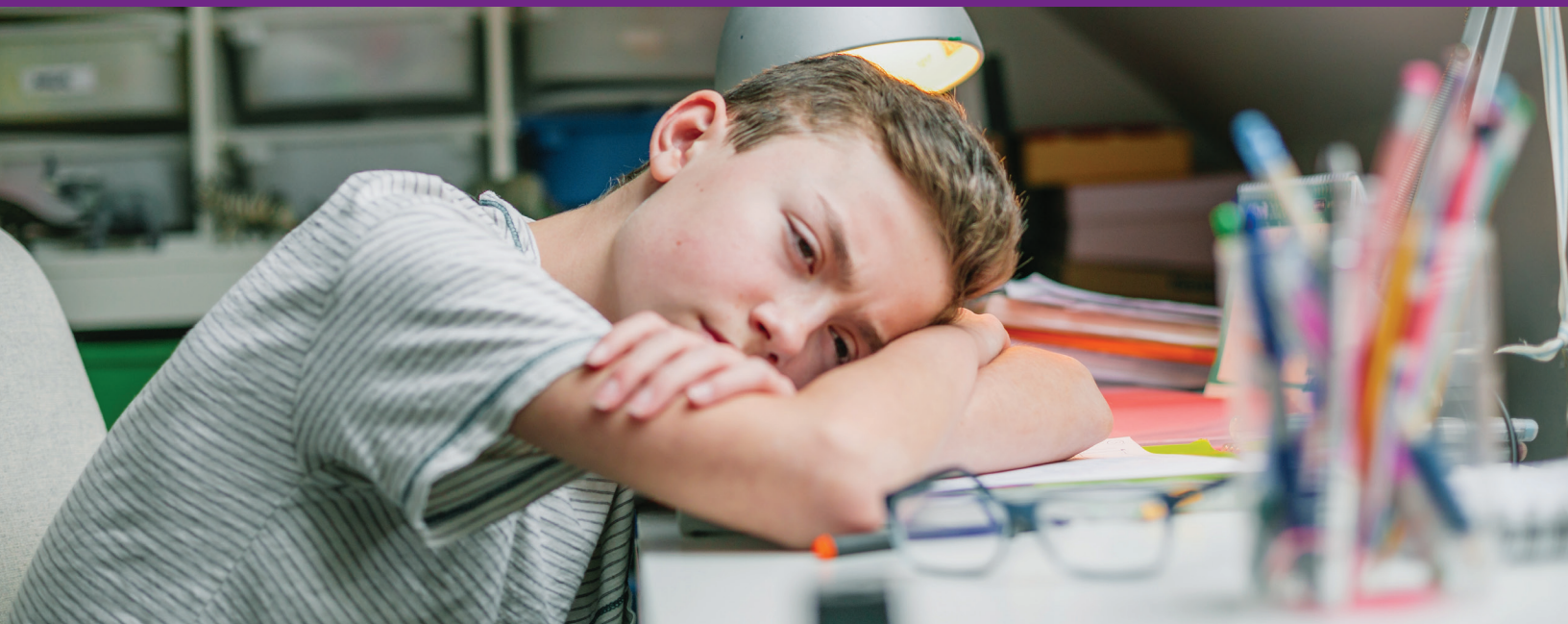


# Anxiety Is Real for Children



Children and youth are facing many challenges today that can lead to fear and worry. Sometimes these feelings can impact their daily functioning, and your child or youth may need additional help. Fear can be a natural reaction to something perceived to be a danger or threat and is a normal part of childhood; however, when this fear begins to impact daily functioning, it can be referred to as anxiety. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), “anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure.”<sup>1</sup>

What are considered “normal” fears and worries can become a problem when they start to get in the way of your child’s ability to complete daily activities or cause them to stop doing the things they enjoy like attending school, engaging in social activities or going to events, or playing sports. Additionally, if there are changes in your child’s sleep pattern or you notice an increase in irritability, anger, crying or worrying, it is important to talk with your child’s healthcare provider as these may be signs of anxiety.

There are many signs that parents should be looking for if they believe their child is suffering from anxiety. Keep in mind, not all children will display all symptoms or the same symptoms as others. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), “anxiety is not one disorder but rather a category of conditions.”<sup>2</sup> The following are anxiety disorders a child may be diagnosed with:



- **Separation Anxiety Disorder:** when a child becomes fearful when they are away from their parents or being fearful of strangers.
- **Phobia:** when a child is overly scared or fearful of something that may be viewed as potentially dangerous such as heights, closed in spaces, or clowns.
- **Social Anxiety Disorder:** when a child has an intense fear of going places or events where there will be people. They may also have a difficult time with public speaking or performing a task (singing, reading) and will avoid going to these events.
- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD):** where a child may have an excessive worry or fear about something that will happen in life that disrupts their daily activities of living.
- **Panic Disorder:** when a child experiences an unexpected, sudden attack of intense fear that will have some additional physical symptoms like racing/pounding heartbeat, trouble breathing, feeling dizzy and sweating.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, “anxiety disorders are fairly common in children. They affect about 15% to 20% of children and adolescents. And nearly 1 in 3 adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 has anxiety. It is more common found in people assigned female at birth.”<sup>3</sup> There can be many factors that cause a child to become fearful or worry about things, especially if there has been some type of traumatic event that the child has experienced. If you suspect that your child is experiencing some form of anxiety, the first step is to contact your health care provider or primary care physician to discuss your child’s behavior and your concerns. The provider may want to speak with other people who may be involved in your child’s life, like a teacher or a caregiver to see what they have observed in the child’s behavior.

Medications and psychotherapy are common treatment recommendations after a diagnosis of anxiety is established. Medication is prescribed by a doctor and helps with the physiological aspects of anxiety, whereas psychotherapy is used with children and their parents to work on learning new coping skills to manage symptoms.

The Cleveland Clinic recommends combining cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT, a modality used in psychotherapy) with medication to treat anxiety, noting more positive outcomes when using medication and psychotherapy together to manage this condition. Contact a behavioral health provider or a local Community Mental Health Center to schedule an assessment for your child or youth to begin the therapy process.

Thinking that your child or youth may need medication to manage their anxiety? There are a few different medications that can be prescribed for this condition. Talk with your child’s primary care provider or health care provider if you think this option is best for your child. It is important to keep in mind that it can take time for medication to work. It is also important to remember that not all medications will work the same way for everyone and finding the right medication can take several attempts. If your child is prescribed medication for anxiety, or any mental health challenge, they must take the medications as prescribed. Be sure to follow up with the provider on a regular basis to monitor progress.

Being a parent to a child or youth who is experiencing anxiety can be challenging. Work to provide a stress-free environment and tools to assist your child in managing this condition. According to the National Health Services (NHS), there are some additional things that “parents can do to help”:<sup>4</sup>

- Talk to your child about their anxiety or worries and feelings.
- Listen to them so that you have a clear understanding of their feelings.
- Do not make assumptions about their feelings or dismiss what they are worrying about.
- Work with your child to find a solution or ways to manage their feelings or whatever they are worrying about.



If you are not sure where to get help, dial [2-1-1](tel:211) or [1-866-211-9966](tel:18662119966) to connect to resources in your community. If you or your child are in crisis and need support, call 9-8-8 to reach the National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. They are available to assist you and your child 24/7.

## Stay Calm, Help Is Near

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