

Supporting Your Child in Managing Stress and Anxiety

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What Is Anxiety?

- Feelings of nervousness and fear in anticipation of a potential negative event
- Anxiety is universal
- Anxiety is often adaptive
- Often hereditary, can be brought on by life events



When does anxiety become a disorder?

- When it leads to avoidance of important situations or life events
- When it causes impairment in areas of functioning
 - Academic
 - Social
 - Family/home
- When it causes significant distress

Separation anxiety disorder

- Excessive distress upon separation
- May involve fear that something bad is going to happen when child and parent/caregiver are separated
- Onset generally in early to mid-childhood

Social anxiety disorder

- Excessive fear of negative evaluation/embarrassment in social situations
- Fear leads to either avoidance of feared situation or extreme distress while in situation
- Often develops in late childhood, early adolescence

Generalized anxiety disorder

- Excessive/uncontrollable worry about everyday life matters (school, performance situations, safety, etc.)
- Physical symptoms (i.e. headaches, stomachaches, sleeplessness) accompany worry
- Youth with GAD often seem like “little adults”

Obsessive compulsive disorder

- Intrusive thoughts (obsessions) that are followed by repetitive behaviors (compulsions) intended to prevent harm and relieve anxiety
- Thoughts may seem bizarre or illogical (fear of taking on another person's essence)
- May develop in childhood or adolescence

...and the rest

- Specific Phobia
- Panic Disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

What do we see at home and school?

- Extreme shyness
- Hesitant to participate in social situations
- Extreme discomfort when the center of attention

“Blends into the wallpaper” in social settings

- Calling/texting parents frequently

What do we see at home and school?

- Trouble paying attention
- Extra time spent on homework, or avoiding it, due to perfectionistic concerns
- Always expecting the worst
- Asks frequent questions
- Excessive worry about failure

Physical symptoms of anxiety

- Trouble catching breath
- Stomachaches/ headaches
- Complains of nausea
- Frequent trips to the bathroom
- Tightness or pain in the chest
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Heart racing
- Feeling faint
- Feeling shaky or jittery
- Sweating

Managing your child's stress at home

- Stress related to school, friendships or the future is **normal**. It is OK, and even important, for children to experience stress and learn how to handle it. Often anxiety worsens in children when they do not learn to face stressful situations.
- Offer to support child in managing stress, but discourage procrastination or escape.
 - Balance validation with expectation
 - "I know this situation is making you very nervous, and I know you can handle it."
- Maintain realistic expectations!
 - "Perfect is the enemy of good"

Managing your child's stress at home

- Incorporate relaxing activities into your family's regular schedule
 - Family Game Night
 - Reading before bed
 - Mindfulness exercise
- Be a "coping model"
 - Demonstrate that you also manage stressful situations throughout your day
 - Discuss situations in your day that raised your stress level, even if you did not handle it perfectly
- Tolerate your child's distress

When to seek help at school?

- If your child frequently worries or gets anxious about schoolwork or attending school
- If your child avoids schoolwork or puts too much time into work
- If your child begins to resist attending school or tries to avoid certain aspects of school

If you see any of these behaviors, please feel free to contact your child's Counselor to begin a discussion on how the school and home can work together to help your child.

When to seek help outside of school?

- If a child's anxiety or worry generalizes beyond the school setting
- If a child's anxiety or worry is chronic or causing significant impairment or distress
- When recommended by school-based staff

Treatment Options for Child Anxiety

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy**
- **SSRI Medication**

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Treatment focused on modifying behaviors and thoughts to reduce anxiety

Central component is gradual exposure to anxiety-provoking situations

Therapist acts as a coach that teaches and guides child in using anxiety management skills

SSRI Medication

Prescribed by psychiatrist

Common SSRI medications include Zoloft, Prozac, Luvox, Lexapro, Celexa and Paxil

Children typically take medication for at least 6 months

Other Treatment Options

Dialectical Behavior Therapy

- Indicated for emotion dysregulation, or when youth is engaging in unsafe behaviors

SNRI Medication: Effexor, Cymbalta,
Pristiq

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