

Anxiety Disorders in Children

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental, emotional, and behavioral problems to occur during childhood and adolescence. About 13 out of every 100 children and adolescents ages 9 to 17 experience some kind of anxiety disorder; girls are affected more than boys.¹

What are anxiety disorders?

Children and adolescents with anxiety disorders typically experience intense fear, worry, or uneasiness that can last for long periods of time and significantly affect their lives.

There are many different anxiety disorders that affect children and adolescents. In addition, anxiety disorders may coexist with physical health conditions requiring treatment. If not treated early, anxiety disorders can lead to other problems.

- Repeated school absences or an inability to finish school;
- Impaired relations with peers;
- Low self-esteem;
- Alcohol or other drug use;
- Problems adjusting to work situations; and
- Anxiety disorder in adulthood.

Types and signs of anxiety disorders

Many different anxiety disorders affect children and adolescents.

Several disorders and their signs are described below:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Children and adolescents with generalized anxiety disorder engage in extreme, unrealistic worry about everyday life activities. They worry unduly about their academic performance, sporting activities, or even about being on time. Typically, these young people are very self-conscious, feel tense, and have a strong need for reassurance. They may complain about stomachaches or other discomforts that do not appear to have any physical cause.

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Children with separation anxiety disorder often have difficulty leaving their parents to attend school or camp, stay at a friend's house, or be alone. Often, they “cling” to parents and have trouble falling asleep.

1. *Anxiety: children at risk* www.aboutourkids.org/families/disorders_treatments/az_disorder_guide/anxiety/children_risk



Separation anxiety disorder may be accompanied by depression, sadness, withdrawal, or fear that a family member might die. About one in every 25 children experiences separation anxiety disorder.¹

Phobias: Children and adolescents with phobias have unrealistic and excessive fears of certain situations or objects. Children and adolescents with social phobias are terrified of being criticized or judged harshly by others. Young people with phobias will try to avoid the objects and situations they fear, so the disorder can greatly restrict their lives.

Panic Disorder: Repeated “panic attacks” in children and adolescents without an apparent cause are signs of a panic disorder. Panic attacks are periods of intense fear accompanied by a pounding heartbeat, sweating, dizziness, nausea, or a feeling of imminent death. Children and adolescents with the disorder may go to great lengths to avoid situations that may bring on a panic attack. They also may not want to go to school or to be separated from their parents.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: Children and adolescents with OCD become trapped in a pattern of repetitive thoughts and behaviors. Even though they may recognize that the thoughts or behaviors appear senseless and distressing, the pattern is very hard to stop. Compulsive behaviors may include repeated hand washing, counting, or arranging and rearranging objects.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Children and adolescents can develop post-traumatic stress disorder after they experience a stressful or traumatic event. Young people with post-traumatic stress disorder experience the event over and over through strong memories, flashbacks, or other kinds of troublesome thoughts. As a result, they may try to avoid anything associated with the trauma. They also may overreact when startled or have difficulty sleeping.

Contact us

Your program provides access to tools and other resources online or call us directly to speak to a professional counselor who is available everyday and at any time to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.

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