

# ANXIETY



Children and adults of all ages experience anxiety from time to time. It is important to normalise worry as being part of the range of human emotions. Some young people will be able to vocalise their worries which will allow you to support them. For others, even being able to identify themselves that they are feeling anxious is hard so being able to express and communicate this to others can be a real challenge.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Not wanting to go to school or be left alone (even in a different room at home).
- Complaints of physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, upset stomach, feeling sick.
- Appearing distressed, agitated and/or irritable.
- Not sleeping well; trouble getting to sleep, staying asleep or waking early in the morning.
- Nightmares or night terrors.
- Regressive behaviour such as wetting themselves.
- Becoming more clingy or needing a lot of reassurance or encouragement.
- Not wanting to be separated from a parent/carer.
- Requiring 'safety' items such as cuddly toys, dummies/soothers/pacifiers which are inappropriate for the age of the child or environment.
- Refusal to speak (particularly if they previously communicated without difficulty).
- Aggressive behaviour (physical and verbal) towards others or "tantrum" behaviour.
- Difficulties concentrating and appearing fidgety or restless.
- Avoidance of certain situations or refusing to participate.

## LINKS

### Young Minds

[https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI-\\_ujvNSM2wIVDI0bCh3wIgOHEAAYA\\_SAAEgJkDvD\\_BwE](https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/?gclid=EAlaIQobChMI-_ujvNSM2wIVDI0bCh3wIgOHEAAYA_SAAEgJkDvD_BwE)

### Anxiety BC Youth

<http://www.youth.anxietybc.com/>

## RESOURCES

### Books:

**Overcoming your child's fears and worries** by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts.

**Helping your anxious child: A step by step guide for parents** by Ronald Rapee

**What to do when you worry too much** by Dawn Huebner

## **SIGNS AND SYMPTONS (Continued)**

- Developing rituals or routines and becoming distressed if these are interrupted or stopped.
- Asking a lot of "what if" questions and repeating them without apparent satisfaction of the answer.

### **In addition to the above signs and symptoms, older children/adolescents may experience the following:**

- Refusal or avoidance of going to school/college, seeing friends or engaging in social activities.
- Appearing distressed, agitated, irritable, sensitive or emotional (tearful).
- Reduced performance at school due to difficulties concentrating.
- Reports by the young person that they feel anxious or worried.

## **TOP TIPS**

- Remain calm yourself. Try to remember that young people often look to the adults around them for guidance. Your behaviour will reassure them that they are safe and do not need to panic.
- Give them opportunities to explore and express how they feel. Children may not use the words 'anxiety' and 'worry' but their own descriptive words such as 'fizzy' or 'wobbly'. If a child cannot describe how they feel, encourage them to draw or paint how they feel or point to where in their body they are experiencing discomfort.
- Explain that everyone worries from time to time and that although the physical sensations are not pleasant, they will pass. Using distraction techniques and activities (such as playing games, seeing friends, reading or watching TV) may help them to manage distressing thoughts and feelings.
- Acknowledge how they feel rather than minimise or dismiss the worries they have whilst providing a clear message that they can and will cope.
- It is important that they do not avoid the situations that make them feel anxious. The more a situation is avoided, the greater the anxiety becomes. Help them to break down their fears into smaller steps and take each one at a time. Find motivators and rewards to encourage them to take small steps to achieve each goal. Keep persevering as the more they face their fear, the easier it will become.

### **TOP TIPS (Continued)**

- Try to identify the source of anxiety. Some young people become particularly concerned when they hear or witness worrying things. For example, ensure they are only accessing age appropriate material on the TV, social media/internet.
- Get their school or college know about the difficulties being experienced so that they can support using the same strategies and techniques for a consistent approach.

### **FURTHER HELP**

- Speak to your child's school.
- Speak to your doctor.