

## Anxiety Disorders (Child)



Stress and anxiety are part of life. It's normal for children to have a few worries. But some children and teens have a lot of fear, worry, or panic. They can't control their anxiety. This causes great distress. Extreme fear reactions due to a perceived loss of control are called panic attacks. Often there is no obvious cause of a panic attack. These extreme behaviors could be an anxiety disorder.

Your child may have an anxiety disorder if the anxiety-related behaviors:

do not fit his or her age (for example a 12 year-old who cries when left at school),

continue even with appropriate support and reassurance, and

cause such distress to your child that daily activities can't be completed.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health concern that starts in childhood. Their exact cause is not known. The development of anxiety disorders seems to occur through complex interactions among biological, psychological, and social/environmental factors

An anxiety disorder may cause both physical and emotional reactions. Some of these include::

- Chest pain
- Agitation
- A lot of crying
- A fast pulse
- Sweating
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Tense muscles
- Shortness of breath
- Very fast breathing
- Dry mouth
- Needing to pee a lot
- Trouble sleeping
- Trouble focusing and remembering

Anxiety disorders often occur with other mental health problems. They may include:

- Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- Depression

Anxiety disorders are treated with counseling. It's sometimes treated with medicine or a combination of counseling and medication.. A child with an anxiety disorder will likely have ongoing symptoms if it's not treated.

## Home care

### Medicine

Once a diagnosis is made, the child's healthcare provider may prescribe medicine to treat anxiety. Follow the provider's instructions for giving this medicine to your child. Don't change the dose or stop the medicine unless the provider tells you to.

### General care

- Use the home care suggestions identified by your child's mental health team.
- Don't ignore your child's fears. Encourage your child to talk about their concerns. Be supportive. Don't yell at them to stop worrying. This does not help. It can make things worse.
- Work with your child's school team. Create support strategies if your child's anxiety causes problems in school.
- Encourage your child to ask for help when they feel overwhelmed.
- Teach your child to breathe slowly and deeply when they feel anxiety.
- Promote exercise and fun activities. Practice healthy behaviors that can help distract your child in an episode of extreme anxiety. An example is playing relaxing music.
- Note your child's behavior in different situations. There may be a pattern of environmental triggers that lead up to severe anxiety. Write down what you notice. This can help the healthcare provider identify the best treatment approaches for your child.
- Note your own behavior leading up to the time your child has anxiety-related behaviors. Your state of mind and behavior may give clues to your child's behavior. Again, alert your child's counselor to your observations. Be calm and reassuring with your child.
- Schedule individual and family counseling as advised.

## Follow-up care

Follow up with your child's healthcare provider as advised. Keep all appointments with your medical and mental health providers. Ongoing assessments will allow the adjustment of treatment plans to meet your child's growth and developmental changes.

## Call or text 988

Call or text 988 if your child:

- Is suicidal, has a clear suicide plan, and has the means to carry out the plan. Don't leave your child alone. When you call or text 988, you will be connected to trained crisis counselors at the Suicide Prevention Lifeline. An online chat option is also available. Lifeline is free and available 24/7. The 988 counselors will work closely with 911 to get you the care your child needs.
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- Call 911. Call 911 if your child:
- Has trouble breathing
- Is very confused, agitated, or irritable

- Is very drowsy or has trouble awakening
- Faints
- Has a fast heart rate
- Has a seizure

## When to get medical care

Call your child's healthcare provider right away if any of these occur:

- Anxiety, fear, or panic that don't stop
- Trouble doing daily tasks
- Trouble falling or staying asleep
- Threats of suicide or self-harm without a plan or means to carry out an attempt. Take all suicide comments seriously and seek help right away. Call 988 (see above) for guidance if your provider is not available.
- Worsening of current behaviors or new behavior that cause concern
- New concerns expressed about your child's behavior from close friends, family, or teachers

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