



Recognizing Anxiety in Youth

Parent/ caregiver guide

Some anxiety is a normal part of life, but if you're concerned it is regularly interfering with a child or teen's ability to function, it may be time to step in and offer support. Do they frequently report feeling ill right before needing to leave for school or other events? Are they avoiding activities they used to enjoy? Are there frequent sleep disturbances or nightmares? Addressing these issues is critical in avoiding serious outcomes, including isolation, suicidal ideation, substance use, missed school, and dropping out.

Types of Anxiety Disorders:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Excessive worrying that often spirals and can lead to insomnia, trouble concentrating, muscle tension, irritability, and more. Areas of worry could be social (peer relationships, social acceptance), family matters, world events, school, health, or weather events. Here are some of the symptoms:

- Focusing on "What-ifs?" – What if I fail my test? Get sick? Mom and Dad get divorced?
- Imagining worst-case scenarios.
- Displaying perfectionism – if they think they won't excel, they avoid.
- Difficulty controlling their worries.

Social Anxiety Disorder

Worry about being judged, humiliated, or embarrassed in a social setting, particularly with peers. Symptoms include:

- Refusing to speak or answer questions in class.
- Reluctance to perform in a school play or musical performance.
- Avoiding social situations.



Separation Anxiety Disorder

Persistent worries about separating from attachment figures, such as parents. Worries focus on something bad happening to the child or parent during separation (such as illness, car accident, fire in the home). Separation anxiety can lead to panic disorder later in life. Here are some of the symptoms:

- Not sleeping in their own room.
- Reporting illness right before leaving home or separating from parents.
- Refusing to go to school.
- Making frequent trips to the school nurse, hoping to be sent home.
- Panic-like behavior at times of separation.
- Withdrawal from activities outside the home.



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