



Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is the body's natural response to stress. It is a feeling of fear or apprehension about what is to come, for example the first day at a new school or taking an exam. Ordinary anxiety is a feeling that comes and goes, but if the sense of fear is there all the time, is intense and so debilitating that it affects everyday life, further support is needed. Severe anxiety can harm young people's mental and emotional wellbeing, affecting their self-esteem and confidence. They may become withdrawn and go to great lengths to avoid situations that make them feel anxious.

Symptoms of Anxiety

Young people may start with a general feeling of anxiety but if symptoms worsen or last for longer periods, then it is probably time to get some support. Symptoms include:

- A lack of confidence to try new things or being unable to face simple, every day challenges
- Feeling nervous, on edge or panicky all the time
- Feeling overwhelmed or full of dread
- Feeling out of control
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Having problems with eating or sleeping
- Low appetite
- Feeling tired or grumpy, often with anger outbursts
- Heart beating really fast
- Having a dry mouth
- Trembling or feeling faint
- Having a lot of negative thoughts or thinking that bad things are going to happen
- Avoiding everyday activities such as seeing friends or going out in public, not wanting to go to school

Treatment and Support

Feeling constant anxiety is a sign that something isn't right and young people may need some help in working out what that is. Talking to a GP means that an appropriate form of support can be offered, as well as regular check-ups to monitor the situation.

For more severe or persistent anxiety, a GP may suggest a talking therapy such as CBT and medication may be suggested alongside a talking therapy to help manage symptoms.

First and foremost it's important to encourage young people to talk about their anxiety or worries. It may be helpful to explain what anxiety is and the physical effects it has on our bodies.

As well as talking about anxieties it is also important to help the young person with problem solving. Rather than avoiding an issue it is best to work on finding a solution or making a plan to overcome the stressful situation.

Other ways to offer support

- Encourage young people to recognise the signs of anxiety in themselves so early help can be sought
- Empathise and validate. It is important to spend time listening to the young person and show an interest in viewing things from their perspective.
- Introduce alternative perspectives and ways of thinking
- Suggest reducing exposure to stressful stimuli such as social media
- Suggest mindfulness and meditation – there are helpful apps such as Calm and Headspace which may be useful
- Suggest some self-help strategies. Finding a physical way to release worries can help. For example imagining the anxious thoughts leaving the brain and floating into the sky or locking them into an imaginary or physical box

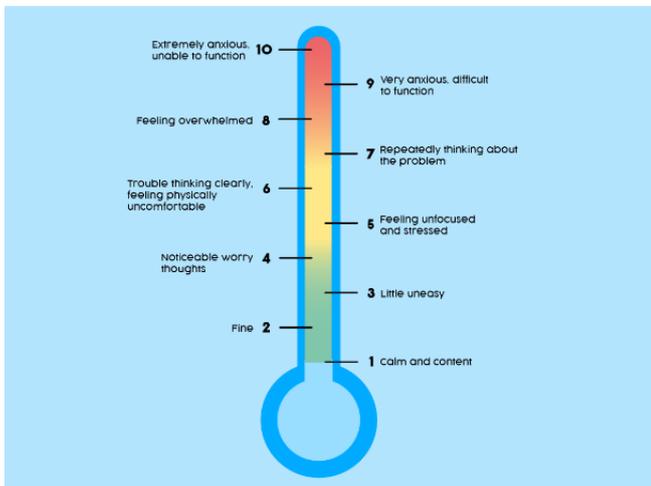




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- Suggest stopping and simply focus on breathing – breathing in slowly and breathing out slowly
- Suggest focusing the mind by naming 5 things they can see, 4 things they can hear, 3 things they can touch, 2 things they can smell and 1 thing they can taste
- Suggest listening to music, finding distractions, doing something practical with the hands

A helpful way of monitoring the impact of any suggestions is to use an Anxiety Thermometer with 0 being calm and content and 10 being extremely anxious.



Social Anxiety

Social anxiety is an intense fear or phobia of social and performance situations. Although most children go through periods of normal anxiety related to changes in adolescence, some experience fear that is out of proportion to the situations they face.

For some teenagers, social anxiety becomes chronic, affecting school performance, extracurricular activities and the ability to make friends.

In addition, children suffering from social anxiety are more likely to experience physical symptoms like headaches, stomach aches and nausea.

Signs of Social Anxiety in School aged children

- Fear of reading aloud or answering questions in class
- Fear of talking to other children
- Fear of talking to adults
- Fear of being in front of the class
- Fear of performance of any kind
- Fear of having friends visit
- Worry about being judged by others
- Refusal to participate in activities

Social Anxiety - teenage traits

- Is quiet
- Keeps to themselves
- Becomes more withdrawn if encouraged to talk
- Is hesitant
- Is passive
- Is overly concerned with negative evaluation
- Fears being embarrassed or humiliated
- Keeps their head down
- Displays few facial expressions
- Is uncomfortable in group settings
- Avoids eye contact
- Speaks softly or mumbles
- Appears always “on the fringes”
- Reveals little about themselves when talking to others

Typically, a child or young person suffering from social anxiety will not raise their hand/speak up in class and is afraid to ask the teacher for help. Potentially they will perform poorly in school and be the type of child who sits alone in the library. Teenagers with social anxiety are at a disadvantage in all areas of life and may have trouble attending school, perhaps dropping out altogether. Children and young people with social anxiety can often go undetected, with the behaviour merely interpreted as shyness. It is important to recognise the symptoms early, however, if long term issues are to be avoided.





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Strategies to Support

- Challenging patterns of unhelpful thinking by asking questions such as: "Is there any evidence for this thought?" "What would you say to a friend who had this thought in a similar situation?" "Is there another way of looking at this situation?"
- Suggest focusing attention on the situation or the person they are speaking to rather than any physical symptoms experienced
- Breaking the stressful situation down into very small steps and supporting the young person to take one small action at a time

When more targeted support is needed, referral to the GP should be recommended and diagnosis will involve an evaluation in several contexts, involving the perspectives of both parents and teachers. Treatment is aimed at helping to alleviate the anxiety and allow the young person to cope with school and day to day functioning. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) has been found to be particularly effective in supporting young people suffering from social anxiety.

Useful websites....

www.annafreud.org

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

www.youngminds.org.uk

www.nhs.uk/conditions/anxiety-disorders-in-children

www.nopanic.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

www.kidshealth.org

teenmentalhealth.org

For a huge range of **FREE** lesson plans, teaching resources and assembly ideas designed to promote positive mental health visit

www.mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/

The screenshot shows the 'MENTALLY HEALTHY SCHOOLS' website interface. At the top, there are navigation tabs: 'Getting started', 'Resource library' (selected), 'Risks and protective factors', 'Mental health needs', and 'Whole-school approach'. Below the navigation is the 'RESOURCE LIBRARY' section, which displays search results for 'Anxiety resources'. The search bar contains the word 'anxiety'. There are filter options for 'Free resources only' (checked), 'Theme', and 'Audience'. Two resource cards are visible: 'Anxiety resources' with a 'VIEW RESOURCE' button, and 'Anxiety thermometer' with a 'VIEW RESOURCE' button. The 'Anxiety thermometer' card includes a small image of a thermometer and text explaining its use for children to recognize their feelings.



www.cobschool.com/behavioursupport