

FACTSHEET

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Anxiety

What is anxiety in children and young people?

Children just like adults will experience worries and fears as they go through life. It is common for children to develop some fears and worries which are in keeping with their developmental stage. For example, younger children may have worries about sleeping in the dark that take some time to adjust. Older children may get shy in front of new people. Most children will grow out of their fears.

When do anxieties become a problem?

Aspects or features of all anxiety disorders are found in all people. So when considering how anxiety disorders differ from normal anxiety, consider:

- Is it interfering with the young person's ability to function and do things, that would be expected for their stage of development or things they enjoy?
- Is it age inappropriate?
- Is it getting worse?
- Does it take a long time to for them to feel better?
- Are there other things I notice, such as change in habits, changes in sleep, avoiding certain situations, becoming clingier or more withdrawn?

If you are concerned about a child's anxiety, specialised help may be needed. General practitioners (GP), the school counselor or in younger children, a child and family nurse, may be able to advise about where to seek help.

Early intervention for anxiety is important. Research suggests that untreated anxiety disorders in childhood lead to increased risk of developing depression or substance misuse in later life.

How common are anxiety disorders?

Anxiety is one of the most common emotional difficulties children and adolescents face. Approximately 14 % of Australians will be affected by an anxiety disorder in any 12-month period. (Mindframe, 2015).

What does anxiety feel like?

Young people and children experiencing anxiety can feel both physical and emotional symptoms. Some children may feel:

- Scared and fearful
- Teary and irritable
- Sweaty and breathless
- Pains and discomfort in their bodies

Types of anxiety disorders:

Professionals have different ways of categorising anxiety. Types of anxiety disorders that are common in children include:

- Generalised anxiety disorder
- Social anxiety
- Separation anxiety
- Specific phobia
- Panic Disorder
- Selective Mutism

For detailed factsheets on the different types of anxiety disorders, we recommend reviewing the resource pages of: www.centreforemotionalthhealth.com.au

What causes Anxiety Disorders?

The development of anxiety disorders most often involves a combination of multiple factors including:

- Genetic vulnerability (for example, anxiety disorders in other family members)
- Temperament style characterised by shyness, inhibition, and withdrawal.
- Adverse or traumatic life experiences.

How to help a child with anxiety?

- Try not to become anxious yourself or overprotective. Rather than doing things for your child or helping them to avoid anxiety provoking situations, encourage your child to find ways to manage them.
- Distraction can be helpful for young children.
- Practice simple relaxation techniques with your child, such as taking three deep, slow breaths, breathing in for a count of three and out for three.
- Seek professional advice if you are concerned about a child's anxiety.

Helpful Resources:

- Parent Line: Online advice and support as well as phone line support for parents run by trained Counselors. 132055 , www.parentline.org.au
- Raising Children Network: www.raisingchildren.net.au

Adolescent and Youth mental health:

- www.youthbeyondblue.com: This website offers a teen self-help online program, as well a great up to date information and support.
- Headspace. Help and support for young people aged 12-25 at centers, online or over the phone for mental health, general health, alcohol and drug and work. www.headspace.org.au

Anxiety Specific

- NSW center involved in research in treatment of childhood anxiety: www.centreforemotionalthhealth.com.au

Self-help for teens

- www.moodcafe.co.uk/ :offers downloadable audio relaxation strategies.
- www.youthbeyondblue.com: Runs an online self-help anxiety program for teens.
- www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk ; Downloadable self-help workbook for teens on a variety of emotional needs, including anxiety.

Remember:

All children and adolescents will experience worry and fears.

Anxiety becomes a problem when it gets in the way of doing things expected for their age, causes a lot of distress and may lead to avoidance.

Early intervention is important to support them develop strategies to manage their anxiety, and reduce risk of other mental health problems in adulthood.

Some children will benefit from some self-help with parental support. Others may require individual or group support from a skilled professional. Some children will require medication in addition to talking therapy. Talk to a professional to consider where to start.