

Anxiety Education for Caregivers

Everybody experiences anxiety at some time. When people describe their anxiety, they may use terms such as *anxious, stressed, wound up, nervous, on edge, worried, tense, or hassled*. Although anxiety can be an unpleasant state, it can be quite useful in helping a person avoid dangerous situations and motivate them to solve everyday problems. However, anxiety can act like a “faulty fire alarm” and vary in severity from mild uneasiness to a panic attack. Anxiety can also vary in how long it lasts – from a few moments to many years. Symptoms particularly common in youth are worrying about what others think about them, fear in social situations, and fear of separation from important relationships. Anxiety looks differently across ages and across cultures.



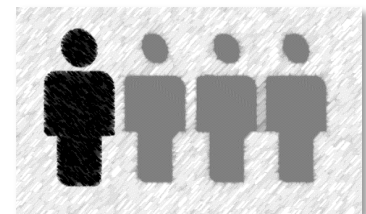
EVERYONE EXPERIENCES SOME ANXIETY. AN ANXIETY DISORDER IS DETERMINED BY:

1. **SEVERITY** – worry is excessive and impacting multiple areas (physical, psychological, behavioral)
2. **DURATION** – excessive worrying is over several weeks, months, or years
3. **INTERFERING WITH THE PERSON’S STUDIES, ACTIVITIES, AND FAMILY/SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS.**

Physical	Psychological	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Pounding heart, chest pain, rapid heartbeat•Rapid, shallow breathing, and shortness of breath•Dizziness, headache, sweating, tingling, and numbness•Choking, dry mouth, stomach pains, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea•Muscle aches and pains (especially neck, shoulders, and back), restlessness, tremors, and shaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Unrealistic or excessive fear and worry (about the past and future events)•Racing thoughts or mind going blank•Decreased concentration and memory•Indecisiveness•Irritability•Impatience•Anger•Confusion•Feeling on edge•Nervousness•Difficulty sleeping•Night terrors•Perfectionism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Avoidance of situations, people or things.•Obsessive or compulsive behavior•Distress in social situations•Phobic behavior - staying away from particular things/people•Trying to control environment - seen as defiance•Irritability•Use of alcohol or other drugs•Temper tantrums or outburst

How we can support youth:

1. **Give reassurance and listen non-judgmentally**
 - Express positive but realistic expectations. We can't promise a child that their fears are unrealistic, but you can express confidence they will be okay, and you will be there to support.
2. **Do not avoid things just because they make a child anxious**
 - Helping children avoid the things they are afraid of will make them feel better in the short term, but it reinforces the anxiety over the long run and could eventually prevent some from ever engaging in those situations or face their fears.
3. **Ask open-ended questions to encourage talking about feelings, but refrain from leading questions**
 - Encourage open-ended questions like “How do you feel about the test coming up?” versus “are you anxious about the big test.” Asking leading questions can feed into the cycle of anxiety.
4. **Think things through with the child and model coping**
 - Sometimes it helps to talk through what would happen if a child's fear came true, and how they would handle it. For some young people, having a plan can reduce the uncertainty in a healthy, effective way. Let your children see how you cope with anxiety yourself.



Anxiety Disorders will impact
1 in 4 Youth

Additional supports shown to be effective: Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Mindfulness

Resource for activities, practice, and tools for anxiety management: <https://www.crisistextline.org/resources/>