

Talking to Your Child about Anxiety

You may have noticed that your child is a little off lately, and you're worried. Maybe they're scared to be away from you. Maybe they're more worried than usual about school. Or maybe they're afraid or even panicky that something bad might happen. While all children have fears, worries, and sadness as part of growing up, too much of these things can be a sign of something else. It could be a sign that your child has anxiety.

What is Anxiety?

The first thing to know about anxiety is that there's nothing wrong with your child. Feeling anxious is very common. Everyone gets worried from time to time. But when these worries take over your child's thoughts, it may be time to get some help.

You may think about anxiety as panic attacks, shaky knees, or a racing heart. The truth is that anxiety is more than that. It can also be:

- Fear of being away from a parent or caregiver
- Fear of certain things like dogs, bugs, or doctors
- Fear of going to school or other places where lots of people are
- Feeling that something bad is going to happen
- Having trouble concentrating or thinking, especially at school
- Having a hard time with everyday situations
- Having trouble sleeping
- Having an upset stomach

Everyone's anxiety is different. Your child may feel only some of these things or have different feelings entirely. What matters is that your child can get help for their anxiety.

How is Anxiety Treated?

It's not always easy for children to talk about what's bothering them. Sometimes they're afraid of telling another person what's going on. Sometimes they just don't have the words to express how they're feeling.

Your role is to offer support. Remember that your child's anxiety isn't a sign of bad parenting. In fact, you can strengthen your relationship with your child by helping them through this difficult time.

The first step is to talk to your child's doctor. Anxiety can be caused by different things, so it's important that the doctor have a chance to check your child's overall health.

In some cases, the doctor may want your child to see a counselor or therapist. This will give your child a new, safe place to talk about their fears and worries. A mental health professional can also give you and your child skills to help control their anxiety.

While medication is sometimes used to help with anxiety, that's not always the case for children. Your child's doctor will talk to you about whether or not medication might work for your child.



Things You Can Do Now

The support you give your child is just as important as the care they receive from a doctor or mental health professional. After all, chances are good that you see your child more than anyone else.

Here are some things you can do at home to help with your child's anxiety:

- Pay attention to how your child is feeling. Don't write them off as "just tired," "faking it," or "overreacting."
- Try to stay calm when your child gets anxious. Let them know that you're there for them.
- Recognize and praise your child's victories.
- Don't punish mistakes or setbacks.
- Be flexible, but try to stick to a routine.
- Allow extra time for things that may be stressful, like getting ready for school.
- Prepare healthy meals.

- Make sure your child is getting plenty of exercise, at least an hour a day.
- Make sure your child is getting enough sleep.
- Share calm time together. This may help at the moment of worry.
- Remember to take care of yourself.

Having anxiety doesn't mean your child won't be able to cope with their problems. With the right help your child can get their anxiety under control.

If your child ever tells you that they're thinking about hurting themselves or someone else, you should get help right away. Call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255. Someone will be able to help you 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Sources: American Psychiatric Association, Anxiety and Depression Association of America, CDC, Mayo Clinic