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Specifics Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder in Children

Excessive worry and anxiety about a variety of matters on most days for at least 6 months. Below is a sample of the ways that anxiety can express itself.

- Overreacting to minor problems (yelling, crying, shutting down)
- Frequent self-doubt and self-critical comments.
- Inability to stop the worrying despite parental reassurance.
- Physical problems: headaches, stomach aches, fatigue, muscle tension.
- Intensification of nervous habits: nail biting, hair twisting, thumb sucking.
- Oppositional/aggressive behavior -- Irritability, increases with increased worry; biting, kicking, poor listening, acting out, impulsiveness.
- sadness, crying, whining, panic, anger
- Very low energy or very high levels of energy or restlessness.
- Sleep problems: waking up early, waking up feeling unrested, trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, nightmares
- Social isolation, poor communication, increase screen-time as a way to avoid interactions with peers and family.
- Frequent absence from school.
- Poor concentration
- Major change in eating habits.
- Poor coping strategies. Increased dependency/clinginess; regressing to less mature behavior. Experimentation with drugs and alcohol as a way to reduce suffering (can worsen anxiety).
- Experiencing physical arousal: racing heart, sweating palms, teeth chattering, dizziness, flushed face, trembling hands.
- Depression or thoughts of not wanting to be alive.

Thought Patterns That Can Lead to or Indicate Anxiety Disorder

- **Do not appropriately match the context:** "If I leave the house something bad will happen to my family."
- **All or nothing thinking:** Extremes with no middle ground. Good or Bad; Safe or Dangerous, Clean or Dirty.
- **Global negative label:** "I'm a failure."; "I'm stupid."; "I'm never as good at things as other people."
- **Overgeneralization:** Use always or never when you describe or think about one isolated current situation. Make far reaching global conclusions based on single event.
- **Negative filter:** Focus on one isolated negative detail and selectively attend to it so interpretation of everything becomes distorted. – focus on negatives and ignore the positives/bigger picture.
- **Discount the positive:** Disqualify positive events and assume they don't count. Accomplish something you could be proud of, tell yourself it wasn't important or that anyone could do it.
- **Mind reading:** Believe you know what others are thinking and that they have negative thoughts about you without any evidence.
- **Fortune Teller:** Predict things will turn out terribly before they even start
- **Emotional reasoning:** assume your feelings affect the way things really are ignoring evidence to the contrary.
- **Should and must statements:** Expect things should be the way you want them to be and if they are not, you feel guilty. "I shouldn't have made so many mistakes."
- **Personalization:** Believe others are reacting to you without considering more likely explanations for their behavior.
- **Unfair Comparisons/Perfectionism:** Hold unrealistically high standards and focus primarily on the few people who meet those standards always finding yourself inferior.