

# Mental Health Supports

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## Anxiety

### What is Anxiety?

Excessive worry, fear, or nervousness that is disproportionate to a situation and significantly interferes with daily life

While some level of anxiety is normal, when it becomes overwhelming and persistent, it can be considered an anxiety disorder.

Typically worries last longer than 6 months

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# Anxiety

## Physical Symptoms and Behavioral Signs

Stomach aches (feeling sick), trouble sleeping, and restlessness, irritable, fatigue

Avoiding social situations, excessive worry, constant reassurance seeking, irritability, difficulty concentrating, wound -up, on edge

Centered around concerns like social acceptance, body image changes, and academic pressures during this developmental stage

## Types of Anxiety Disorders

Generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, specific phobias, separation anxiety disorder.

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# Depression

## What is Depression?

A serious mental health condition that can impact a teen's mood, thoughts, and body. It's more than just feeling sad or down for a short time, and it can make it hard to do normal activities.

Depression is not the same as being unhappy or a sign of personal weakness.

Treatment is often needed, and can include antidepressants, psychotherapy, family therapy, and school assistance.

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# Depression

## Physical Symptoms and Behavioral Signs

**Persistent sadness:** A teen may feel hopeless, angry, or frustrated for a long time.

**Loss of interest:** A teen may lose interest in activities they used to enjoy, or have trouble seeing the good in things.

**Changes in sleep and eating:** A teen may sleep more or less than usual, or have changes in their eating habits.

**Low energy:** A teen may have low energy or feel like nothing is fun.

**Changes in school performance:** A teen may do poorly in school, or not put in as much effort.

**Withdrawing from others:** A teen may spend more time alone, or seem distant from friends and family.

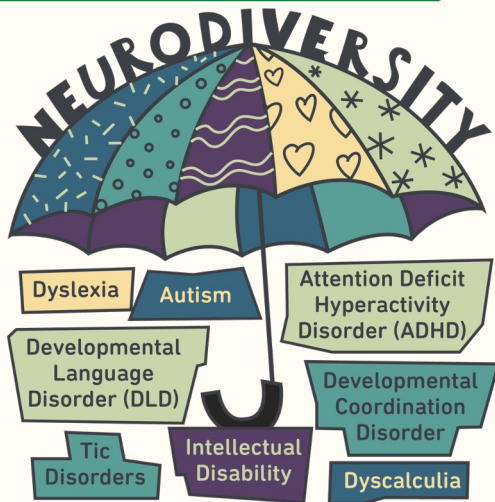
**Risky behaviors:** A teen may engage in risky behaviors, like self-harm or substance use.

**Suicide threats,** Obsession with death, Dramatic changes in personality or appearance, Irrational or bizarre behavior, and Severe drop in school performance.

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# Neurodiversity: Symptoms and Traits

Neurodiversity is the idea that people's brains work in different ways, and that these differences are normal and valuable. It's a framework that considers the variety of ways people think, learn, and behave.



- Social Differences
- Speech and Language
- Executive Functioning
- Physical Behaviors
- Sensory Differences

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## Masking



Masking is when an individual hides or controls behaviors that are not considered typical when compared to their peers.

Masking can have severe effects on mental and physical health, and contribute to the development of conditions like:

- anxiety
- depression
- exhaustion
- loss of identity
- suicidal thoughts

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## Gender Differences



### Girls

- More likely to have depression, anxiety, and traumatic stress-related disorders.
- The overall difficulty levels reported by girls were significantly higher than boys across a range of mental health problems and subjective wellbeing.
- Girls may be more sensitive to emotional stimuli, which could make them more vulnerable to depression and anxiety.
- Girls may be more likely to seek help for mental health issues.

### Boys

- Boys are more likely to struggle with addiction.
- Boys are more likely to commit suicide than girls
- Boys may experience depression differently than girls, and may not show obvious signs of depression.
- Boys are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, such as anger issues and high-risk behaviors.
- Display High-risk behaviors
- Boys may learn to hide their vulnerabilities and health needs.

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## As a parent, how can I help with anxiety?

- Acknowledge your teen's fears and emotions. Don't ignore it or dismiss it by saying, "You have a good life. You shouldn't worry about that." We need to take their emotions seriously and be ready to listen. Don't meet them with too many questions, let them talk, and sit in the silence.
- Remind them that other kids are anxious too.
  - Try to avoid labeling our teens with negative labels such as "shy" or "anxious."
- Start with a level of exposure
  - slowly working up to the worry, but providing positive reinforcement for tasks and social activities they are worried about.
- Give your child love and empathy.
- Make time to talk to your child every day without distractions.
- Encourage healthy diet, physical activities and good sleep habits.
- Strong parent-teenager relationships are good for young people's mental health and is protective.
- If you need to seek more help, reach out to your pediatrician or trusted psychologist/counselor for additional support. School counselors can also be helpful.

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## As a parent, how can I help with depression?

### Open Communication

- **Actively listen:** Create a safe space for your teen to share their feelings without judgment.
- **Ask open-ended questions:** Encourage your teen to elaborate on their thoughts and emotions.
- **Validate their feelings:** Let them know you understand and care about what they are going through.

### Monitor for signs

- **Observe changes in behavior:** Pay attention to sudden shifts in mood, sleep patterns, appetite, or social interactions.
- **Look for warning signs:** Take seriously any talk of self-harm or suicide.

### Seek professional help

- **Consult a mental health professional:** If you suspect depression, reach out to a therapist or pediatrician to discuss treatment options.
- **Consider family therapy:** Family therapy can be beneficial to address dynamics that may be contributing
- **Create a supportive environment**
- **Maintain a positive routine:** Encourage healthy habits; regular sleep, balanced meals, and physical activity.
- **Limit screen time and social media:** Monitor technology usage and encourage face-to-face interactions.
- **Show love and support:** Remind your teen that you are there for them and believe in them.

### Educate yourself

- **Learn about depression:** Understand the symptoms and treatment options for adolescent depression.
- **Stay informed about mental health resources:** Know where to find support in your community.

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## Sentence Starters: Child

**Oftentimes we don't know (or can't observe) what is going on with a student, but our gut tells us something is off. Instead of asking a yes/no question ("Are you okay?"), start a conversation that invites your child to share beyond a one-word answer (open-ended).**

I've noticed that you seem more anxious on Sunday nights. What's going on?

I'm worried about you and would like to know what's going on so I can help.

I haven't seen you playing basketball like you used to. What's up?

I haven't heard you laugh (seen you smile) in a while. Is everything okay?

Have you noticed that you're not eating all of your dinner lately? I wonder if something is bothering you.

It seems like something's up. Let's talk about what's going on.

I've noticed you've been down lately. What's going on?

Seems like you haven't been yourself lately. What's up?

You don't seem as \_\_\_\_\_ as you usually are. I'd like to help if I can.

This might be awkward, but I'd like to know if you're really alright.

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## Coping Skills and Tools for Child

Mindfulness

Grounding

Deep Breathing

Self Check-in

Digital Apps (Mood Bloom (18+); CALM, and more)

Therapy



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## Self Check-In

How is my mood?

How is my energy?

How is my breathing?

How is my focus?

How is my body?

What are my needs?

What am I thinking?

What emotions am I feeling?

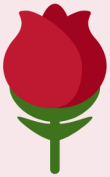
What are my feelings trying to tell me?

How did I sleep?

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## Rose, Bud, Thorn

**ROSE**



Success

**THORN**



Challenge

**BUD**



Potential

Check-Out Exercise:

At the end of the day try the following with your child:

1. Tell me about something that went well today.
2. Tell me about something difficult, challenging or an obstacle that came up today.
3. Tell me something that you can work to improve or feel hopeful about.

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## Affirmations

- I will not hide my identity and individual traits just because they make people uncomfortable
- My brain works exactly the way it was designed to, and I deserve to find ways to support my brain.
- I do not have to hold myself to anyone else's standards, rules, or expectations.
- It's ok if most strategies and tools that work for most, don't work for me!
- My differences are real and valid and they deserve to be accommodated.



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## Grounding Exercise: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1

In moments when we feel anxious and overwhelmed we can focus on our 5 senses by naming things to help regulate these emotions.

- List 5 things you can see
- List 4 things you can touch
- List 3 things you can hear
- List 2 things smell
- List 1 thing you can taste



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# De-escalation Techniques

- 1. Be Empathic and Nonjudgmental
- 1. Respect Personal Space
- 1. Use Non Threatening Nonverbals
- 1. Keep Your Emotional Brain in Check
- 1. Focus on Feelings
- 6. Ignore Challenging Questions
- 7. Set Limits
- 8. Choose Wisely What You Insist Upon
- 9. Allow Silence for Reflection
- 10. Allow Time for Decisions

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EMOTIONAL INTENSITY	SKILLS TO TRY
1-2	Mindfulness
3-6	Emotional Regulation
7-10	Distress Tolerance

<b>MINDFULNESS</b>	Skills to help you ground yourself, create awareness & focus on the present.	<b>Observing present moment with your senses</b>
<b>DISTRESS TOLERANCE</b>	Skills and tools to help you manage moments of distress, overwhelm and overload.	<b>Personal Anchor (breathe, object, etc)</b>
<b>EMOTIONAL REGULATION</b>	Skills to help you understand, manage and respond to your emotions.	<b>Label your emotions</b>
		<b>Act Intentionally</b>
		<b>Sensory Self Soothing</b>
		<b>Movement or STIMS</b>

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## Coping Skills for Parents

Act calm, even if you're not

Practicing deep breathing

Using positive self-talk

Thinking of something calming  
(your dog or favorite vacation spot)

Take a break

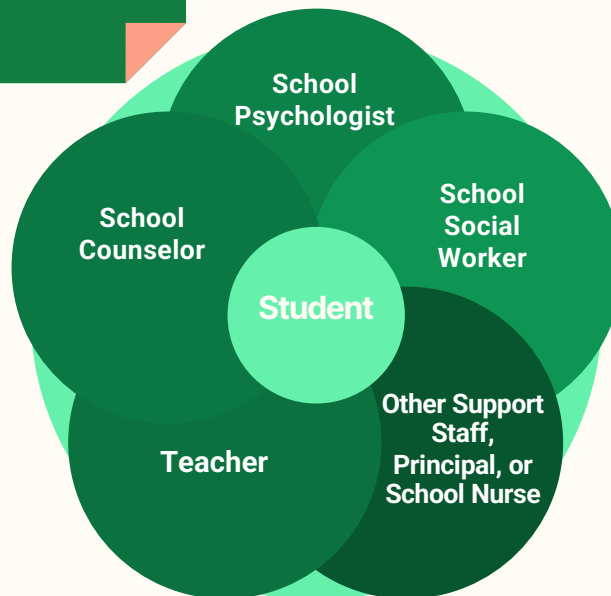
Respite Services

Modeling the behavior you want to see

Al-Anon - support group for people learning how to set boundaries and not continue co-dependent relationships.

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## Accessing Support within Schools



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## Community Resources

[211](#)

[San Diego Regional Center](#)

[San Diego Center for Children](#)

[Rady Children’s Hospital- San Diego](#)

[San Diego Behavioral Health Services](#)

[Medi-Cal \(Referrals\)](#)

[The Village Lighthouse](#)

Private Health Insurance (Referrals)

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## Sentence Starters: Resources

I was referred by, could you please tell me how to get started?

What services are offered to my family?

What does that mean?

Can you please tell me more about ....

Can you describe the timeline for services and what is to be expected?

What type of insurance do you accept? Or forms or payment?

What is the time commitment and what times are services provided? After school hours?

Thank you for the flyer, could you tell me more about this?

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## Helpful Tips

- Try not to be embarrassed
- You can't overshare - honesty is appreciated
- What's next? What to expect? Timeline? Waitlist?
- Comprehensive Binder- Create a folder or binder with the following: IEP, 504 Plan, medical records and contacts, community agencies documents and contact information such as Regional Center, copies of exchange or release of information
- Identify who's on your team

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