The Youth Mental Health Project EMPOWERS families and communities to act with the KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS and RESOURCES they need to support the SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, MENTAL, and BEHAVIORAL health of youth.

THE YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH PROJECT™

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Fear, **worry**, and **anxiety** are natural feelings that everyone has from time to time and can be appropriate reactions to certain situations. In fact, those feelings can be completely typical responses to a variety of circumstances or stressful situations and can, sometimes, even be healthy.

Fear is most easily identified as a response to something specific that is perceived as a clear and imminent threat. Fear can start the fight, flight, or freeze response in a child and can cause a child to act out, become extremely agitated, distracted, or withdrawn. At the same time, fear is generally temporary and the reaction calms down when the threat is no longer present.

Worry is closely related to fear. You may have a child who asks lots of worrisome questions, like "*What if lightning hits the house during a rainstorm?*" or "*What if I break my arm during baseball practice?*" While sometimes hard to differentiate, worry is the anticipation of something bad, the train of thought before the potentially fearful event.

Anxiety is also anticipatory in nature and focused on a *possible* danger, but it is more intense than worry. Anxiety is an overwhelming sense of unpleasantness, discomfort, or apprehension, which can sometimes be related to a specific thought or feeling but oftentimes is unexplainable.

Generally, worries and fears that cause significant distress and impair daily functioning may be an indication that your child is experiencing anxiety.

Children can be diagnosed with different kinds of anxiety depending on what they are most worried about.

Anxiety is a common problem affecting children and adolescents both at home and in school, causing significant problems personally, socially, and academically yet is highly treatable.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY DISORDERS

- Worrying a lot
- Headaches, somachaches, sweating, and racing heartbeat
- Avoiding certain situations
- Difficulty concentrating
- Having difficulty sleeping
- Disruptive behavior
- Clinging to parents or caregivers
- Being hard on themselves
- Low self-esteem
- Lashing out or acting aggressive

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- of children under 10

- Talk with your child every day about life.
- Don't minimize their concerns, they are big to them.
- Encourage proper rest, exercise and nutrition.
- Help them put stressors into perspective.
- Provide structure, consistent rules and predictability.
- Plan ahead for stressful events.
- Set reasonable expectations and help your child set manageable goals.
- Model effective coping strategies.
- Set up a reasonable schedule.
- Plan for transitions (For example, allow extra time in the morning if getting to school is difficult.)

7.1%

of children aged 3-17 years (approx. 4.4 million) have been diagnosed with anxiety.

TYPES & SYMPTOMS

GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER[3]

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is characterized by persistent and excessive worry about a variety of events. People with GAD may anticipate disaster or may be overly concerned about a number of different topics. Individuals with GAD find it difficult to control their worry, and they may worry more than seems warranted about actual events. They may expect the worst even when there is no apparent reason for concern. Some signs and symptoms include having an increased heard rate, difficulty concentrating,having trouble sleeping, feeling nervous, irritable, or on edge, or having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom.

PANIC DISORDER[4]

Kids with panic disorder have sudden attacks of anxiety that come with intense feelings of dread and physical symptoms that can feel like a heart attack. These kinds of episodes are called panic attacks. Panic disorder is rare in young children, but often begins during the teenage years.

SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER [4]

it is common for children and teenagers to feel anxious about what other people think of them. However, some kids feel so anxious that they develop social anxiety disorder. Social anxiety disorder is a type of anxiety that can cause children extreme worry about being rejected or judged negatively by other people. It is important to remember that children with social anxiety disorder are not just shy. They are scared of being embarrassed that they avoid doing things or situations that they want or need to do. Social anxiety in kids starts between the ages of 8 and 15. The kinds of situations that cause social anxiety in kids is different from person to person, so it is important to be mindful of that.

SPECIFIC PHOBIAS [4]

Specific phobia is a condition in which a child has an extreme and uncontrollable fear of something that is not actually dangerous. Some examples include, dogs, clowns, bugs, the dark, and loud noises. Specific phobia is more common in girls than boys.

SEPARATION ANXIETY [4]

Separation anxiety disorder (SAD) is a mental health condition that causes children to become extremely upset when they are separated from parents or caregivers. They worry something bad will happen to their loved one during the separation. Symptoms of SAD usually show up in preschool and early elementary school, and in some rare cases it can occur during middle school.

Children with SAD may experience:

- Difficulty being away from parents or other loved ones.
- Excessive worry about harm to loved ones.
- Excessive worry about danger to self.
- Difficulty leaving the home, even to go to school.
- Difficulty sleeping.
- Feeling physically ill when away from loved ones.

In order to diagnose SAD, these symptoms must be present for at least 4 weeks and be more severe than the normal separation anxiety that most children experience.[4]

SELECTIVE MUTISM[4]

A child with selective mutism may be unable to speak around certain people or in certain settings. It is common for children with selective mutism to be very talkative at home with family, but silent at school. Parents or caregivers typically start noticing signs of selective mutism when a child is three or four, but the condition might not be diagnosed until they are school aged.

If your child has selective mutism, you may notice that:

- They talk freely at home, but become completely or mostly nonverbal at school or around strangers
- Inability to speak even to familiar adults (parents or caregivers) in the presence of others
- Difficulty talking with peers in school
- Seeming "shut down" or "paralyzed in social situations
- Using gestures, facial expressions, or nodding instead of verbal communication

For more information:

The Youth Mental Health Project

ymhproject.org

National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov

Child Mind Institute
https://childmind.org/topics/anxiety/

2. Anxiety & Depression Association of America
3. Child Mind Institute