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. When there is something to fear, a child may have significant somatic symptoms, such as increased heart rate, shortness of breath, muscle tension, and even sweat. 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flight, or freeze response in a child and can cause a child to act out, become extremely agitated, distracted, or withdrawn.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.

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. As a result of an overactive fight, flight, or freeze response to anxiety, a child may feel uneasy, complain of headaches or stomach aches, and perceive a threat which may or may not exist.

Anxiety is one of the most prevalent mental health issues among youth, but it is one of the least treated. 30% of youth will experience anxiety. [1]

However of this 30%, 80% will go untreated.[1]

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

Anxiety develops from a complex set of risk factors, these can include multiple elements including, genetics, brain chemistry, life events, and personality. [2]

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

7.1%

of children within the ages 3-17 years have been diagnosed with anxiety. This percentage adds up to approximately 4.4 million youth. [3]

1. Child Mind Institute
2. Anxiety & Depression Association of America (ADAA)
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER [4]

Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is characterized by excessive and uncontrollable worry about a variety of events. It is often accompanied by physical symptoms such as headaches, muscular tension, restlessness, heart palpitations, and stomach upset. Children and adolescents with GAD may worry excessively about their performance and competence at school or in sporting events, about personal safety and the safety of family members, or about natural disasters and future events. These worries and associated symptoms cause significant distress and impair daily functioning. Children with GAD are often overly self-critical and avoid activities in which they feel that may not be able to perform perfectly. They also tend to seek frequent reassurance from caregivers, teachers, and others about their performance, although this reassurance only provides only fleeting relief from their worries.

Common signs and symptoms of anxiety disorders:[4]

- Irritable or feeling "on edge"
- Feeling easily tired or tired all the time
- Having a hard time concentrating
- Worrying exceedingly about everyday situations or conditions
- Having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Having headaches, muscle aches, stomach aches, or unexplained pains
- Having trouble controlling their worries or feelings of nervousness
- Knowing that they worry much more than they should

For more information:
The Youth Mental Health Project
www.ymhproject.org
Fact Sheets:
Panic Disorder
Social Anxiety Disorder
Specific Phobias
Separation Anxiety Disorder
Selective Mutism Disorder
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Anxiety and Depression Association of America
240-485-1001
www.adaa.org

TIPS FOR PARENTS
FOR CHILDREN OVER 11

- Be consistent in how you handle problems and discipline.
- Be patient and be prepared to listen.
- Avoid being overly critical.
- Maintain realistic, attainable goals and expectations for your child.
- Do not communicate that perfection is expected.
- Maintain consistent but flexible routines for homework, chores, activities, etc.
- Accept that mistakes are a normal part of growing up.
- Praise and reinforce effort, even if success is less than expected.
- Teach organization.
- Do not minimize feelings.
- Do not criticize your child for not being able to respond to rational approaches. Rationalization may not always work.
- If the problem persists and continues to interfere with daily activities seek help

4. National Institute of Mental Health