



ProjectTEACH

Your Child's Mental Health: What to Know About Anxiety

Some forms of anxiety are part of typical development. Feeling anxious about a class presentation, for example, can motivate a child to prepare well and practice. For some kids, though, their levels of anxiety become overwhelming. This can interfere with daily life including school, social life, and healthy development. Anxiety disorders are pretty common – nearly 1 in 3 people will have one at some point in their life.

The Key is To:

- 1) Know what to look for
- 2) Ask your child about what you notice
- 3) Bring any concerns to your pediatrician

What Are Common Types of Anxiety?

There are many kinds of anxiety. While they have similarities, unique features set them apart.

SEPARATION ANXIETY

The unique feature is stress when **separated from parents** or other caregivers. It's more common in younger kids, and may show as physical complaints like stomachaches or headaches, or a child getting really upset when parents go out or drop them off at school or child care.

GENERALIZED ANXIETY

The unique feature is intense worrying about **everyday things**, like homework, or being late for class or work. It can interfere with schoolwork, friendships, or sleep. Signs can be stomachaches, headaches, or pain, acting restless or irritable, or having sleep problems.

SOCIAL ANXIETY

The unique feature is fear of being embarrassed in **public or group settings**, like messing up in public speaking, auditioning for sports or a play, or making new friends. Signs can be not wanting to go to social events, like parties, and isolating oneself from others.

PANIC DISORDER

The unique feature is **physical episodes** of intense fear, with symptoms like fast heart rate, hyperventilating, sweating, nausea, and even fainting. Episodes are triggered by any number of things – going to school or concerts, riding the bus or driving over bridges – which can lead to avoiding these situations.

If you notice any of these behavior changes in your child, *ask them*. If you still have questions, *ask your pediatrician about what you have seen*. A simple, "I've noticed some changes in my child's behavior that don't seem typical for him/her," can start the conversation. Your pediatrician can help you figure out if there's cause for concern.

How Is Anxiety Treated?

Anxiety disorders are very treatable, and the earlier the better. Treatment may involve a combination of talk therapy or counseling and medication. Behavior therapies like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and meditation can help your child to manage their fears.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a way of reframing fearful thoughts to make them more realistic. If your child constantly stresses about homework, peer criticism, or anything else, CBT helps them to understand what in their thoughts makes them feel afraid. Practicing ways to alter these thoughts helps them to manage their emotions and change behavior. It involves slowly exposing your child to things that cause distress, while helping them to stay relaxed and in control.

Remember, you know your child best. If you notice something different in your child's behavior, it's completely normal to have concerns. Take that opportunity to learn more by talking to your pediatrician or another trusted health care provider.

To learn more about healthy development and mental health by child age group, visit the Project TEACH Parent and Family Page: bit.ly/PTEACH-Family