Northeast and Caribbean (HHS Region 2)
MHTTC Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Anxiety in Children and Teens

Worry and anxiety are regular parts of life, but they can also be indications that your child needs more support. The recognition of anxiety disorders in young people has increased significantly over the past 10 years. Approximately 30% of children and adolescents will experience an anxiety disorder at some point in their young lives. Knowing the signs and seeking professional help when needed will help to interrupt a progression that can lead to depression, poor school performance, and substance use1.

1Child Mind Institute. (2018). 2018 Children's Mental Health Report. https://childmind.org/awareness-campaigns/childrens-mental-health-report/2018-childrens-mental-health-report/

Signs of Anxiety

- Feeling restless, nervous, or tense
- Physical changes (rapid breathing, sweating, increased heart rate, shaking)
- Having a worry they can't let go of
- Trouble concentrating (distracted by worry)
- Repeated bathroom trips
- Impatience/Irritability
- Anger/Outbursts
- Avoidance of situations
- Distress, upset

Pointers for Caregivers

- Remember, worry is normal
- Don't judge or dismiss the worry (E.g. "It's no big deal" or "Everything will be fine")
- Focus on helping the child manage the worry rather than trying to eliminate it
- Respect the child's feelings and the intensity of those feelings
- Show empathy without agreeing with worry
- Reinforce the child to use tools to manage their anxiety

Assisting a Child During an Anxious Moment

Breathing Techniques
Blow up a balloon
Blow out candles
Counted breathing (Breathe in through your nose, hold it, breathe out through your mouth)

Body Movements
Take a walk
Stretch your body
Do an exercise (jumping jacks, run in place, etc.)

Do Something with Hands
Use clay, play dough, squeeze toy (Keep these objects inside child's backpack)
Color or draw (Keep small coloring books and colored pencils or markers handy)

Have kids create a physical or mental toolbox full of tools they can have with them to use when they feel anxious or distressed.

How to Know When More Help is Needed

- Changes in child's behavior, sleep, eating, or mood
- Extreme distress
- Avoidance of specific activities, situations, or people
- Worries that interfere with daily activities

Contact a school counselor or mental health professional for more help.

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