

Understanding Your Child's

Anxiety

This article is for anyone who would like to know the basic information for diagnosable anxiety disorders. For test anxiety, check out the additional resource podcast section, as well as the website links under additional information. This is not meant to be used to make your own diagnosis. Let it help you identify symptoms and signs in your child, so that you can seek a mental health professional to best support your child.

Prevalence of Anxiety

Anxiety disorders affect one in eight children and teens and more than a quarter of teens report experiencing extreme stress during the school year (ASCA, 2020). Anxiety is one of the most common mental illnesses in children according to [the CDC](#). Anxiety that goes mistreated or untreated entirely can cause harm to the child's psyche and negatively impact his/her ability to succeed in school.

Common Signs to look for @ home:

- Excessive worry
- Irritability
- Sleeping problems
- Irrational fears
- Muscle fatigue due to muscle tension - often causes body aches, headaches, teeth grinding at night
- Chronic indigestion (stomach ache)
- Low self-worth / Confidence
- Flashbacks
- Perfectionism
- Compulsive behaviors

DIFFERENT TYPES OF ANXIETY

Generalized Anxiety Disorder(GAD)

Children with GAD are seen to be hard on themselves because they tend to worry constantly about many things such as family problems, relationships with peers, natural disasters, grades, performance in sports.

Physical: fatigue, or sweaty palms

Behavioral: hypervigilance, irritability, or restlessness

Cognitive: lack of concentration and/or unwanted irrational thoughts

Psychological: severe anxiety or fear

Also common: emotional distress, excessive worry, difficulty falling asleep, headache, nausea, palpitations, repeatedly going over thoughts, or trembling

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Children with OCD have intrusive thoughts that cause repetitive habits/rituals or routines to try and ease the anxiety. OCD consists of obsessions, compulsions, or both. Some children/people with OCD also have a tic disorder. Motor tics are sudden, brief, repetitive movements, such as eye blinking, facial grimacing, shoulder shrugging, or head or shoulder jerking. Common vocal tics include repetitive throat-clearing, sniffing, or grunting sounds.

Physical & Behavioral: could see...

- excessive cleaning/washing a body part
- hoarding unnecessary objects
- ordering/arranging items in a particular, precise way
- repeatedly checking or counting something
- constantly seeking reassurance

Cognitive: overly stressed, nervousness, fearful, apprehensive

Psychological: could have...

- fear of germs/contamination
- fear of losing/misplacing something
- worries of unforeseen hurtful/harmful scenarios to oneself or others
- craving symmetrical/"perfect" order

DIFFERENT TYPES OF ANXIETY

[CONTINUED]

<p>Panic Disorder A Panic disorder is a sudden episode of intense fear/worry that has triggers to cause severe physical reactions when there is no real danger or apparent cause.</p>	<p>Physical: tightening chest pains, Shortness of breath or having trouble breathing, sweating, chills or having hot flashes</p> <p>Behavioral: in shock, crying, irrational behavior</p> <p>Cognitive: feelings of nausea, headaches</p> <p>Psychological: fearful of death or feeling a sense of looming danger, feeling out of control of the situation</p>
<p>Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) PTSD is intense fear(s) causing emotional numbness or easily irritable behaviors due to a traumatic event they experienced</p>	<p>Physical: anger, sadness, avoidance</p> <p>Behavioral: restlessness, staying away from places, events, or objects that are reminders of the traumatic experience, avoiding thoughts or feelings related to the traumatic event</p> <p>Cognitive: flashbacks, bad dreams, frightening thoughts</p> <p>Psychological: immense fear of a traumatic event</p>
<p>Separation Anxiety Disorder Separation Anxiety is normal for an 18 mo to 3 year old child. It is when they become a littler older that it can turn into an anxiety disorder. Extreme homesickness, school refusal, or not wanting to have sleepovers are all signs of this disorder. Oftentimes they cannot even express that this is their deep embedded concern because they are too young to process their emotions.</p>	<p>Physical: inconsolable crying, irrational anger, emotional outbursts</p> <p>Behavioral: lies to avoid separation, clinginess</p> <p>Cognitive: nightmares, constant physical complaints, avoidance</p> <p>Psychological: can't think about anything but the present fear of separation</p>
<p>Social Anxiety Disorder Sometimes referred to as social phobia, is the intense fear of social and/or performance situations. They fear judgment and/or criticism. This significantly impairs the child's ability to be successful socially with peers as well as in the classroom.</p>	<p>Physical: shy, quiet, compliant, or complacent in social settings</p> <p>Behavioral: avoidance of social gatherings, playdates, leaving home</p> <p>Cognitive: headaches, nausea, hot/cold sweats</p> <p>Psychological: fear of interaction with others or small/large groups</p>
<p>Selective Mutism A child who refuses to speak in situations where talking is to be expected or necessary. They will look and behave completely normal at home but in a public setting they become mute in almost all occasions. They have learned to fear public speaking in any context.</p>	<p>Physical: frozen-looking, blank, expressionless face, tummy ache, nausea, vomiting, joint pains, headaches, chest pain, shortness of breath, diarrhea</p> <p>Behavioral: mutism, act normal around those they trust, difficulty communicating</p> <p>Cognitive: nervous feelings, scared feelings, when the child is young, he/she may not seem upset about mutism since peers are more accepting. As children age, inner turmoil often develops and they may develop the negative ramifications of being untreated</p> <p>Psychological: fear of embarrassment, fear of others' judgement, does not trust easily, feel as if they are always on stage</p>
<p>Specific Phobia A specific phobia causes unreasonable or irrational fear related to exposure to specific objects or situations. As a result, the affected child tends to avoid contact with the objects or situations and, in severe cases, any mention or depiction of them which causes anxiety/worry.</p>	<p>Physical & Behavioral: avoidance to their phobia, panic-like behavior, crying, tantrums, freezing, clinginess</p> <p>Cognitive: fear is out of proportion to the actual danger posed by the specific object or situation</p> <p>Psychological: fear or anxiety about a specific object or situation</p>

5 STEPS TO BUILDING STRONGER CONNECTION WITH AN ANXIOUS CHILD

These 5 tips plus many more strategies can be found in the book Anxiety Relief for Kids by Rachel Stone

1. **Encourage the child to not be afraid** - Let your child know that oftentimes being strong means being able to show your vulnerability, your weaknesses to those you trust. Encourage your child to never be afraid to ask for help and support when processing emotions. The child is trying to make sense of this world and seeking help is not a weakness - seeking help in these moments is a strength.
2. **ALWAYS be honest with your child** - Even if your first instinct is to “protect” your child by shielding him/her from the truth, it is SO important for the relationship to be built on openness, honesty and trust. Expressing the truth will show your child that there is no need to be afraid and it is okay to be completely honest. You can determine how much you share based on what is developmentally appropriate.
3. **Encourage your child to always look forward, never back** - There is a reason the past is the past. Validate your child’s feelings. Assure your child that he/she is better equipped now to handle that type of situation looking forward. Discuss deeper if the child wants, ask him/her how he/she would react now if that situation happened in the present. Help your child develop a statement of positive affirmation about his/her abilities (i.e., “I am capable.”).
4. **Encourage your child to seek and express gratitude** - Expressing gratitude is a great bonding experience that will bring you two closer together. Expressing gratitude also initiates a positive mindset helping the anxious thoughts to subside. Talk about the things you are grateful for first and then encourage the child to do the same. Let the child know you appreciate his/her ability to trust in you and let the child know you are so grateful for him/her in your life.
5. **Encourage your child with baby steps** - Talk about one piece of information at a time that is bothering your child. Gauge the child’s comfort level before moving on.

Podcasts / Blogs Parenting Advice

[The Anxious Child Blog](#)

[Health Line: Anxiety Diaries](#)

[Worry Wise Kids Blog](#)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Articles/Websites:

- [Anxiety YouTube Channel **](#)
- [LINK FOR TEST ANXIETY](#)
- Article on: [The Importance of Nutrition & Sleep for Test Anxiety](#)
- [Childhood Anxiety Disorders - From the ADAA](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health](#)

** The YouTube Channel is a great resource to help your child manage their anxiety. Check her out! Child Therapist & Author.

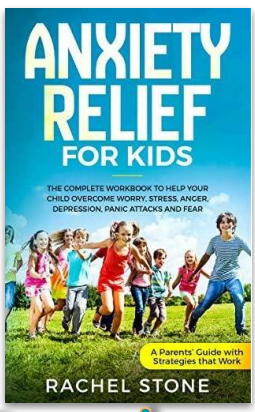
**Feeling anxiety?
Do a "grounding" tool.**



Look around you. Find 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. This is called "grounding." It's helpful to do whenever you feel anxious.

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Books About Anxiety

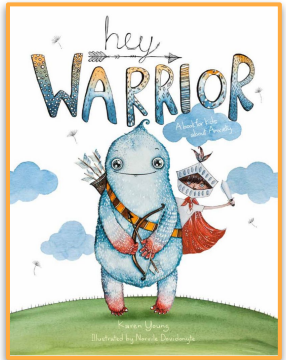


Book Review: Anxiety Relief for Kids

Anxiety Relief for Kids by Rachel Stone is a quick read with easy to implement strategies and techniques for helping to identify your child's anxiety. It breaks down the differences of how anxiety and fear are different and also how anxiety, depression, and anger may at times intertwine. The book gives practical tips for helping the heightened anxious emotion to subside. Anxiety is an emotion that everyone has and this book helps teach you how to manage it.

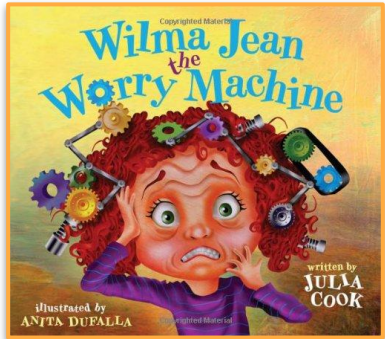
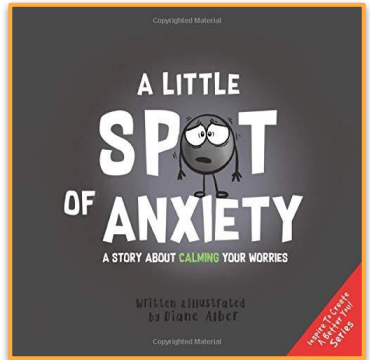
[Audible link to Anxiety Relief for Kids](#)

Books to Help Kids With Anxiety



Explains why our brain has the anxious emotion

Helps Children Learn Breathing Techniques



Gives children the tools needed to feel more in control of their anxiety

Helps children Understand Mistakes are okay



Be sure to check out:

<https://sites.google.com/newrichmond.k12.wi.us/elementary-counseling/home>

Thank you! • Your NRSD Elem. School Counselors: Lauren Glinsky • Corie Hoffman • Ally Youderian