



The Anxious Child

The information and advice below is extracted from a booklet called 'The Anxious Child' produced by the mental health foundation: <file:///E:/AA%20SYD/Health%20and%20well-being/Anxiety/Anxious%20child%20booklet%20for%20parents.pdf>

(See also 'Understanding anxiety and panic attacks' produced by 'Mind': <file:///E:/AA%20SYD/Health%20and%20well-being/Anxiety/MIND-anxiety-and-panic-attacks%20support.pdf>)

Many parents are not sure whether to be concerned when a usually talkative 8 year old becomes withdrawn and pre-occupied, when an 11 year old feels sick every school morning or when an adolescent suddenly begins to refuse to leave their room.

For many years it was believed that children did not experience depression or anxiety, and that those who appeared to were merely malingering or attention seeking. This is no longer the case. It is now widely accepted that as many as 8 - 11% of children and adolescents suffer from an anxiety that affects their ability to get on with their lives.

Children are sensitive to what happens around them, and young children in particular can feel that it is their fault when things go wrong at home. This makes them feel worried and guilty

Teenagers

The teenage years can be a fraught time for adolescents and parents alike. It is a time of rapid physical development and emotional change and this can be very uncomfortable. Signs of anxiety amongst adolescents might be revealed through over eating or under-eating, excessive sleepiness, and over-concern with appearance. Some adolescents will experience phobias and panic attacks may occur. For the majority of young people the feelings of uncertainty, turmoil and unhappiness that are all part of adolescence, do not mean that they will go on to develop more serious problems. However, for a minority of adolescents, specialist help may be necessary.

Parents can play an important role in helping their children through this difficult time. Strategies that parents can develop include:

- setting clear ground rules for the young person - these should be reasonable and become less restrictive as older children become more responsible.
- be prepared to really listen to your child - adolescents are much more likely to confide in you and trust you if they feel that you will respond to their worries and not automatically criticise them.
- find support for yourself - many parents feel rejected by their adolescent offspring and are uncertain how to support them. Talking to other parents and to your partner can make you feel less isolated.

When the young person's anxiety is such that it is causing them prolonged distress or it is interfering with their lives; stopping them going out with friends, having relationships or hobbies, for example, then you might want to consider asking for professional help.

What to do

It is clear that a number of causes of general anxiety in childhood can be prevented or managed by sensible handling. For the illogical fears which are not severe enough to be called phobias, simple

explanations and reassurance will help many children gradually get over them. Anxiety or fear which is causing the child or teenager prolonged distress, or is interfering with everyday events such as going out with family or friends or having relationships or hobbies, will often need special treatment. This treatment will nearly always take place in a clinic without the child having to be admitted to hospital. There are a number of professionals who can help children and young people who are extremely anxious.

The GP

An important starting point in getting help for your child is often your local GP. It is important to be clear with the GP the nature of your worries, and s/he should carry out a detailed interview with you and your child, enquiring into such areas as the relationship between you and your child, concerns regarding school and friends, and other difficulties that your child might be experiencing. Some GPs have counsellors attached to their practices, and they might suggest that your child talks to the counsellor about their anxiety, or they might refer them to counsellors outside the practice.

Specialist help

For other children and young people, the GP might feel that more specialist help is appropriate. If this is the case, they will refer your child to another professional for further assessment.

These will most likely be:

- Child and adolescent psychiatrists. These are doctors specially trained to help with anxiety in children.
- Clinical psychologists use psychological methods which can be particularly helpful with phobias. Both groups of professionals often work together.
- Educational psychologists and education welfare officers may become involved in helping your child if their anxieties are about school.
- In some instances, social workers might also become involved, particularly if your child's anxieties are specifically to do with their home life. The social worker might meet all the members of the family in order to help resolve any difficulties, sometimes through Family Therapy.
- Many professionals are part of a multi-disciplinary teams. These multi- disciplinary teams are often an important part of child and adolescent mental health services within a given area.

How are most anxieties treated?

- This is usually achieved by talking to or helping children and parents to understand how the problem has developed so that children can understand and overcome the anxiety.
- Specific fears are usually treated by helping children confront their fear in a way and at a pace that they can manage, for example by carefully planning a gradual return to school in the case of a school phobia.
- Some older children can be taught how to relax.
- Some children with general anxiety, which is hard to understand, can benefit from psychotherapy – intensive talking with a psychotherapist or professional skilled at this.

Sources of help for parents

- **Association for Child Psychology and Psychiatry** St Saviour House, 39/41 Union St., London SE1 1SD Tel: 020 7403 7458
 - **British Association for Counselling**
1 Regent Place, Rugby, Warwickshire CV21 2PJ Tel: 01788 578328
 - **British Psychological Society** St. Andrew's House, 48 Princess Road East, Leicester LE1 7DR Tel: 0116 2549 568
 - **Carers National Association**
20/25 Glasshouse Yard London EC1A 4JB
Tel: 020 7490 8818
- Activities include information and advice service for carers.*
- **Childline** (Confidential helpline for children and young people) Tel: 0800 1111, 24 hours, free.
 - **Eating Disorders Association** First Floor, Wensum House 103 Prince of Wales Road Norwich, Norfolk NR1 1DW Tel: 0870 7703278. Helpline: 0845 634 1414 Open Monday to Friday 8.30am-8.30pm
 - **Exploring Parenthood** 4 Ivory Place, 20 Treadgold Street, London W11 4BP Tel: 020 7221 4471 Advice Line: 020 7221 6681
 - **Manic Depression Fellowship** 8-10 High Street, Kingston upon Thames, KT1 1EY Tel: 020 8974 6550
 - **Mindinfo** Granta House, 15-19 Broadway Stratford, London E15 4BQ Tel: 020 8522 1728 (London) 08457 660 163 (outside London) Mon-Fri 9.15am - 4.45pm
 - **Rethink** (National Schizophrenia Fellowship) 28 Castle Street, Kingston upon Thames Surrey KT6 4NS Tel: 020 8547 3937 020 8974 6814 (advice line)
 - **The Self Injury Project**, Bristol Crisis Service for Women PO Box 634, Bristol B15 1XH. Tel: 0117 923 1119

For women in emotional distress. Focuses on self-injury. Publications and information on self-injury.

- **Parentline** Endway House, The Endway, Hadleigh, Essex SS7 2AN. Tel: 01702 554782
- Offers help and advice to parents on all aspects of bringing up children and teenagers. (Helpline Tel: 01702 559900 open 9 - 6pm Monday to Friday and 10am 2pm Saturday)*
- **Parent Network** 44-46 Caversham Road, London NW5 2DS Tel: 020 7485 8535
- Co-ordinates a national network of self-help groups for parents.*
- **The Samaritans** 10 The Grove, Slough SL1 1QP. Tel: 01753 532713/ Helpline: 08457 90 90 90

The Samaritans offer confidential emotional support at any hour of the day or night, to anyone in personal crisis and in danger of taking their own life.

- **Trust for the Study of Adolescence** 23 New Road, Brighton BN1 1WZ Tel: 01273 693311
- **Youth Access** 1a Taylors Yard, 67 Alderbrook Road, London SW12 8AD Tel: 020 8772 9900
- **Young Minds** 102 - 108 Clerkenwell Road, London EC1M 5SA Office Tel: 020 7336 8445 Fax: 020 7336 8446 Parents information service: 0800 018 2138

Young Minds, the national children's mental health charity works to promote the mental health of children and young people.

Young Minds runs a Parents information service, and produces a range of leaflets for parents and young people.