

Anxiety and Stress

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a natural human emotion; everyone feels anxious or worried at times. Anxiety in children and teenagers can arise because of separation, fears, something catastrophic happening, being judged, worrying about things before they happen, being in school or in social situations. Anxiety that rises to the level of interfering with normal functioning may be an anxiety disorder. Anxiety Disorders are among the most common mental health problems affecting children and teenagers and are among the most effectively treated.

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS OF ANXIOUS CHILDREN

Internet Resources:

The Child Anxiety Network: www.childanxiety.net

WorryWise Kids: www.worrywisekids.org

Massachusetts General Hospital School Psychiatry Program and MADI Resource Center:
www.massgeneral.org/schoolpsychiatry/info_anxiety.asp

Anxiety Disorders Association of America: www.adaa.org

The Center for Mental Health Services: www.mentalhealth.org

Books For Parents:

Chansky, T. E. (2001). Freeing your child from obsessive-compulsive disorder: A powerful, practical program for parents of children and adolescents. Crown Publishing Group.

Chansky, T. E. (2004). Freeing your child from anxiety: Powerful, practical solutions to overcome your child's fears, worries, and phobias. Broadway Books.

Dacey, J. S., & Fiore, L. B. (2000). Your anxious child: How parents and teachers can relieve anxiety in children. Jossey-Bass.

Manassis, K. (1996). Keys to parenting your anxious child. Barron's Educational Series, Inc.

Rapee, R. M., Spence, S., Cobham, V., & Wignall, A. (2000). Helping your anxious child: A step-by-step guide for parents. New Harbinger.

Spencer, E. D., DuPont, R., & DuPont, C. (2003). The anxiety cure for kids: A guide for parents. John Wiley & Sons.

STRESS

Everyone is affected by stress and reacts to it in different ways. Stress is a way that our body responds to the demands made upon us by the environment, our relationships, and our perceptions and interpretations of those demands. We all experience both "good stress" and "bad stress." Good stress is that optimal amount of stress that results in our feeling energized and motivated to do our best work. Good stress encourages us to develop effective coping strategies to deal with our challenges, which ultimately contributes to our resilience. Bad stress occurs when our coping mechanisms are overwhelmed by the stress and we then do not function at our best. The same event can affect children and adults in very individual ways—one person may see a carnival ride as thrilling and another may see it as a major stressor. For children, stress can manifest itself through changes in behavior. Common changes can include acting irritable or moody, withdrawing from activities that used to give them pleasure, routinely expressing worries, complaining more than usual about school, crying, displaying surprising fearful reactions, sleeping too much or too little, or eating too much or too little. With teens, while spending more time with and confiding in peers is a normal part of growing up, significantly avoiding parents, abandoning long-time friendships for a new set of peers or expressing excessive hostility toward family members, may indicate that the teen is experiencing significant stress. While negative behavior is not always linked to excessive stress, negative changes in behavior are almost always a clear indication that something is wrong. Adults will want to pay attention to these behaviors and determine an appropriate response or intervention. Stress can become distress when we are unable to cope or when we believe that we do not have the ability to meet the challenge. The solution is to adapt, change, and find methods to turn that bad stress into good stress.

~Courtesy of The National Association of School Psychologists

Resources for Parents

Shapiro, L., Sprague, R., (1980). The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook for Kids.

Ginsburg, K.R., (2011). Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings.

Hipp, E. (1995). Fighting Invisible Tigers: Stress Management for Teens.