

FACTSHEET

This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professionals to make sure this information is right for your child. If you would like to provide feedback on this fact sheet, please visit: www.schn.health.nsw.gov.au/parents-and-carers/fact-sheets/feedback-form.

Anxiety

What is anxiety in children and young people?

Children are just like adults. They will have worries and fears as they go through life. It is normal for children to develop fears and worries at each developmental stage. For example, younger children may worry about sleeping in the dark. Older children may get shy in front of new people. Most children will grow out of their fears.

When do anxieties become a problem?

Most people will have some features of an anxiety disorder. When deciding if your child has normal anxiety, ask:

- Is it interfering with your child's ability to do things?
Can they do things they enjoy?
- Are their worries, age inappropriate?
- Are they getting worse?
- Does it take a long time for your child to feel better?
- Have you noticed any other things like a change in habits, changes in sleep, avoiding certain situations, becoming clingier or more withdrawn?

If you are worried about your child's anxiety, you may need to get specialised help. General practitioners (GP), the school counselor or in younger children, a child and family nurse, can advise about where to seek help.

Early intervention for anxiety is important. Research suggests that untreated anxiety disorders in childhood lead to increased risk of developing depression or substance misuse in later life.

How common are anxiety disorders?

Anxiety is one of the most common emotional difficulties children and adolescents face. Approximately 14 % of Australians experience an anxiety disorder in any 12-month period (Mindframe, 2015).

What does anxiety feel like?

Young people and children with anxiety can feel both physical and emotional symptoms. Children can feel:

- Scared and fearful
- Teary and irritable
- Sweaty and breathless
- Pains and discomfort in their bodies

Types of anxiety disorders:

Professionals have different ways of describing anxiety. Common types of anxiety disorders in children include:

- Generalised anxiety disorder
- Social anxiety
- Separation anxiety
- Specific phobia
- Panic Disorder
- Selective Mutism

For detailed factsheets on the different types of anxiety disorders, we recommend reviewing the resource pages of: www.centreforemotionalehealth.com.au

What causes Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety disorders are caused by a combination of many factors including:

- Genetic vulnerability (e.g. anxiety disorders in other family members)
- Temperament style (e.g. shyness, inhibition, and withdrawal)
- Adverse or traumatic life experiences

How to help a child with anxiety?

- Try not to become anxious yourself or overprotective.
- Encourage your child to find ways to manage their worries rather than doing things for your child or avoiding anxiety provoking situations.
- Distraction can be helpful for young children.
- Practice simple relaxation techniques with your child (e.g. taking three deep, slow breaths, breathing in for a count of three and out for three).
- Seek professional advice if you are worried about your child's anxiety.

Helpful resources:

Children:

- Parent Line: Online advice and support as well as phone line support for parents, run by trained Counselors. Phone: 132055; www.parentline.org.au
- Raising Children Network: www.raisingchildren.net.au

Adolescent and Youth mental health:

- www.youthbeyondblue.com - This website offers a teen self-help online program, as well as great up to date information and support.
- www.headspace.org.au Headspace provides help and support for young people aged 12-25 at centers, online or over the phone for mental health, general health, alcohol and drug and work.

Anxiety Specific

- NSW center involved in research and treatment of childhood anxiety:
www.centreforemotionalthhealth.com.au

Self-help for teens

- www.moodcafe.co.uk - offers downloadable audio relaxation strategies.
- www.youthbeyondblue.com - runs an online self-help anxiety program for teens.
- www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk - has downloadable self-help workbook for teens on a variety of emotional needs, including anxiety.

Remember:

All children and adolescents will experience worry and fears.

Anxiety becomes a problem when it causes a lot of distress and leads to children avoiding doing things expected for their age.

Early intervention is important. It will help your child develop strategies to manage anxiety, and reduce risk of other mental health problems in adulthood.

Some children will benefit from some self-help with parental support. Others will need individual or group support from a skilled professional. A few children may need medication, in addition to talking therapy. Talk to a professional to help find what your child needs.