



ANXIETY OVERVIEW

Worries and fears are a natural and adaptive part of childhood development. Anxiety and fear become concerning for a clinical anxiety disorder when the concerns are **persistent and excessive, causing notable distress or especially difficulty functioning in day-to-day life.**

Cognitive behavioral therapy helps people learn about the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and actions. It helps patients recognize and change thoughts that can lead to anxiety as well as identifying avoidance. This therapy often uses education as well as exposure treatment (gradual and repeated exposure to what prompts anxiety). These help the patient learn how to manage normal anxiety reactions and how to resolve particularly anxious thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS — Anxiety can show up in many different ways for children including:

- Avoidance-not wanting to go to school, scouts, church, parties, other social activities and talking to safe strangers
- Physical symptoms like headaches, belly pain, intense pain complaints that don't seem to have another cause
- Difficulty falling asleep, waking up often at night and not falling back asleep easily
- Needing reassurance often before possible stressful times: storms, bedtime, going to school, or a general feeling that something bad is going to happen
- Not doing well in school due to difficulty focusing or running out of time on tasks/tests
- Anger outbursts or opposition to parents or teachers, especially when this is brought on by a stressful situation
- Either eating too much or too little to deal with anxiety

Watch for a pattern that may show that stress or anxiety happens in certain places or situations like around many people or new people or when needing to leave parents for a time.

CLASSIFICATION — There are a few types of anxiety disorder. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, or DSM-5, includes seven types of anxiety disorder seen in children.

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder:** many different worries that are difficult to control, stressed about school performance, needing perfection in assignments, focus on mistakes, safety or health concerns for them or family/friends, often associated with trouble sleeping
- **Social anxiety disorder:** very shy, withdrawn, poor eye contact with new people, seems to be afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing around other people, fear of being laughed at or embarrassed, often they will avoid social situations
- **Panic disorder:** panic attacks-feels like a heart attack or going crazy, losing control, will also have fear of attacks happening again or that they will get worse and have bad consequences
- **Agoraphobia:** Fear of places and situations that might cause panic, helplessness, or embarrassment like large open spaces, crowded places, small enclosed areas, public transportation, leaving the home, no history of panic disorder -rare in children but can be an issue for adolescents
- **Specific phobia:** Many people have specific fears. These become a phobia if they inhibit functioning like avoiding the park or running into the street from a dog because of fear of dogs. Afraid of storms to the point they won't go outside if it's raining.