



UNDERSTAND ANXIETY

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of worry, fear and unease. Everyone will feel anxious or stressed at some point in their life; these are natural emotional responses to some situations.

It is normal to feel anxious during an exam or the first day a child starts at a new school.

Anxiety becomes an issue when the response outweighs the situation. Some people experience these feelings more often and it begins to affect their daily life.

THE PURPOSE OF THE FOLLOWING IS TO HELP YOU:

- understand what anxiety is
- recognise the signs of anxiety
- know how to support young people with anxiety
- know how to access professional support for anxiety.

TYPES OF ANXIETY

Anxiety disorders are the most commonly diagnosed mental health condition. Types of anxiety disorders include:

- **Phobias**
- **Panic disorder**
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder**
- **Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)**
- **Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD)**

Anxiety disorders are thought to affect five percent of the UK population (NHS, 2018). According to Young Minds, one in six young people will experience anxiety at some point.

Separation anxiety is common in babies and young children but can occur in older children and adults. Anxiety levels are heightened due to the fear of being separated from home or a person they have strong attachments to. For babies this is normal between the age of eight and 12 months.

Social anxiety often starts in the teenage years and it can affect a young person's relationships, self-confidence, social and school life. A young person will avoid starting conversations, speaking on the phone and they may also fear criticism and embarrassment.



WHY?

It is not known why some people develop anxiety disorders, but it is believed that there are some things that make it more likely.

These include:

- **Family history**
If there are other family members who have an anxiety disorder, then a young person is more likely to develop anxiety themselves.
- **Having a history of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs)**
These are difficult or upsetting events that occur in childhood. ACEs can include events such as domestic abuse, bullying or neglect. These experiences in childhood can make a young person more likely to suffer with anxiety.
- **Long-term health conditions**
Conditions that cause long-term pain may cause an anxiety disorder.
- **History of substance misuse**
- **Young people who are placed into the care of the local authority or youth justice are at particular risk and known to have a higher incidence of anxiety**
However, some young people will experience difficulties with anxiety with no apparent cause.



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TRIGGERS FOR ANXIETY



Some young people will experience anxiety related to specific issues or situations such as attending school, going on holiday or attending medical appointments.

Other triggers include:

- **Neglect and/ or abuse**
- **losing a parent/carer**
- **being bullied**
- **being socially excluded**
- **homelessness/poverty**
- **being under pressure e.g. school**
- **puberty.**



PANIC ATTACKS

Panic attacks can be a distressing symptom of anxiety. Panic attacks can begin suddenly and may not have an obvious cause. The symptoms of a panic attack can include:

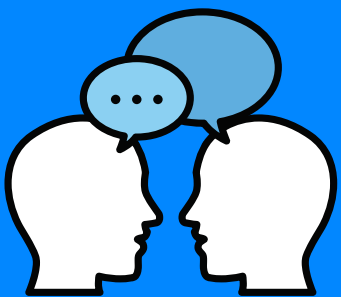
- **shortness of breath**
- **a racing heartbeat**
- **feeling faint**
- **sweating**
- **nausea**
- **chest pain.**

Panic attacks typically last between five and 20 minutes. Although they are frightening, panic attacks are not dangerous and will come to an end. During a panic attack breathing exercises can be helpful to try and reduce the symptoms.

Further information

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is a combination of cognitive therapy and behaviour therapy. This type of talking therapy can help the person to manage their problems by changing the way they think and behave. CBT is normally delivered by a health care professional in hour- long sessions over a number of weeks.

Medication may also be prescribed for anxiety. For children and young people medication should only be prescribed following an assessment by a psychiatrist and they should be closely monitored.



SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY



When a young person is feeling anxious there are a number of signs and symptoms which they may experience both physically and psychologically.

Physical symptoms include:

- nausea (feeling sick)
- tense muscles and headaches
- pins and needles
- feeling light-headed or dizzy
- breathing faster which may lead to a panic attack
- feeling sweaty or hot
- increased heart rate
- difficulty sleeping
- butterflies in the stomach

Psychological symptoms include:

- feeling tense or nervous
- having a sense of dread, or fearing the worst
- feeling like other people are looking at you
- dwelling on negative experiences
- thinking over a situation lots of times.

Signs to look out for:

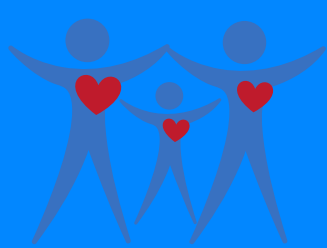
- increase in crying
- complaining of tummy ache
- not eating properly
- getting angry
- finding it hard to concentrate
- worrying
- having negative thoughts
- being clingy.

Young people may misuse substances such as drugs or alcohol to help them manage anxious feelings.



Medications used for Anxiety may include:

- **Anti-depressants** – Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors increase the levels of serotonin in the brain.
- **Pregabalin**- A medication that is often used to treat epilepsy has been beneficial in managing anxiety.
- **Benzodiazepines** – Sedative medications that may be used to control severe episodes of anxiety.

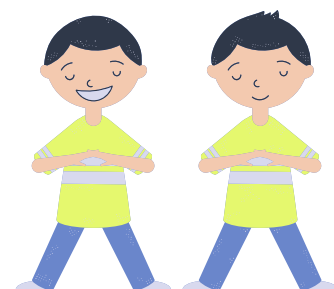


SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ANXIETY

There are a number of ways that children and young people can be supported to reduce their anxiety. Helping them to understand what anxiety is and explaining how they might be feeling and why, will help them to deal with it.

Anyone suffering with anxiety should be encouraged to learn self-help strategies. This can include:

- regular exercise
- encourage a healthylifestyle
- listening to music
- keep a diary
- talking to a friend or peer mentor
- encourage positivethinking
- cutting down on the amount of alcohol and caffeine consumed
- using distraction techniques such as fidget toys or colouring books
- using breathing exercises to help to manage their anxiety.



Gently breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, keeping the pace slow and regular. Slowly tense then relax all the muscles in your body, starting at your toes and working up to your head. Afterwards just take some time to be still and focus on how your body feels (Mind, 2018).

Other support

If the child or young person's anxiety is not getting better, then additional professional support should be sought which could involve making an appointment with the GP or other medical professional. They might offer support using psychological therapies; these may include counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy.

If the child or young person is still of school age you could make a referral to the school nurse.

Helpful resources

Ways to access support Anxiety UK:

Telephone: 03444775774

Email: support@anxietyuk.org.uk

Live Chat Advisory Service: Available during office hours, via the website.

Text: 07537 416 905

Services are available Monday – Friday 9.30am – 5.30pm (excluding bank holidays)

Childline:

0800 1111

YoungMinds Crisis Messenger:

Text YM to 85258

The Mix:

Freephone: 0808 808 4994 (16:00-23:00 daily)



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