

SAFEGUARDING - Social Anxiety

Anxiety

Many parents have been very appreciative that anxiety is being outwardly spoken about. They are finding the weekly articles a great starting point when opening up discussions with their children. Presently it is one of the main causes of distress for children and one of the main reasons why they do not meet their potential in schools. To this end, here is another great article talking about anxiety, how common it is and the different types of anxiety so that children can start to label their anxiety and start to regulate their emotions.

Children, like adults, have all sorts of strong feelings about what is happening to them. It's natural for them to feel fearful or worried from time to time. However, a small group of children and young people have severe anxiety which causes a lot of distress, and can seriously affect the way their everyday lives.

How common is it?

Anxiety is one of the common mental health problems. Nearly 300 thousand young people in Britain have an anxiety disorder. Lots of people, however, suffer in silence. It is important to recognise their problems and seek help especially when it starts affecting their everyday life.

Growing up: different types of anxieties

Anxieties are grouped on what the fear or the worry is about. These groups are helpful in understanding what the difficulties are and how to treat them.

Fears and phobias

Young children often develop fears, for example of animals or of the dark. A phobia is an extreme fear which causes a lot of distress and affects the child's life significantly. For example, a fear of dogs would be called a phobia if it means that a child refuses ever to go to the park to play. Most children either grow out of their fears or learn to manage them with support and encouragement, but it is much more difficult to cope with a phobia without some extra help.

General anxiety

Some youngsters feel anxious most of the time for no apparent reason. It may be part of their temperament, or it may be part of a pattern of behaviour that is shared with other members of the family. If the anxiety becomes very severe, it can mean that the child will not want to go to school, cannot concentrate or learn, and is not confident with other people.

Separation anxiety

Worry about not being with a child's regular care-giver is a common experience for most children. It normally develops at 6 months, and can go on in some form during the pre-school years. It can make going to sleep, parents leaving for work, or settling at nursery or school very difficult at times. If it is extreme and affects the child's development, education and family life, it may be useful to get some additional help.

Social anxiety

It may be helpful to think of this as an extreme, sometimes disabling, type of shyness. It means that although children and young people are not affected in the company of people they know and family, they find it very worrying to be in other social situations. This means that they will usually avoid them. This causes problems for the child in making new friends or dealing with situations at school. Older children describe it as a fear of humiliation or embarrassment which leads them to avoiding social situations.

A small minority of children and young people may develop other specific types of anxiety, such as post traumatic stress disorder or obsessive compulsive disorder. Unlike young people and adults, it is extremely rare for children to suffer panic attacks.

Working together to keep our children safe and happy.

Halina Rooney

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