

Anxiety

It's quite natural for children to worry and to be anxious at various stages of school and home life.

Sometimes we just need to let children know that they just have to do things being 'a bit anxious, or a bit scared, or a bit worried' and that this is ok. We can talk about how we, as adults, do things being 'a bit worried, or a bit scared, or a bit anxious'.

This is all part of becoming resilient and building up a toolbox of strategies to manage thoughts, feelings and emotions and the knowledge that we can cope with larger problems when they arise.

However, some children might need extra support if the anxiety becomes a problem.

Anxiety can become a problem when:

- there isn't a clear reason for it
- it disrupts a young person's life at home or school on a regular basis
- the problem has gone but the feeling of fear or panic has not
- it interferes with their ability to take part in activities
- they struggle to complete tasks that other children or young people do easily
- their fear or worry seems out of proportion to the problem
- they become anxious or fearful more easily, or more often, or more intensely than other children or young people
- it leads to unhelpful and unrealistic thoughts about themselves and others.

Identifying the signs

A child or young person with an anxiety disorder may display physical and emotional symptoms including:

- headaches and stomach aches or just feeling unwell
- dizziness/faintness/palpitations/breathlessness/sweating
- not sleeping
- not eating properly
- restlessness
- being clingy/feeling panicky/tearful
- seeming to be worried or anxious and needing lots of reassurance
- feeling down or depressed
- having difficulty concentrating
- wanting things to be perfect and getting frustrated if they're not
- expressing a sense of impending danger, panic or doom
- lashing out at others
- hyper-alertness and difficulty keeping still

Find out more about common anxiety disorders in children

MindEd is a free educational e-learning resource for professionals on children and young people's mental health. The following sessions aim to help staff better understand how anxiety affects children:

- [The worried child](#): describes anxiety and worry in children and teens and discusses how to react to them.

- [Anxiety disorders](#): outlines how common anxieties present in children and young people, and how to assess and treat them.

Top tips

- Stay calm, supportive and practical
- Try not to get drawn into a child emotions. Praise and reward small (and big) successes when they face their fears. It can help them if you remain positive and encouraging, without forcing them into anything.
- Focus on what helps
- Instead of trying to reassure a child or young person that nothing bad will happen, focus on what helped them cope when they faced a similar situation. Help them think through what they have learned about their fears and about themselves. Did their worry come true? Did they cope?
- Try breathing techniques or mindfulness activities
- Mindfulness activities can help children relax physically and emotionally. If you don't know where to start, there are lots of activities on the [Mentally Healthy Schools' mindfulness calendar](#).

Working together to keep our children safe and happy

Halina Rooney

Deputy Head of Inclusion/SENCo