# Anxiety Disorders in Children

## What Are Anxiety Disorders?

Children with anxiety disorders have too much fear and worry that lasts a long time. Children with anxiety often have problems at school or home because of it. A small amount of anxiety is normal in childhood. At different ages, some fears are common like fear of being away from parents and fear of the dark. Children can also have anxiety when they are in new or stressful situations.

Children can have so much anxiety it causes problems. Some children:

- Have aches and pains, like headaches or stomachaches
- Feel restless, tired or tense
- Have trouble focusing or sleeping
- Can also have tantrums or meltdowns because of anxiety

## What Causes Anxiety Disorders?

There are many reasons why a child may have anxiety. It can run in families and start at birth. It can also start after exposure to stressful events and problems meeting developmental milestones.

## What Are the Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders?

Children with anxiety may:

- Be very upset when caregivers leave them
- Be very shy and quiet in new situations and with people not in their family
- Stay away from places or activities that make them feel nervous
- Worry a lot about many things (They may not be able to control the worry and may often talk about or ask questions about the things they worry about.)
- Not talk in stressful places, but talk easily at home
- Feel very scared of certain things like animals, heights, being in an airplane, or seeing blood

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## How Are Anxiety Disorders Treated?

Anxiety will not get better without help. Treatment for mild anxiety starts with psychotherapy. In psychotherapy, a health care provider helps your child by understanding how they think and feel about things. Children will learn to:

- Replace their anxious thoughts with helpful ones
- Control their anxious feelings with coping skills

Your child will need to practice what they learn outside of sessions. This is an important part of therapy. Parents are often part of therapy sessions so they can help their child practice the skills. Psychotherapy is usually done by psychologists, mental health counselors, and clinical social workers.

- Medicine can help decrease feelings of anxiety. Medicines may be prescribed to help your child's anxiety.
- For moderate to severe anxiety, treatment that uses psychotherapy and medicine together may be most helpful.

## How Can I Help My Child's Anxiety?

- Be with your child and support them during stressful times. If your child gets anxious remain calm. Have them take deep and slow breaths. They can pretend they are blowing up a balloon. Do not let your child pass up things that raise their anxiety.
- Ask your child to talk about their worries. You can tell them what you saw that made you think they were anxious. For instance, if their body shakes when they are anxious. This is called a non-verbal cue. Do not tell your child not to worry.
- Have a daily routine or use a schedule so your child knows what to expect.
- Praise your child for facing fears and being brave in stressful situations.
- Talk with your child's school to let teachers know how they can help your child practice using their coping skills. If anxiety causes problems for your child at school a special plan called a 504 Plan or IEP may be needed.

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