

How is anxiety treated?

Anxiety can be treated with behavioral therapy, medication, or both.

Therapy for anxiety

For kids with mild or moderate anxiety, the recommended treatment is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT).

In CBT for anxiety, the therapist helps the child face the thing they're afraid of a little at a time in a safe space. Kids learn skills to tolerate anxiety rather than avoiding things that trigger it, and the anxiety gradually diminishes.

Medication for anxiety

The best medications for most kids with anxiety are antidepressant medications known as SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors).

Medication and therapy together are the most effective treatment for anxiety. Medication might also be prescribed alone if CBT is not available or feasible for the child's family.

How can parents help anxious kids?

As parents, our instinct is often to protect kids from things that scare them or make them uncomfortable. But with anxious kids, letting them avoid things that worry them can actually make their anxiety stronger. That's because it gives them the message that the thing they're worried about really is scary or isn't something they can handle on their own.

Here are some more helpful ways to be supportive:

Hear kids out.

Don't automatically downplay or dismiss their fears. At the same time, don't dwell on them and make them bigger.

Talk it through.

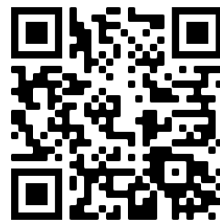
Is their fear realistic? If the worst happened, what are some ways they could handle it?

Express confidence.

Let them know that you think they can handle it. And remind them that their fears will get smaller the more they face them.

Give lots of praise afterward.

Facing fears is tough. Show kids you see and appreciate their hard work.



For more resources on Anxiety in English and Spanish, visit the Child Mind Institute's Family Resource Center at childmind.org/resources

The Child Mind Institute is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need to thrive. We're here to provide clear, accurate information to help you feel confident, comfortable and empowered when it comes making decisions about your child's mental health.



Anxiety in Kids: Quick Facts

Symptoms of anxiety and tips for supporting children and teenagers who are anxious



Child Mind
Institute

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is intense worry or nervousness. It is one of the most common mental health challenges for kids. We all feel anxious sometimes. But when a child's worries don't go away, are unrealistic, and make them start avoiding everyday things, they could have an anxiety disorder.

The good news is that anxiety responds very well to treatment — both therapy and medication. The sooner kids get help the easier it is to treat their anxiety, and the better they'll feel.

What are the symptoms of anxiety?

Anxiety can look very different from child to child. Here are some common signs that a child might have an anxiety disorder:

- Repeatedly asking for reassurance (“Are you sure nothing bad is going to happen?”)
- Complaining about headaches or stomachaches
- Physical symptoms like sweating and racing heart
- Avoiding situations that make them uncomfortable
- Being clingy around parents or caregivers
- Trouble concentrating in class or being very fidgety
- Trouble sleeping
- Tantrums and acting out
- Being very self-conscious (“What if I say something dumb?”)
- Being hard on themselves (“Nobody likes me.”)

What kinds of anxiety can affect kids?

Children can be diagnosed with different kinds of anxiety depending on what they are most worried about. Here are some different anxiety disorders that children can struggle with:

Separation anxiety disorder

Children with separation anxiety become extremely upset when they are separated from their caregivers, and worry about something happening to them. This distress continues after other kids their age have outgrown it.

Social anxiety disorder

Children with social anxiety disorder are very self-conscious. They can find it difficult to spend time with peers or participate in class because they are so afraid of embarrassing themselves.

Selective mutism (SM)

Children with SM have a hard time speaking outside of home, in places like school. Their anxiety goes beyond typical shyness. Kids with SM can't speak even when they badly want to.



Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)

Children with GAD worry about lots of everyday things. They are often perfectionists and may be particularly worried about how they are doing in school.

Panic disorder

Children with panic disorder have a history of panic attacks. Panic attacks are a scary and very sudden surge of physical symptoms like a racing heart. They may worry they are dying or “going crazy.”

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)

Children with OCD experience unwanted, upsetting thoughts or worries called obsessions. They develop repetitive actions like hand-washing or lining things up or counting — called compulsions — to calm their anxiety. Children with OCD sometimes hide their compulsions at school and explode when they get home.

Specific phobia

Children with specific phobia have extreme fears about a particular thing like dogs or insects or vomiting. These things aren't typically considered dangerous but seem very scary to the child.