

Tipsheet:

# Anxiety in kids



**If a child has persistent feelings of worry and fear, it could be anxiety. Let's explore what anxiety is and how you can support your child to overcome it.**

## **When anxiety becomes a problem for your child**

Some level of anxiety is a normal part of life and growing up. But if your child is anxious for long periods of time then it could be a problem.

It's natural for kids to experience anxiety when faced with new or stressful situations and it doesn't mean that they will develop an anxiety disorder.

With support and reassurance, most worries will go away. But sometimes, kids need a little extra help and it may be time to visit a professional if you're concerned.

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**Your child may need some extra support with their anxiety if:**

- They seem to be more anxious than other children their age
- They feel anxious often and the anxiety is intense
- Their fears and worries seem out of proportion to what they're facing
- It stops them from participating in activities or day-to-day tasks
- They have feelings of panic and/or panic attacks
- They avoid anything that might trigger their anxiety
- The anxiety stops them from doing things other children their age do



**“Anxiety disorders are one of the most common types of mental health concerns in kids, with around 7% of Australian children experiencing some type of anxiety disorder.”**

Sky, Kids Helpline Counsellor

## Signs your child might be experiencing anxiety

**As a parent, it's important to be aware of some of the signs of anxiety and how they might appear in your child so you know when to intervene.**

**Here are some signs that your child might have anxiety:**

- Worries most days and for long periods of time
  - Complains of stomach pains or headaches when they feel uneasy about something
  - Clings to you and seeks reassurance often
  - Tries to avoid situations that they feel worried or scared about
  - Has lots of fears, dislikes taking risks or trying new things
  - Worries about making mistakes and doing things the wrong way
  - Thinking about the situation makes them more worried and tense
  - Inability to control fear or worry, asks lots of "what if?" questions
  - Irritable, tired and has difficulty concentrating
- Asks for help with things they can do for themselves
    - "will you do it for me?"
  - Gets upset easily, especially over small things
  - Trouble sleeping at night - won't go to sleep alone or experiences nightmares
  - Their worries and fears are out of proportion to the situation
  - Tries to get others to do the things they're worried about
    - "will you tell them for me?"
  - Always sees the dangerous or negative side of things
  - Physical symptoms like muscle tension, sweating and diarrhoea



## **Common types of anxiety disorders in kids**

**There are many types of anxiety disorders, all with different symptoms.**

**Here are some of the most common types in kids:**

### **Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD):**

Large amounts of time spent worrying about any aspect of life – past, present or future.

### **Specific Phobias:**

Intense irrational fears and panicked reactions to specific objects or situations eg. dogs, heights, the dark.

### **Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):**

Develops after a significant stressful event such as a natural disaster or personal trauma.

### **Social Anxiety or Social Phobia:**

Extreme shyness and intense feelings of fear and worry that something bad will happen to them in a social situation.

### **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):**

Persistent and unwanted thoughts followed by impulses or compulsive, repetitive behaviour.

### **Panic Attacks or Panic Disorder:**

Periods of intense fear which starts suddenly eg. shortness of breath, pounding heartbeat, chest pain.

## How to support your child through anxiety

**There's many things you can do as a parent to support your kids with anxiety. Here are some strategies you can try:**

- Find out more about anxiety – read books and talk to experts
- Avoid telling them to 'stop worrying' – often they can't control it
- Teach them about anxiety – its role is to protect us from threats
- Talk about their anxiety – sketch where on their body they feel it
- Slow things down – encourage your child to take some slow, deep breaths
- Reassure them that shaking, sweating and a racing heart can be part of anxiety
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle – eat well, exercise, sleep
- Be patient and positive as your child practices new ways to cope
- Seek professional support for you and your child when needed
- Let them know you can work together to overcome anxiety
- Acknowledge fears and help them to see that things might not be as bad as they think
- Help them manage their anxiety – set daily goals and develop coping skills





## Kids can overcome anxiety with some help and support.

It can be stressful wondering if your child is suffering from anxiety.

If you have concerns about possible signs of anxiety in your child you can seek further information and support through your local GP.

If you need some support, call the **Parentline** service in your state or territory to discuss your options with a counsellor. You can also visit **[kidshelpline.com.au/parents](https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents)**

If your child needs support they can call **Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800** or visit **[kidshelpline.com.au](https://kidshelpline.com.au)**

