

Tipsheet:

Social anxiety in kids



Parenting a child with social anxiety can be a challenge, but you're not alone. We're here to help you and your family.

Is it shyness or social anxiety?

Shyness can be very common and kids usually grow out of it. On the other hand, kids with social anxiety have intense feelings of fear and worry that something bad will happen to them in a social situation.

- Their temperament and personality will play a part
- Some kids naturally cope with meeting new people while others find it very difficult
- Some enjoy being the centre of attention but other kids may find it really uncomfortable
- Some kids may experience a higher level of discomfort in some social situations and not others

With thanks to Kids Helpline for enabling Bupa to share this valuable content.



Situations that can trigger social anxiety

Every child is different. What one child finds triggering, another child may not.

Here's some situations your child may find distressing:

- Giving a talk in front of their class
- Meeting someone new
- Going to a party with people they don't know
- Asking for a favour or for help
- Going to a public place like a shopping centre
- Being the centre of attention
- Talking to someone in authority like a teacher
- Talking on the phone





Social anxiety affects the body, mind and behaviour

The fear underlying social anxiety is usually related to a belief or thought about something bad happening.

They may think “I might say something stupid and people will stop liking me”. This can lead to a number of symptoms including:

Physical: Racing heartbeat, muscle tension, sweating, sore stomach, nausea

Psychological: Difficulty concentrating, negative thoughts of being judged by others, mental blanks where they have nothing to say, an urge to get out of the situation

Behavioural: Avoidance of certain places, not answering the phone, avoiding achievement so as to not stand out

Unhealthy ways of coping with social anxiety

If your child feels they can't handle fearful social situations they may turn to coping strategies, which can cause longer term harm.

- They may avoid social situations which can make their anxiety worse
- They may avoid asserting themselves and go along with what others want them to do to, as they might think it will create conflict
- They may avoid success so they don't stand out and draw attention to themselves

“My child became distressed while entering a birthday party; I helped him to calm down by focusing on his breathing and positive thinking. We then found a good friend of his to play with.”

Drew, parent of an 8 year old

The first step is tuning in to your child and noticing if they are particularly anxious about social situations.

Some of the following ideas can help:

- Affirm your child’s strengths and their worth
- Teach them relaxation techniques such as meditation, breathing, muscle relaxation
- Teach assertive communication and how it is different to being passive or aggressive
- Do some role plays – if your child needs to have a difficult conversation with someone practice with them first
- Practice being in social situations but start with easier ones first and work up to more difficult situations gradually
- Put any setbacks into perspective – encourage your child to challenge unrealistic or negative thoughts and to not give up



Support is available for you and your child

To talk through your options call a counsellor or speak with your GP.

If your child needs support to manage anxiety they can call Kids Helpline and talk with a counsellor 24/7.

If social anxiety is impacting your child's quality of life you can seek further help 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**

If your child needs support they can call **Kids Helpline on 1800 55 1800** or visit **kidshelpline.com.au**

