



Anxious Adolescents

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Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are the most common psychological disorders in adolescents and affect around 10% of this population. Anxiety disorders consist of having an irrational fear of a situation or stimulus that is in excess of what would be considered reasonable. If the worry is evident for at least six months an anxiety disorder could be a possibility. There are different types of anxiety disorders:

- 1.) Separation anxiety disorder - having anxiety due to separation from home or from the caretaker
- 2.) Generalized anxiety disorder - excessive worry, anxiety and nervousness
- 3.) Social phobia - fear of social interactions or performance where embarrassment could occur
- 4.) Panic disorder - unexpected and recurrent panic attacks followed by worry over having another panic attack
- 5.) Obsessive-compulsive disorder - obsessions of ideas or thoughts that cause anxiety or compulsions that are carried out obsessive behaviors
- 6.) Specific phobias- persistent fear of a specific object or situation that causes much anxiety
- 7.) Post-traumatic stress disorder - re-experiencing a traumatic event

accompanied by avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma that occurred

Along with these anxiety disorders, School Phobia can exist when students may have anxiety symptoms at the prospect of attending school. The student may resist going to school or they may ask to leave early. The student may fear attending school due to a social phobia, a specific phobia, learning difficulties or bullying. It is possible that adolescents who have an anxiety disorder also have overlapping anxiety disorders in which there is more than one type of anxiety disorder that they struggle with.

Demographics and Symptoms

Anxiety can vary by age and gender. Many times, younger children's anxiety deals more with separation anxiety and then as a student gets older, more generalized and social anxiety are prevalent. Girls are more likely to experience anxiety than are boys.

Many times, anxiety in adolescents may be unrecognized and untreated. Parents are more likely to seek help for students that act out or behave aggressively than they are for children who are fearful and anxious, so many times it goes unrecognized.

There are many symptoms especially during peak anxiety experiences that may be noticeable:

- 1.) difficulty concentrating
- 2.) irritability
- 3.) muscle tension
- 4.) nausea
- 5.) change in sleep patterns
- 6.) restlessness
- 7.) fatigue

All adolescents have anxiety at some point during their school years, but where anxiety can become problematic is when it starts to interfere with a student's daily functioning or academic performance. Anxiety in adolescents can persist from childhood into adult years and can interfere with student's social adjustment and academic functioning. Anxiety can also lead to higher rates of depression, attention difficulties, poor self-esteem and difficulty developing relationships and social behavior. It can also increase risk of illicit drug use and educational underachievement.

Dealing with Anxiety in the School Setting

The school setting is an important place for recognition and prevention of anxiety disorders. Your child's emotional growth and well-being are important to us and our school counselors can provide assessment, programs and referrals in cases of need.

There are different ways that we can assess if a student may have an anxiety disorder.

- 1.) Self-report questionnaires for students and/or for parents
- 2.) Interviews with students to assess which types of anxiety are present,

the severity of the anxiety symptoms and the impairment that the anxiety causes.

- 3.) Teacher's observations in the classroom

How We Can Help

We offer programs that can help prevent anxiety and help students cope with anxiety.

“Nerves of Steel”:

- Weekly prevention sessions during school hours (1 hour a week for 10 weeks) as part of the school curriculum given to all students in the classroom
- Designed to prevent the development of anxiety and depressive symptoms
- Followed up by two sessions held one month and three months after completing the main program
- Three sessions for parents at the school to help parents reinforce the skills their child has learned
- Includes cognitive strategies, exposure exercises, relaxation techniques and preparation for Anxiety-provoking situations



“Breaking Barriers”:

- Weekly sessions during or after school hours (1 hour a week for 10 weeks) administered to small groups of students selected as at risk of

developing or indicating symptoms of anxiety.

- Two parent counselor meetings are held and the start and midpoint of the program
- Includes cognitive restructuring, child management strategies and graded exposure to situations that cause anxiety. Also offers skills on how to handle teasing and how to be more assertive.

These programs teach students to identify their anxious thoughts and understand how their thoughts affect their feelings. They also teach students how to challenge their anxious thoughts by searching for a more realistic solution to replace their negative belief. Adolescent's fear can be broken down into less threatening steps and we help them walk through their fear and encourage their confidence and courage. It is important to teach the skills to help students cope with anxiety.



The School Counselors are in a great position to monitor your children and to intervene with prevention and early intervention for anxiety disorders so that students can successfully attend school and excel academically and socially.

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References:

McLoone, J., Hudson, J. L., and Rapee, R. M. (2006). Treating Anxiety Disorders in a School Setting. *Education and Treatment of Children Vol. 29, No. 2, pp. 219-242.*

Muris, P., Merckelbach, H., Kindt, M., Bogels, S., Dreessen, L., Van Dorp, C., Habets, A., Rosmuller, S., and Snieder, N. (2001). The Utility of Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED) as a Tool for Identifying Children at High Risk for Prevalent Anxiety Disorders. *Anxiety, Stress, and Coping, Vol. 14, pp. 265-283.*

For more information on Anxiety in Adolescents, please visit:

<http://www.adaa.org/GettingHelp/FocusOn/Children&Adolescents.asp>

or

http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/mental_health/anxiety.html