



Pediatric Consultation Specialists, PLLC
Behavior ★ Learning ★ Success

CHILDHOOD ANXIETY

WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE IN CHILDREN?

Depending upon the developmental age of a child, some anxiety in children is normal. Children with anxiety disorders experience *intense* worry, fear, or uneasiness that can last for long periods of time and significantly impact their lives.

TYPES OF ANXIETY DISORDERS:

- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Separation Anxiety Disorder
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Phobia or Specific Phobia
- Panic Disorder

ASSOCIATED FEATURES OF ANXIETY DISORDERS IN CHILDREN:

- In children and adolescents, anxiety symptoms may include irritability, somatic complaints (i.e., headaches, stomach aches) and school avoidance.
- Children with anxiety often have sleep difficulties (usually falling asleep).
- Children with anxiety may also appear inattentive, as they are focusing on their worries.
- Depression and anxiety often coexist in adolescents with emotional distress.
- Childhood anxiety may be expressed through your children's behaviors, such as aggression, tantrums, or defiance.

WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY?

Research remains uncertain regarding the specific causes of anxiety disorders. However, if parents experience anxiety, children are at a higher risk for developing an anxiety disorder.



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TREATMENT FOR CHILDHOOD ANXIETY?

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy is the most effective treatment for children experiencing anxiety. Cognitive-behavioral strategies include learning relaxation strategies, gradual exposure to feared situations, challenging negative self-statements, learning to modify the ways they think and behave, and family anxiety management training.
- Medications are also available to treat the symptoms of anxiety. Consultation with your pediatrician is recommended.

STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL:

- Reduce outside stressors, whenever possible.
- Acknowledge specific fear and provide support in learning to manage that fear.
- Provide a safe place when feeling overwhelmed in school.
- For test anxiety, the child may require a quiet room free of distractions, modified test-taking options (i.e., multiple-choice vs. essay), and/or the opportunity to correct their mistakes.

STRATEGIES FOR HOME:

- Acknowledge your child's fears and provide them with practical information to counteract their irrational fears and worries.
- Remind them to use their relaxation and cognitive-behavioral strategies.
- Do not punish for worrying. Instead, provide options and a plan.
- Prepare your child for changes, transitions, or times that make your child feel more anxious.
- Model positive coping strategies.
- Encourage gradual exposure to fears.