

## **Child & Adolescent Anxiety FAQ**

### **Q. What is Anxiety and what are the various forms of Anxiety?**

**A.** Anxiety is the feeling of nervousness or worry over things in our lives. It becomes a disorder when the level of anxiety is so high that it gets in the way of key daily functioning. Anxiety disorder can be thought of as the excessive worry and perseveration of thought about how things can go wrong or harm us; the intensity level and duration of these worries and thoughts are considered to be irrational. There are many types of anxiety disorders. The main ones are: generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, phobias/specific phobia, social anxiety, and separation anxiety. To learn about each of the different types, visit [psychiatry.org](http://psychiatry.org).

### **Q. What causes Anxiety?**

**A.** There are many reasons why a person might develop an anxiety disorder. Genetics can play a part, meaning it can run in the family. Trauma is another potential cause. Brain development, environmental factors, family dynamics and parenting styles may all contribute to anxiety. There is no single cause, and it is important to remember that while certain familial factors may play a role, parents are not to be blamed for their child's anxiety (with the exception of child abuse).

### **Q. How do I support a student with anxiety in the classroom?**

**A.** A key piece of supporting a student with anxiety is helping them to feel safe. Routines can help with this. When a student knows what to expect throughout the day, and these expectations do not change, then the day can run smoother. Preparing the student the day before for interruptions (e.g., fire drill, assembly) will help when you need to break away from routines. It is also important to teach the student how to handle situations and be flexible when routines might be broken. This may involve teacher coping strategies, such as mindfulness or other therapeutic practices. Clearly posting class schedules, rules, and expectations that the student can read from their seat can help with routines. Teaching the student about the anxiety helps build self-advocacy and self-determination skills. Adjusting the environment of the classroom (e.g., seating, schedule, lighting, teacher moving about the room) and tasks (e.g., breaking down assignments to smaller parts, extended time) are also good. More specific interventions will depend on the student and type of anxiety.

### **Q. How can the school support the family of a student with anxiety?**

**A.** Many of the same interventions in the classroom can be used in the home. Setting good routines of when to do homework, eat dinner, go to bed, and other activities can be helpful. It is important to talk about the anxiety and not yell at or punish the child for anxiety winning a battle that day. Family members may be invited to be present in the initial counseling session if counseling is sought. Limiting homework to only what is essential, providing checklists for parents to follow to help with homework or reading, and open communication between the school and family are all good places to start as well. Following Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs may be beneficial if the student comes from a low-income home. Providing discrete ways for the child to get food and hygiene supplies can be helpful when considering these basic needs. As with the classroom supports, more detailed interventions to help the family will depend on the student, family, and nature of the anxiety.

### **Q. How do I get a student with anxiety to come to class?**

**A.** Routines are a great place to start. Helping parents set up good night and morning routines help prepare the student for class. Having a friend meet the student at school can ease the separation anxiety. Allowing the student to text or call usually just makes the issue worse. Parent training is the best first step to help in this situation. Another option, similar to the friend, is to the Check-In/Check-Out system. For more information on this topic, visit [childmind.org](http://childmind.org).