

Learning Links Fact Sheet

Anxiety in Children



What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a common mental health condition affecting 1 in 7 young Australians. It is a normal part of childhood development and is the body's way of preparing for unfamiliar and potentially dangerous experiences. Anxiety is characterised by intense fear, worry or dread that is disproportionate to the situation and hinders a person's ability to function and participate fully in everyday life.

Types of Anxiety Common in Children

Anxiety disorders may be diagnosed when a child's anxiety is more excessive, persistent, or irrational than what is considered normal for their age and situation. Some of the most common childhood anxiety disorders include:

- **Generalised Anxiety Disorder:** an excessive and irrational worry about everyday situations, events or activities like attending school, making friends, performance in sports, health or world events.
- **Social Anxiety Disorder:** an intense fear of being judged in social situations, making it difficult to make friend or speak up in class.

- **Separation Anxiety Disorder:** an intense worry or distress caused by being away from a parent or caregiver or of something bad happening to a loved one while they are away.
- **Panic Disorder:** a condition where a child experiences frequent and unexplained panic attacks, causing difficulty breathing.

Signs of Anxiety in Children

Anxious children may experience a combination of psychological, physical and behavioural symptoms, including:

- rapid heart rate and breathing
- restlessness and irritability
- difficulty concentrating
- persistent worry
- angry outbursts, tantrums or meltdowns
- difficulty sleeping, nightmares/night terrors
- changes in appetite
- shaking and dizziness
- unexplained stomach pain, vomiting, headaches or muscle pains
- avoidance of places and activities

What Causes Anxiety?

There is no one cause for anxiety. Some children are naturally more anxious than others due to genetics or environment while others may have experienced distressing events that led to the development of anxiety. Children with conditions like ADHD and Autism have a greater risk of developing anxiety due to the significant social and emotional challenges they can face.

How is Anxiety Diagnosed?

A mental health professional such as a GP, psychologist or psychiatrist can diagnose different anxiety disorders using criteria from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). A comprehensive assessment usually involves a questionnaire that asks about different aspects of the child's life, including:

- Home and environment
- Education and school experience
- Extra curricular activities
- Relationships
- Conduct and risk-taking activities
- Eating, sleep and other lifestyle factors
- Self-harm and suicide risk
- Psychosis and mania symptoms

Mental health professionals may also use a range of standardised assessment tools to understand your child's overall wellbeing.

Support for Children with Anxiety

The GP, psychologist, or mental health professional who has made a diagnosis of anxiety will discuss different options to treat anxiety. The most common support options for anxiety include:

- **Counselling:** A child psychologist can use different approaches such as play therapy or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to help your child understand their feelings and develop positive coping strategies to manage anxious feelings.
- **Lifestyle changes:** Making changes to diet, exercise, and sleep can help manage the impact of anxiety symptoms on daily functioning.
- **Medication:** If a child is experiencing severe anxiety, their healthcare professional may recommend medication to help manage symptoms.



How Families Can Help

There are lots of simple ways families can help children to build resilience and manage anxiety:

- Keep a consistent routine including sleep and mealtimes
- Schedule relaxing activities like drawing or listening to music in your daily routine
- Validate their feelings and offer encouragement

How Learning Links Can Help

Learning Links has more than 50 years of experience supporting children's wellbeing. We offer a range of services and resources to support children with anxiety.

- **Anxiety Assessments:** gain a better understanding of complex and severe anxiety symptoms and investigate other possible causes.
- **Anxiety Counselling:** help your child to understand their feelings, develop strategies to manage anxiety, recognise their strengths and build self-esteem.
- **Family Counselling for Anxiety:** parents and carers can get support to better understand their child's support needs and develop strategies for all family members to cope.

Enquire about our services

Call our friendly Intake team on **1300 003 900** or submit an online enquiry.

[www.learninglinks.org.au/
service-enquiry](http://www.learninglinks.org.au/service-enquiry)