

CHILDHOOD ANXIETY

Guidance for Parents

All children worry sometimes, it's a normal part of growing up. For some children, however, worries can feel overwhelming and begin to affect everyday life. When this happens, it may be a sign of anxiety.

What is anxiety?

Anxiety can affect children in different ways, and it **doesn't look the same for every child**. There are several types of anxiety, each with its own signs and challenges. Understanding the different forms anxiety can take **may help you recognise what your child is experiencing** and know when to seek support.

- **Separation anxiety:** Worry about being away from parents, particularly at school drop-off or during the school day.
- **Social anxiety:** Fear of social situations and concern about how they are perceived by others.
- **Selective mutism:** Difficulty speaking in certain settings, such as in front of a teacher or in class.
- **Generalised anxiety:** Excessive worry about a wide range of everyday things.
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD):** Distressing thoughts and repetitive behaviours used to reduce anxiety.
- **Phobias:** Strong or irrational fears of specific things, such as animals, insects, or storms.

Young children may:

Anxiety can manifest differently from person to person and in each child, but there are some common symptoms:

- Become irritable, tearful or unusually clingy
- Have difficulty sleeping or waking during the night
- Start wetting the bed
- Have frequent nightmares
- Complain of stomach aches or headaches

Older children may:

- Lack the confidence to try new things and/or feel unable to manage everyday challenges
- Struggle to concentrate
- Struggle with sleeping or eating
- Have angry outbursts
- Experience persistent negative thoughts and/or worry that something bad will happen
- Avoid common activities (such as seeing friends, going out in public, or attending school)



What causes anxiety in children?

Children can feel anxious for many different reasons, and it's not a reflection of parenting. Big changes, challenges at school, stressful or frightening experiences, family difficulties, or experiences of loss can all affect how a child feels.

Children may not always be able to explain why they feel anxious or put their feelings into words, but their behaviour can often be a sign that something is worrying them.

When to seek help

If your child is experiencing anxiety and it isn't improving, or is getting worse, **it may be helpful to speak with your GP**.

If your child's anxiety is affecting their school life, it may also be a good idea to **speak with their teachers and school staff, alongside conversations with healthcare professionals**, so a joined-up approach to support can be put in place.

