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PARTNERING TO HELP OUR STUDENTS

Supporting children with anxiety

Anxiety is a normal reaction to stress, but it can be a problem for some children when feelings of **excessive fear or anxiety** are out of proportion to the situation or age inappropriate. Anxiety disorders are the most common among mental disorders, affecting **one in every eight children**.

What are common signs of anxiety in children?

Child may be hesitant or fearful about school:

- School phobia
- Frequent absences
- Incomplete work
- Difficulty concentrating
- Concern about grades
- Decline in grades

Child may have physical symptoms:

- Stomachache
- Muscle tension & headache
- Lack of energy
- Problems sleeping
- Dizziness

Child may show signs of excessive worrying:

- Fear of new situations
- Asks reassuring questions
- Easily frustrated
- Upset easily by mistakes
- Frequent bouts of tears

Child may have difficulty making friends:

- Refuses to take part in school social activities
- Has few friends
- Spends time alone

Child may also:

- Be angry, irritable, or inflexible
- Act out spontaneously
- Have memory problems
- Seem overreactive
- Exhibit ritualistic or repetitive behavior

What should adults do if they observe signs of anxiety in children?

Reassure your child but don't deny the feeling. "It's better to ask, 'What are you worried about?'" says **elementary school counselor Mary Benischeck**. Caring adults should listen and explain that they will help the child work through their anxiety. It's also important to set a routine and stick to it as much as possible.

Parents or guardians should monitor questionable behaviors in children closely. "Understanding the frequency, duration, and intensity of the behaviors will help to determine how serious the problem is," says **Charlene Koretz, certified school nurse**.

"Seek outside help if the problem continues or worsens," says **Rosary Pennington, a high school counselor**. "Turn to the school counselor, teachers, or nurses for recommendations or contact a local mental health provider."

Can life events increase a child’s risk of developing anxiety?

While anxiety is linked to genetics, experts say that life events can increase anxiety for children:

- Physical factors, such as puberty or illness
- Traumatic events, such as a death, an accident, bullying, or domestic abuse
- Environmental factors, such as moving and changing schools
- Familial changes, such as parental separation or divorce
- Socioeconomic factors, such as a lack of money for academic or health needs

What can schools do to help?

Public schools work closely with parents and families of students with anxiety. There are several professionals who can help, including school counselors, school nurses, school social workers, school psychologists, administrators, and teachers.

<p>“School counselors can work with students on helpful techniques like positive self-talk, realistic thinking, and problem-solving. Counselors and teachers can help provide encouragement and accommodations for students during stressful situations.”</p> <p>– Rosary Pennington, school counselor</p>	<p>“The school nurse may notice the frequency of student nurse visits for symptoms related to the anxiety that are manifested in physical symptoms, such as stomachaches, headaches, and difficulty breathing.”</p> <p>– Charlene Koretz, school nurse</p>
<p>“As a school nurse, I can offer support in assisting students with their coping skills when anxious (deep breathing, relaxation techniques), providing a safe space for them, delivering their prescribed medication regime, assisting/supporting them in self-managing their condition...”</p> <p>– Judith Morgitan, school nurse</p>	<p>“For me, I’ve had several students who just needed that friendly face at the door to give them a moment to get in the building. So, they might come in my office; we might have a little conversation.”</p> <p>– Mary Benischeck, school counselor</p>

Additional Resources

Find additional information and resources at www.partnersforpubliced.org/Anxiety.

School counselor Mary Benischeck of Antietam Education Association, school nurse Charlene Koretz of Colonial Education Association, school nurse Judith Morgitan of Perkiomen Valley Education Association, and school counselor Rosary Pennington of Clarion Area Education Association contributed to this resource.



Partners for Public Education

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