

ANXIETY DISORDERS FACT SHEET

- Anxiety is an illness characterized by excessive fear or worry that repeatedly interferes with a child’s well-being.
- Anxiety disorders are the most common type of mental illness among children and adolescents.
- Anxiety disorders affects all areas of a child’s life – home, work, school, and social life.

Clinical Symptoms

DISORDER	WHAT DOES A PARENT/CAREGIVER SEE?
Separation Anxiety Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intense anxiety about separation from parent(s)/caregiver(s) • Clinging • Refusal to sleep alone or go to school
Panic Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme distress • Sweating • Shaking • Nausea • Dizziness • Fear of dying
Social Phobia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noticeable anxiety in social situations • Extremely self-conscious • Fear of humiliation or embarrassment • Avoiding social interactions but has good relations with familiar people or in one-on-one situations • Refuses to speak in front of others
Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many worries about everyday experiences such as school, sports, and appearance • Worries about things before they happen • Fear of doing things wrong even though work is excellent • Headaches • Stomach aches • Frequent tears

DISORDER	WHAT DOES A PARENT/CAREGIVER SEE?
Specific Phobias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unrealistic and excessive fears about certain situations or objects • Avoiding feared objects/situations or refusing to go near them
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complains of upsetting thoughts • Getting “stuck” doing something over and over • Repeatedly touching or counting things • Preoccupation with order or organization • Avoiding things that trigger upsetting thoughts

Evidence-Based Practices

Evidence-based practices are treatments that have been shown through clinical research to produce positive outcomes for children and their families.

Treatment Approaches

The following are the best-supported treatment approaches for treating anxiety in children and adolescents:

- Cognitive Behavior Therapy
- Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Parents/Caregivers
- Cognitive Behavior Therapy and Medication

Treatment Practices

The following are the best-supported treatment practices for treating anxiety in children and adolescents:

- Exposure: Children might develop unrealistic fears. These fears may be related to objects or situations. Exposure is a technique that helps the child overcome fear. A therapist usually starts with indirect ways to help the child stay calm while thinking about the feared object/situation. This might include practicing relaxation while talking about the fear. It might include looking at photos or imagining events while checking for tension or fear. Eventually, the therapist will support the child to face the actual object or situation.
- Cognitive Processing: Cognitive processing is used to teach children about how the way they think about things can affect how they feel, and how they feel can affect how they behave. Cognitive methods might be used to help children understand how their thoughts are related to their moods and behaviors. They are taught strategies to help them check the accuracy of their thoughts and replace negative or unhelpful thoughts with more positive or helpful thoughts.
- Psychoeducation: Psychoeducation is teaching children and their caretakers about their mental illness. The purpose is to help children and their families understand how the illness affects them, what kind of activities or treatment might help, and that there are others who have similar problems. This type of

education helps them understand what will happen in the treatment sessions and how long the treatment might take. They will also learn what role the parent, the therapist, and the child will play in the treatment, and that they will be a team that will work on problems together.

- **Relaxation:** Ongoing anxiety or stress can make children irritable and can interfere with concentration. Relaxation methods help children reduce stress. These exercises include muscle relaxation, breathing exercises, imagery, meditation, and similar activities. Some methods are meant to be used away from daily activities. Others are useful in the moment.
- **Maintenance/Relapse Prevention:** Maintenance/relapse prevention includes exercises and training designed to consolidate skills the child has already developed and to anticipate future challenges that might arise after the termination or reduction of therapeutic services. The overall goal of maintenance/relapse prevention is to minimize the chance that the gains made during the course of treatment will be lost in the future.
- **Modeling:** When learning a new skill, it is often helpful to see another person using the skill first. This strategy involves demonstration to the child of a desired behavior, typically performed by a therapist, peers, or other actors, to encourage the child to copy the behavior and perform that behavior in the future.