

# Children and Anxiety

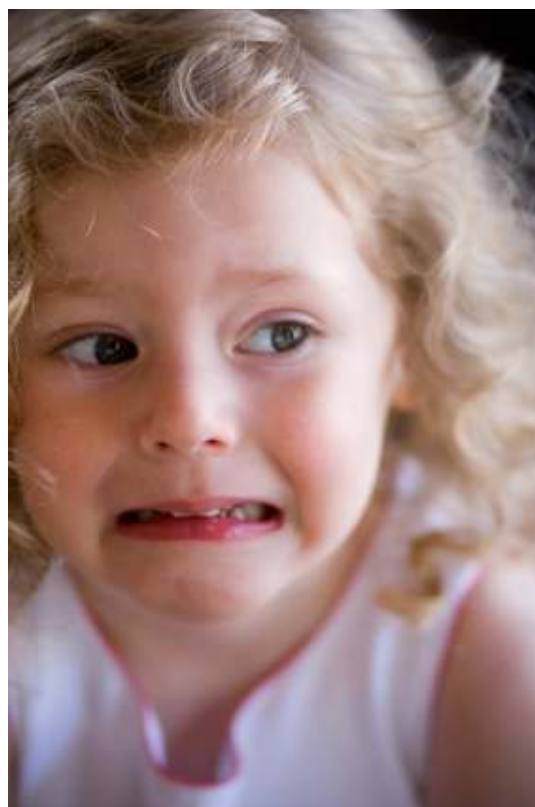
## Anxiety in Children is a Real Problem

One of the most common psychiatric disorders affecting children and adolescents is anxiety. While most children experience some anxiety, children who experience high and stable levels of anxiety may also experience severe impairments in functioning. This can be manifested in some children in their avoidance of school, and/or avoidance of peer interactions.

Literature has shown that fewer than 20% of children who require mental health services actually receive the necessary intervention.

Given that anxiety is a common disorder in children that may have significant influences on their school and social functioning, it would follow that intervention in the school could be beneficial.

This may be especially important if less than 20% of children who require services are actually receiving them. With children spending so much of their time in the school setting, school-based interventions targeting anxiety disorders in children may be an effective way to support those children who may not otherwise receive mental health services.



*“... fewer than 20% of children who require mental health services actually receive the necessary intervention.”*

## How much do we know about childhood anxiety?

Based on a recent survey conducted at your school it appears that 15% of those who participated felt they did not know what the symptoms of anxiety in children were. About 57% responded that they were not familiar with effective

methods for working with students with anxiety. Of those who responded, 43% indicated they didn't know where to get resources on working with children with anxiety. And finally, 100% of those surveyed indicated they felt a need for inter-

ventions focused on helping students deal with anxiety at this school. Hopefully the information included in this newsletter will be helpful to our teachers and school staff in supporting our students who may experience anxiety!



## What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is considered to be a close relative of stress. We all experience stress and anxiety at some time in our lives, but some children experience stress and anxiety over everyday activities and events. This can become constant and pervasive condition that requires more attention.

Sometimes the children's worries may relate to real-life situations, like having problems at school. But there may also be worries related to unrealistic or unlikely things, such as being

struck by lightning. Children may experience more general, "free-floating" worries that may not be linked to anything specific. Children with these kinds of worries may simply feel anxious all the time for no apparent reason.

If there is no real threat to the child but they are still experiencing fear, that may be considered anxiety. Many times if these types of feelings are felt in childhood and not properly addressed they tend to carry on into adulthood.

Anxiety has been shown to interfere with children's success in school, ability to learn, problem solving, can increase feelings of guilt, inadequacy and lack of self-esteem. Highly anxious children may also display many attention seeking behaviors.

Read on to see if you can recognize some of the symptoms of stress and anxiety often exhibited by children.

## Do you know the signs of stress and anxiety in children?

Take this quiz to see if you can identify the signs of stress **often** exhibited by children! Mark a "√" next to the behaviors you think are often exhibited by children and an "x" next to those that are not. Check your answers on the last page! GOOD LUCK!

1. \_\_\_ Headaches
2. \_\_\_ Irritable
3. \_\_\_ Easily Startled
4. \_\_\_ Purposefully hurts others
5. \_\_\_ Feels tired often
6. \_\_\_ Never laughs
7. \_\_\_ Eating problems (no appetite, constant eating, feeling full without eating)
8. \_\_\_ Steals things
9. \_\_\_ Lies
10. \_\_\_ Stomach Problems (diarrhea, constipation, nausea, heartburn)
11. \_\_\_ Unable to concentrate or finish things
12. \_\_\_ Sucks thumb
13. \_\_\_ Does not have friends
14. \_\_\_ Wets pants
15. \_\_\_ Does not finish homework



\*Not all of these may be often exhibited by children in elementary school experiencing anxiety, if any of the above symptoms are observed often it may indicate a need for follow up by a teacher, counselor, psychologist, parent or physician.

# What can you do to help children with anxiety?

Adults may find themselves trying to help children with anxiety by simply telling them to stop worrying, which usually doesn't help. Neither does using adult logic, or allowing the child to avoid the feared situation (especially if that situation is school!), and adults cannot continue to offer reassurance every time the fears are expressed. So what CAN we do to help children who experience anxiety?

## Relaxation

Some research suggests that when children experience stress their bodies react in a "fight-or-flight" response. A way to "quiet" this response may be to help children utilize relaxation techniques.

One possibly economic, easy to teach technique with a solid research base may be Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR).

In PMR children concentrate on progressively relaxing one muscle group after another, while comparing the difference between tension and relaxation in each muscle group.



## Music

Historically, some music was supposed to affect the listener by aligning, harmonizing and synchronizing mind and body to more harmonious patterns. Some music has been found effective in stress reduction as measured by physiological changes. In fact, calming music has been found to enhance relaxation and learning, reduce heart rate and respiration rates, and aid in the effectiveness of other relaxation techniques. Some music selections have been used in research and has been very popular with children:

*Pianoscapes*—Michael Jones

*Language of Love*—Gary Lamb

*Pachelbel w/ Ocean*—Liv & Let Liv

*Bach Forever by the Sea*—Dan Gibson

*The Fairy Ring*—Mike Rowland



## Recognition

Another technique for teaching children to deal with their anxiety can be helping them recognize the what makes them anxious and what being anxious feels like. This can include having the child identify things that make them worry from a list of things that kids usually worry about.

Children can also benefit from learning to rate how anxious they're feeling. Using a 1-10 rating scale (1 = not worried at all, 10 = really, really worried) can help children identify what types of things make them more anxious as well as how to recognize when they don't feel anxious.

## Self-Talk

The better children are at recognizing their own self-talk, the better they will be at catching worries and nervous thoughts before they become disruptive.

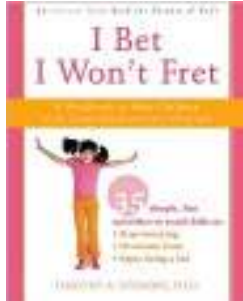
Activities to help children increase their awareness of self-talk may start with asking them some basic questions:

1. What are you thinking?
2. How does thinking about that makes you feel?
3. What does that thought make you want to do?
4. What does that thought tell you about yourself?



*See page 4 for more resources that you can use to help children with anxiety!*

# Resources



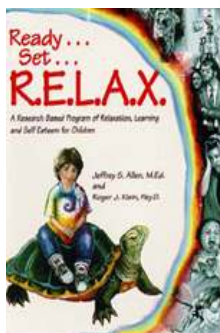
“ I Bet I Won't Fret: A Workbook to Help Children with Generalized Anxiety Disorder.”  
By Timothy A. Sisemore, Ph.D.

A workbook filled with activities to help *any* child with anxiety identify and deal with worries.



“What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety”  
By Dawn Huebner, Ph.D.

A fun and illustrated book with activities for children to practice containing and controlling their worries.



“Ready... Set... R.E.L.A.X.”  
By Jeffrey S. Allen, M. Ed. And Roger J. Klein, Psy. D.

A research based program of relaxation, learning, and self-esteem for children. Program can be used with individuals, small groups, or on a school-wide basis.

## Answers to the quiz!

√ : 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 13, 15  
x : 4, 8, 9, 12, 14

This newsletter was prepared by  
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your school site for the 2009-10

The information and facts contained in this newsletter were obtained from the above resources as well as the following articles:

Albano, A. M., Chorpita, B. F., & Barlow, D. H. (2003). Childhood anxiety disorders. In E. J. Mash & R. A. Barkley (Eds.), *Child Psychopathology* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 279-329). New York: The Guilford Press.

Albanno, A. M., & Detweiler, M. F. (2001). The developmental and clinical impact of social anxiety and social phobia in children and adolescents. In S. G. Hofmann & P. M. DiBartolo (Eds.), *Social phobia and social anxiety: An integration* (pp. 162-178). New York: Plenum Press

Kendall, P. C. (1994). Treating anxiety disorders in children: Results of a randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62, 100-110.

Tuma, J. (1991). Mental health services for children: The state of the art. *American Psychologist*, 44, 188-199.