

Parenting Your Child with an Anxiety Disorder

Anxiety is a normal emotion. Anxiety makes us aware of danger and may help us rise to meet challenges, like studying for a test or preparing our homes for a storm. If anxiety becomes too frequent or out of proportion with challenges, it may be an anxiety disorder.

What is an anxiety disorder?

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health problems in children and teens. Common anxiety disorders include:

- Separation anxiety disorder → Fear of being away from a caregiver.
- Generalized anxiety disorder → Constant worry of danger, uncertainty, failure, or illness.
- Social anxiety disorder → Fear of judgement from others and avoidance of social situations.

How you can help your child

- Practice bravery. It is normal to want to keep your child from experiencing distress. However, allowing your child to avoid things that they should be doing – like falling asleep by themselves or trying new activities – can keep your child from learning how to do things for themselves.
- Avoid giving false reassurance. Anxious children may seek frequent reassurance about their fears and ask their parents to promise that they won't get sick, that a storm won't come, or that they will never die. These are promises that parents can't keep. Shift the conversation: "We talked about how mommy is feeling healthy and fine, let's not talk about this anymore and instead talk about what you would like to have for breakfast."
- Respect feelings and empower action: "I understand that you're afraid for me to leave you with a sitter tonight. Let's plan a fun activity that you can do with her when she gets here."
- Be aware of your own anxiety response. Identify if you feel worried and model how you try to keep calm and manage the situation.

How you can help yourself

- Be kind to yourself. Recognize that you are doing heroic work as a parent.
- Build self-care into your schedule.
- Take care of your adult relationships. An anxious child can be a strain on parents. Ensure your child's anxiety is not keeping you from having time alone with other adults.

Resources



UCLA CARES Center

AACAP Anxiety Medication
Guide for Parents

