

# ANXIETY

ANXIETY IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

# WHAT IS ANXIETY?

- ❖ Anxiety is your body's natural response to stress
- ❖ It's a feeling of fear or apprehension about what's to come
- ❖ Examples that create symptoms of anxiety may include: The first day of school, taking a test, talking to new people, or giving a speech
- ❖ There are different types of anxiety:
  - Generalized Anxiety
  - Social Anxiety
  - Separation Anxiety
  - Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
  - Specific Phobias
  - Panic Disorder
  - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
  - Selective Mutism

# WHAT ARE SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY?

## ❖ Symptoms of anxiety may include:

- ❖ Rapid breathing
- ❖ Restlessness
- ❖ Nightmares
- ❖ Panic attacks
- ❖ Trouble concentrating
- ❖ Difficulty falling asleep
- ❖ Increased heart rate
- ❖ Feeling nervous or "on edge"
- ❖ Unfounded or unrealistic fears
- ❖ Trouble separating from parents
- ❖ Obsessive thoughts and/or compulsive behaviors
- ❖ Somatic symptoms or physical symptoms such as: trembling, sweating, shortness of breath, stomachaches, headaches and/or muscle tension

# HOW DOES ANXIETY AFFECT SCHOOL PERFORMANCE?

Here are examples of ways that children can struggle with school performance with specific anxiety diagnosis:

- ❖ **Separation anxiety:** When children are worried about being separated from caregivers. These kids can have a hard time at school drop-offs and throughout the day.
- ❖ **Social anxiety:** When children are excessively self-conscious, making it difficult for them to participate in class and socialize with peers.
- ❖ **Selective mutism:** When children have a hard time speaking in some settings, like at school around the teacher, other adults and/or peers.
- ❖ **Generalized anxiety:** When children worry about a wide variety of everyday things. Kids with generalized anxiety often worry particularly about school performance and can struggle with perfectionism.
- ❖ **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD):** When children's minds are filled with unwanted and stressful thoughts. Kids with OCD try to alleviate their anxiety by performing compulsive rituals like counting or washing their hands making it difficult to focus on academic tasks.

# BEHAVIORS ASSOCIATED WITH ANXIETY THAT COULD AFFECT SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

- ❖ Decrease in attendance or poor attendance
- ❖ Decrease in grades or poor grades
- ❖ Inattention in the classroom setting
- ❖ Poor interactions with others creating struggles with group work and peer socialization
- ❖ Disruptive behaviors in the academic setting
- ❖ Trouble with participation in class such as answering questions
- ❖ Frequent trips to the nurse's office
- ❖ Problems in certain subjects
- ❖ Not turning in assignments

# WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

- ❖ Set clear expectations. Setting clear expectations and helping your child create appropriate benchmarks to meet those expectations teaches your child that she/he can work through anxious feelings and manage their anxiety.
- ❖ Let your child worry. Worry serves an important function in our lives. Without some amount of worry, we wouldn't stop to consider actual dangers that do threaten us. Give your child uninterrupted time with you each day to vent worries and brainstorm solutions together.
- ❖ Avoid avoidance. Just like telling your child not to worry won't make those anxious thoughts disappear, avoiding triggers of anxiety won't help your child learn to cope. Take small steps to help your child overcome and learn to work through their fears and worries vs avoiding them.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP? (CONTINUED)

- ❖ Practice reframing. For example, your child voices a fear that the kids in their class don't like them. Why do they think this? Because a boy in class laughed when they didn't know the answer, and now they are scared that their classmates think they are dumb. Help them break down the reality of their situation: "I answer questions in class every day. A friend always sits with me at lunch. I play with my friends at recess." Now reframe the situation: "It hurt my feelings when the boy laughed, but I have other good friends in my class."
- ❖ Help them build a coping kit. You can help your child learn a variety of coping skills. You can encourage your child to try: deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, use of a stress ball, writing it out, talk back to worries and reframe thoughts, get help from a trusted adult or implementing other care skills or coping skills.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP? (CONTINUED)

- ❖ Get back to basics. Your anxious child doesn't need to play every sport and attend every party, but may need to slow down and focus on basic health needs such as:
  - Sleep
  - Healthy meals
  - Plenty of water
  - Downtime to decompress
  - Outdoor free play
  - Daily exercise (riding bikes, playing at the park, walking, running, stretching, etc.)
- ❖ Empathize often. Anxiety can be paralyzing for young children and adolescents as they struggle to do everyday things like attend school or go to soccer practice. It's important to empathize with your child. This normalizes what they experience and helps them understand that they aren't alone, and you will guide them through it.
- ❖ Consult with a professional. Contact a professional (primary care physician, mental health professional, school counselor, etc.) to determine if your child needs a higher level of support and care.



# WHAT CAN YOU DO IF THIS IS IMPACTING YOU OR A FRIEND?

- ❖ Go to a trusted adult to talk about what you are feeling, thinking or experiencing
- ❖ Begin journaling your thoughts and feelings
- ❖ Keep a log of when symptoms are occurring and what symptoms you are having as well as the intensity of the symptoms
- ❖ If a friend is struggling with symptoms of anxiety, you can go to a trusted adult with your friend, for example you can walk your friend to the school counselor's office during your lunch period
- ❖ If your friend is not open to your help but you are worried about your friend, then you should go to an adult that you trust for help
- ❖ There are solutions! Do not try to get through this alone!

# LOGAN ELM RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

- ❖ Jennifer Murphy, School Social Worker  
(740) 474-7538 Ext 1413
- ❖ Grace King, School Counselor at Logan Elm High School  
(740) 474-7503 Ext 1306
- ❖ Libby Straub, School Counselor at Logan Elm High School  
(740) 474-7503 Ext 1307
- ❖ Nikole Bunting, School Counselor at McDowell and Washington Elementary  
(740) 474-7538 Ext 1404
- ❖ Tahnee Grube, School Counselor at Saltcreek Intermediate, Laurelville Elementary and Pickaway Elementary  
(740) 332-4212 Ext 1503

# ONLINE RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

- ❖ <https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/ask-and-learn/resources>
- ❖ <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>
- ❖ <https://angstmovie.com/resources-helpful-websites/>
- ❖ <https://www.nami.org/learn-more/fact-sheet-library>
- ❖ <https://www.nami.org/akaresources/factsheets>