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Impact Education

Anxiety

Overview

This booklet is a resource to give you some information about:

- **What anxiety is**
- **How to spot the signs**
- **Tips for parents**
- **Tips for young people**
- **Where you can find more help**

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is actually a perfectly normal human state – and despite its presence in the headlines as a major player in the mental ill-health of many people – it actually has its uses!

At moderate levels of anxiety, a person's performance and attention to detail can improve. However, it becomes a problem when the feelings become more intense, last for a long time and begin to negatively impact on how well you can do things, your enjoyment of things and family life.

In general, stress and fear are seen as responses to specific, external factors, whereas anxiety is often internal and is usually concerned with what could or might happen.

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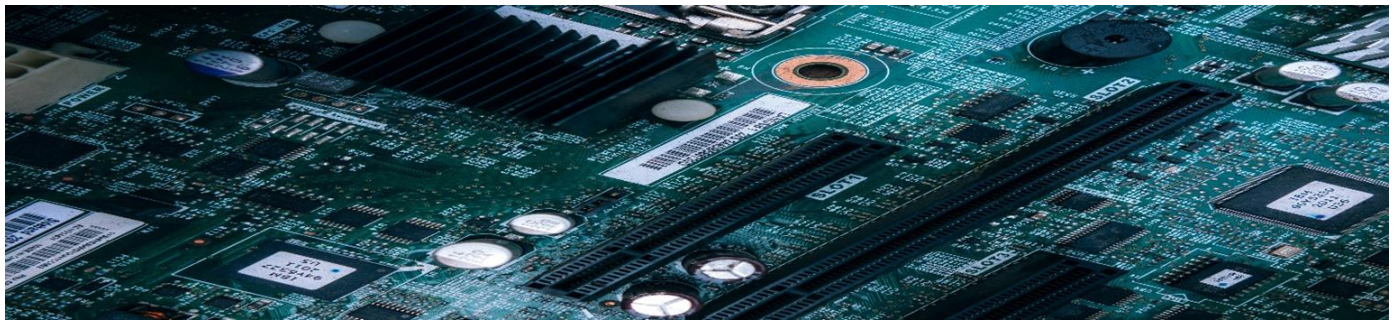
How to spot the signs

Anxiety has the same physiological response as stress or fear: fight, flight or freeze. It's in our circuitry.

These responses are instinctive and a result of evolution – they would have been pretty useful for keeping cave people alive! However, now these 3 things can be a sign that someone is struggling with high levels of anxiety.



Watch out for:

Fight – an aggressive response to simple requests or offers of help; maybe starting arguments with family members.

Flight – avoiding tasks they need to do by spending time scrolling through social media, watching Youtube videos or gaming.

Freeze – trying to study or complete the things they need to do, but instead spending ages looking at a blank page or reading the same page in a book over and over because it won't go in.

Yes, we realise some of these are typical tween & teen behaviours! But you know your child, and if their fight/flight/freeze response is activated, you will see a change in their behaviour.

Spot the Signs

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Tips for Parents

Top Tips for Parents

If you feel that your child is constantly anxious and doesn't seem to improve with your support, it's important to make an appointment to see your GP. However, there are some things you can do to support your child:

1. **Avoid the temptation to rescue** *Every time you help your child to avoid a situation that makes them anxious or step in to 'rescue' them, you inadvertently send the message that there is something to be worried about and/or that s/he can't handle the situation on their own.*
2. **Help them to recognise and make sense of physical symptoms** *Quite often young people don't realise that their fast heartbeat, quick breathing or that feeling in their stomach is anxiety. They may sometimes describe being anxious as having a 'stomach-ache'. These feelings can by worrying in themselves, so helping your child to recognise them and reassuring them that they will pass can be helpful.*
3. **Make the most of drive time!** *Just 5 minutes with your child each day where you don't give them any instructions or advice but allow them to 'take the lead' can boost their wellbeing and enable them to open up conversations. Children will often talk about tricky things when you can't make eye contact – like when you're driving!*
4. **Encourage sleep!** *Don't discuss worries at night. Teach kids that they can 'put their worries down' for a while by getting them to write them on bits of paper and put them in a box. You can then talk through them later.*
5. **Family time** *Being anxious can be lonely. Plan things to do as a family and encourage them to focus on the moment they're in.*

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Top Tips for Young People

If you feel that you are constantly anxious and it doesn't seem to improve no matter what you do, it's important to make an appointment to see your GP. However, there are some things you can do to try and manage your thoughts and feelings:

1. **Go through it!** *It's normal to have anxious feelings from time to time, but quite often if you can push through, your confidence in yourself to manage difficult situations will grow. Every time you avoid a situation, your anxiety will grow.*
2. **Recognise anxiety's 'voice' so you don't take it seriously** *A lot of people name the voice in their head that pops up with all the unhelpful thoughts. Giving it a funny name can help you to challenge it. This is what they do in Harry Potter when they make the Boggart look ridiculous!*
3. **Challenge the 'what ifs'** *Sometimes that 'voice' has a 'what if…' answer for everything! But remember, thoughts are not real so reality check them. How many people has it happened to? What would you do if it did happen?*
4. **Sleep!** *You are more anxious when you're tired, but when you're anxious you can't sleep! Try just resting and trust your body to get the sleep it needs. No screens an hour before bed, close eyes and decide on a happy 'twilight-dream' to focus on.*
5. **Activities** *Being anxious can be lonely and you are focused on the future. Try doing things you enjoy with family/friends and focus on the moment you're in.*

Tips for Teenagers

Where to Find Help

Where to Find Help

NHS Advice:
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/anxiety-in-children/

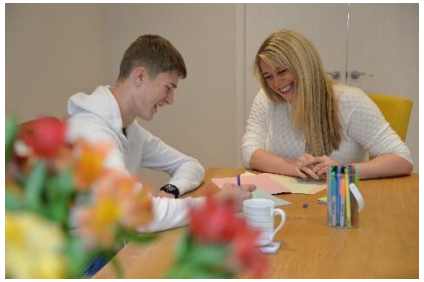
Mind:
https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/anxiety-and-panic-attacks

Young Minds:
https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-anxiety/

About Dragonfly

We champion the belief that to thrive, emotional wellbeing is just as important as physical health. We advocate that helping young people to manage their emotions is as important as teaching them to read and write.

We work with young people, their families, their educators and employers by helping to tackle emotional wellbeing issues, so that they're able to fully engage with all aspects of their life.

Just like the dragonfly, we believe children have the power and capability to hone their resilience in the face of change, growing and maturing into adults who can accept who they are, deal with setbacks and confidently handle their emotions.

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Empowering Young Lives