



Anxiety in Children & Teens

[Statistics](#) [Causes](#) [Symptoms](#) [Strategies](#) [Treatment](#) [Resources](#)

Statistics concerning anxiety affecting teens and children, indicate various impacts on huge numbers of kids. Currently, 32% of those under 18, meet the diagnostic criteria for an anxiety disorder.¹ Generally defined, it is when anxiety is “persistently beyond normal developmental periods”.² Girls are twice as likely as boys to have anxiety problems, and also more likely to get depressed.

Categories studied include:	Specific Phobia	19.3%
	Social Phobia	9.1%
	Separation Anxiety	7.6%
	Posttraumatic Stress Disorder	5.0%
	Panic Disorder	2.3%
	Generalized Anxiety Disorder	2.2%

Causes of anxiety in children and teens may be circumstantial or more ingrained from early and persistent situations.

Circumstantial:

- High expectations and pressure to perform in school, sports, activities
- Overloaded schedule from too many activities on top of school demands
- Poor and/or picky eating habits
- Too much time on social media and electronics
- Less time spent in face-to-face interactions
- Victim or perpetrator of bullying in any form
- Parental discord, especially separation or divorce
- Exposure to stories of violence via news reports
- Drug or alcohol abuse, including cannabis
- Lack of a spiritual base, lack of knowledge about God’s provision
- Normal developmentally induced fears that will pass with time

More ingrained:

- Entitlement and lack of responsibility as part of a family, feeling not needed
- Feeling a lack of safety or predictableness for having needs met
- Emotional disconnection within families (both intact and broken)
- Direct or indirect fallout from Traumatic events, including unremembered events
- Abandonment or lack of bonding from parental absences or problems
- Direct or indirect exposure to abuse – physical, emotional, sexual
- Family history of modeling or genetics

Symptoms in young brains produce overstimulation of the Basal Ganglia area, causing too much activity, reducing levels of serotonin and other neurotransmitters that control functioning.³ Symptoms may include nervousness, panic, fear, excessive worry, anxiety, catastrophic thinking, negative thinking, racing thoughts, ruminating thoughts, poor sleep, nightmares, obsessive-compulsive behaviors and avoidance behaviors.

Physical sensations may include shortness of breath, pounding heart, headache, stomachache, tremors, elevated blood pressure, twitches and muscle tension.

Strategies to manage times of high anxiety:

- Learn and understand the things that trigger anxiety
- Breathe deeply sending oxygen to the brain
- Drink a glass of fresh cool water in the moment
- Take a break and time out to settle down
- Do the Butterfly Hug taught by school counselor
- Get perspective on what fears are real and ones that are not
- Talk to a trusted friend/loved one to sort it out
- Nurture and love yourself with soothing
- Pray and ask Jesus to help you

Treatments for anxiety should be tailored to specific needs and problems.

General options include:

- Getting to the root of the problem and solving it through therapy
 - EMDR therapy is the most fantastic method of resolving anxiety in my professional opinion! As a Certified EMDR therapist, I have used this therapy with hundreds of clients, most having life-changing results. It resolves the problem from the root by identifying and addressing the original cause of the anxiety and processing the events, feelings, and negative beliefs about oneself that resulted from the disturbing event! This is very important for lasting results. For children, the process is usually very quick and effective. We should not have to go through life “managing” a problem that we can be free from altogether. EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing. (It is not hypnosis.) It has been used worldwide for tens of thousands of people who have experienced the most devastating events in life. See note below for information.⁴
- Medication
 - Benzodiazepines are central nervous system depressants, are highly addictive, and not recommended for children. Many psychiatrists today are scaling back the prescribing of these drugs even for adults, as they have proven to be hazardous in many ways. (Names are Xanax, Ativan, Valium, Lorazepam, etc.) Older teens could be vulnerable to having these prescribed, however, depending on their whole health profile. Parents should ask a lot of questions including alternatives, and only use these as a last resort. These drugs are at times okay as a “bandaid” for

anxiety, but not for daily or long term use. They do not solve the root problem and in time can worsen anxiety and make discontinuation of the drug very difficult. If teens are irresponsible and use them with alcohol, they can stop breathing. Very scary.

- Anti-depressants provide serotonin to the system which may be lacking with high anxiety. Although anxiety and depression “live” in two different parts of the brain, low serotonin or a low level of other neurotransmitters may cause many symptoms.
 - Children and teens are usually able to be treated for anxiety without these drugs, and I recommend that every means be tried before resorting to prescription drugs.
-
- Offer up Prayers for healing and draw on your relationship with Jesus who is our ultimate Healer. Whatever you attempt to resolve about anxiety, don't forget to get God involved. His will is for us to be well. He has appropriated healing for us through Jesus' work on the cross. The word “fear” and “afraid” are in the Holy Bible ~689~ times. Jesus frequently said “Fear not!” (170 times) This is so wonderful! We must not forget to use the most valuable resource available to us as Believers and to go to Him in prayer for all anxiety and fear. Parents, use the spiritual authority that God has given you for your children and bless them in this way. Read those soothing verses from the Holy Bible about resolving fear to feel God's healing. One of my daughters still remembers the verse we used for her as a child: “What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee.” Psalm 56:3.⁵ The Word of God especially memorized as children, forever stays in our minds and hearts. Teach the Word to your kids!

Diana Karpavage LPCC

“I have no greater joy and to hear that my children walk in truth.” 3 John 4

References/Resources:

1 <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/05/31/teens-social-media-technology-2018/>

2 <https://cdn.website-editor.net/30f11123991548a0af708722d458e476/files/uploaded/DSM%2520V.pdf>

3 <https://www.amenclinics.com/blog/why-teens-have-more-anxietyand-how-to-help/>

4 <https://www.emdr.com/what-is-emdr/>

5 <https://www.biblegateway.com/>