

Anxiety and Children: Tips for Coping with an Anxious Child

Anxiety is a normal part of childhood and every child goes through phases of worry. However, according to a 2016 [report](#) by the Child Mind Institute, mental health disorders are the most common health issues faced by our nation's school-aged children. So when should a parent worry about too much worry? And what can parents do if they believe their child's anxiety is spiraling out of control?

Chris Bellonci, M.D., DFAACAP Attending Psychiatrist, Floating Hospital for Children at Tufts Medical Center and Medical Director, National Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health offers advice on what anxious behavior looks like and what to do if you feel your child is suffering from anxiety:

- Often anxiety can manifest through bodily ailments for children - a tummy ache or complaint of a headache can often be worry, masked as physical pain.
- The overall goal is not to help children eliminate anxiety, rather to help them manage and tolerate anxiety's uncomfortable feelings - physical and emotional. Therefore, it's important to listen to your child, acknowledge concerns and identify ways to make worry more manageable.
- Do not accommodate your child or empower worries by providing constant reassurance in response to anxiety - this creates a cycle where the child is dependent on the parent rather than developing healthy coping mechanisms like deep breathing and positive self-talk.
- When a child's symptoms become problematic, for the child (child is not able to perform their day-to-day activities) or for the family unit as a whole, it's time to seek help. The best place to start is with your child's pediatrician for a full evaluation and, if necessary, a referral to a child psychologist or psychiatrist.
- It's important to get help - most treatment for children starts with cognitive behavioral therapy. Medications that have been effectively and safely used for more than 20 years in both adults and children are also an option if symptoms become more severe.