

Worry-vs-Anxiety

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?



It's normal for children to feel worried, afraid or stressed sometimes. These feelings can come and go and are part of growing up. Anxiety happens when worry or fear feels really strong. Anxiety can be a normal response to stress or uncertainty but it becomes a concern when it:

- Lasts a long time
- Makes daily activities hard
- Happens frequently
- Causes physical symptoms

If anxiety starts to interfere with your child's everyday life, it's a good idea to get extra support.

WHAT IS AN ANXIETY DISORDER?

An anxiety disorder is a mental health condition that is diagnosed by a qualified healthcare provider when feelings of anxiety:



Happens most days



Last several months



Interfere with daily life or happiness

AND cause problems such as:

- Worrying a lot about many things
- Feeling restless, tense or irritable
- Being tired or worn out
- Trouble focusing
- Physical problems like stomachaches and headaches
- Hard time falling/staying asleep

FAQ

Q: Can children be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder?

A: Yes. According to the Centers for Disease Control, 10% of children aged 3-17 in the U.S. have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.

Q: What help is available?

A: Help can include therapy, lifestyle changes, learning new skills and sometimes medication.

Q: What causes anxiety in children?

A: Anxiety in children and teens can come from a mix of factors, including family history, stress at school or home or past experiences. Some kids are more sensitive to stress, so worry feels bigger.

TRUST YOUR GUT.
You know your child best.

4^{out of} 5
PARENTS

think kids' mental health is getting worse



Source: Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2025

► **If you notice signs, take them seriously. Check with a provider if you're concerned. Consider your child's age, developmental level and situation.**

Worry-vs-Anxiety



TALK & LISTEN

Check in with your child in calm, low-pressure ways:

- Ask simple questions without pushing for details: **"What's on your mind?"**
- Share what you notice using "I" statements: **"I've noticed you seem worried lately."**
- Reflect their feelings without judging or fixing: **"That sounds really hard."**
- Keep it short and easy: **"On a scale from 1 to 10, how are you feeling today?"**



SUPPORT HEALTHY HABITS

Support your child in keeping a routine that helps them feel safe. Helpful ideas include:

- Spend quality time together daily when you can
- Keep meals and snacks at regular times
- Create a calming bedtime routine to support healthy sleep
- Post a daily schedule in a shared family space
- Make it easy for your child to play, move and exercise daily



ASK FOR HELP

If you're concerned about your child's anxiety, reach out to someone who can help, such as:

- Your child's primary care doctor
- Mental health provider
- School counselor
- School nurse

It can help to share:

- Changes in sleep, eating, mood or energy
- How long you've noticed changes
- Any recent stress or big life changes



THINK ABOUT SCREENING

Screening tests can help look for signs of anxiety. A healthcare provider can help to screen your child for anxiety. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening for anxiety in children aged 8 to 18 years.



CARE FOR YOURSELF, TOO

Supporting a child who is struggling can feel heavy. Your wellbeing matters. Rest, connect with others and seek support when you need it. Taking care of yourself helps you stay steady and present so you can be there for your child.

REMEMBER:

Reaching out for support is a sign of care — not failure.

Learn More



- AAP Healthy Children | [Help Your Child Manage Anxiety: Tips for Home & School](#) (available in Spanish and English)



- Children's Nebraska Video [Anxiety in Children & Teens](#)



- Children's Nebraska [Anxiety & My Body](#) (available in Spanish and English)



**LET'S
TALK**

Talk with your child about worry and anxiety.

Ask questions like:

- Do your worries come and go, or do they stick around?
- Are there times at school or at home that feel harder than others?
- Is there anything you wish adults understood better about how you're feeling?

WORRIED ABOUT YOUR CHILD AND NEED HELP RIGHT AWAY?

You can call or text 988 for support or walk in anytime to the Children's Nebraska Behavioral Health & Wellness Center, which is open 24/7: 8550 Indian Hills Drive, Omaha, NE 68114 | 402-955-4700. **In case of a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.**

Medically reviewed by: Sarah Klein, PMHNP-BC, Shannon Soderberg, PMHNP-BC Date reviewed: July 2026

About this project: This resource was developed by Children's Nebraska, in collaboration with Nebraska Partnership for Mental Healthcare Access in Pediatrics (NEP-MAP) and the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC) College of Public Health. This resource and others in the series provide practical information and tips specifically designed for Nebraska parents and caregivers. This information is not intended as medical advice.

NEP-MAP is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of cooperative agreement U4CMC32322 to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (NEDHHS) totaling \$821,760 for 2025-2026 with an additional 20% percent non-federal funds cost-sharing. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement by, HRSA, HHS, the U.S. Government, or NEDHHS.

