

Anxiety disorders are the most common psychiatric conditions in children and adolescents, affecting nearly 1 in 12 children and 1 in 4 adolescents.



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHIATRY

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Educational videos from the Department of Psychiatry:



The Regents of the University of Michigan:
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PEDIATRIC ANXIETY DISORDERS



ANXIETY IN CHILDREN



What Are Pediatric Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety disorders are a group of disorders that can affect kids and teens, making them feel extremely nervous, worried or fearful. Some common types include separation anxiety disorder, selective mutism, specific phobia, social anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and agoraphobia. These are not just normal worries; they can cause big problems in a child's life, sometimes making it hard to do everyday things. It's estimated that about 15% to 20% of kids and teens have these disorders, and the number can be as high as 32% for those aged 13 to 18. Many kids with anxiety might have more than one anxiety disorder at once.

Kids with anxiety might worry a lot about their parents' safety, not want to go to school, have stomachaches or other physical symptoms, and have intense fears about certain things or situations. They might avoid social situations because they're scared of talking to people or making mistakes. Some might worry excessively about schoolwork, tests, friends, and other activities, or experience sudden bouts of intense fear. Other challenges include being overly alert, having extreme reactions, or viewing normal



situations as threatening. This can also lead to parents changing their routines to make their child feel better.

What Causes Pediatric Anxiety Disorders?

Just like other mental health issues, anxiety disorders are believed to result from a mix of genetic and environmental factors. This means that a child's genes, along with their surroundings and life experiences, can contribute to anxiety. Anxiety disorders often run in families, which may be due to shared genes, how families interact, or both. Studies have shown differences in brain function in some people with anxiety disorders.

What Other Problems Can Be Linked to Pediatric Anxiety Disorders?

If not treated, pediatric anxiety disorders often get worse and can lead to other issues. These may include having difficulty adapting to new situations, avoiding school, struggling with classwork, feeling scared to leave home or go to college, and social isolation. It may also lead to depression, substance use, or suicidal thoughts and attempts.

How Are Pediatric Anxiety Disorders Treated?

Treating anxiety disorders in kids is important for helping them live better, happier lives. The goal is to address the anxiety symptoms that cause impairment.

The best treatment usually starts with cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), especially exposure therapy, which helps kids face their fears in a safe way. Medicines called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) can also help. Sometimes, using both CBT and medicine works better than using either one alone. Another type of medicine, called serotonin and norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors (SNRIs), can also be used if needed. It's important to help kids build their life skills to cope better, and therapy such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) can help with serious issues like self-harm.

What Should I Do If I Think My Child Has an Anxiety Disorder?

If you think your child might have an anxiety disorder, it's important to talk to a doctor or mental health professional. They can figure out what's going on and suggest the right treatment. At the University of Michigan, the Child OCD and Anxiety Disorders Program can help. Call 734-764-0231 to set up an appointment. A referral might be needed from a Michigan Medicine primary care doctor. This program helps kids and teens with anxiety, OCD, and related disorders and has been a resource for families since 1991.

