

# ANXIETY & YOUR TEEN

IS IT NORMAL FOR A TEEN TO BE ANXIOUS?



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# Introduction

Anxiety is found throughout everyday life. It is normal for your teen to worry or to be anxious. Teenagers may worry about their grades, friends, dating, sports, family or other situations that can make them anxious.

According to Teen Mental Health, physical, emotional and behavioral responses to new situations, perceived dangers, or challenges in life are normal reactions. Anxiety is oftentimes an automatic response. In fact, this response is how we as human protect ourselves.

Anxiety can be, in healthy doses, a motivator. It can help one focus on tasks in order to accomplish something or be successful. For example, your teen may be anxious about a test, causing him to study harder and pass the exam. A healthy amount of anxiety contributes to growth, development, and learning new skills.

## When Does Anxiety Become a Disorder?

While anxiety can spur growth and develop, it can also become a damaging hindrance to your teen's physical and emotional growth and success.

Anxiety has reached unhealthy levels when:

- The anxiety becomes increasingly intense
- It lasts longer than expected
- Your teen begins to struggle or fall behind in school or at work
- Your teen begins to shy away from social settings
- Your teen avoids normal/daily activities in order to lessen anxious thoughts/feelings
- Your teen's ability to cope with fear, worry, or depression is impaired

When anxiety takes over the life of your teen, seeking treatment is necessary. This is a sign that their anxiety has moved from a healthy/normal state to a disorder.

Kids Health describes anxiety disorders as a mental health condition that involves excessive amounts of fear, nervousness, worry or dread. When anxiety is too frequent or too intense it can cause an individual to feel preoccupied, distracted, tense, and constantly alert.

## What are Some of the Causes of Teenage Anxiety

According to Teen Mental Health, approximately 9 percent of people will develop Generalized Anxiety Disorder during their lifetime. Women are twice as likely as men to develop the disorder. GAD typically begins during adolescence.

There is not one specific or singular cause of anxiety disorders. Genetics and the teen's environment can both play an important role in their development of an anxiety disorder. Some medical conditions, like thyroid disease, may be mistaken for an anxiety disorder. If your child is on medication, these medication can sometimes cause anxiety-like symptoms.

CRC Health states that while the exact cause of Teenage anxiety and anxiety disorders is not known, several factors may play a role in developing such a disorder. These factors include:

- Genetics
- Brain Chemistry
- Stressful Life Events
- Home Environment (specifically when caregivers are also anxious or fearful)

## Types of Anxiety Disorders Found in Teens

Anxiety disorders are some of the most common mental disorders, reaching individuals across all ages. Teenagers are no exception. There are a variety of different types of anxiety disorders, characterized by their symptoms. All anxiety disorders occur often, are intense, are out of proportion with the situation at hand, and negatively affect the life of the person involved.

Some distinct types of anxiety disorders include:

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Phobias
- Social Phobia (Social Anxiety)
- Panic Attacks
- [Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder](#) (PTSD)

## What are the Symptoms of Teen Anxiety?

Anxiety disorders are categorized by their symptoms. When your teen experiences symptoms of anxiety, it is important to recognize which anxiety disorder best matches up with the symptoms they are experiencing.

### **Generalized Anxiety:**

As the name implies, this disorder is quite general and common among teenagers and adults alike. If your teen is suffering from generalized anxiety, he/she worries excessively. In fact, his/her worries will not just be limited to one subject or item. Your teen may worry about their friends, family, school work, and the future. Your teen will be prone to thinking that the worst possible thing could happen in all situations.

In addition to the mental symptoms of excessive worrying, a teenager who suffers from generalized anxiety will also suffer from physical symptoms. According to Kids Health, physical symptoms can include:

- Chest Pain
- Headache
- Tiredness
- Muscle Tightness
- Stomachaches
- Vomiting

A teen suffering from generalized anxiety will feel overwhelmed; like life is out of control. They may miss school or avoid being around others. This disorder can take a toll of virtually every aspect of their life.

### **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):**

Kids Health explains that OCD takes place “anxiety takes the form of obsessions (bad thoughts) and compulsions (actions that try to relieve anxiety).”

### **Phobias:**

Phobias are an intense form of anxiety. These fears are concerns for situations or things that are not inherently dangerous. A teen may have a phobia about something like heights, flying, spiders, or other actions or things. Phobias will typically cause your teen to avoid the thing that makes them fearful and anxious.

### **Social Phobia (social anxiety):**

Much like a simple phobia, social phobia is intense anxiety surrounding social situations. This could also include the fear of speaking in front of a large group of people. Social anxiety has an extreme form of the disorder known as selective mutism. In this case, a teenager may be too fearful to speak at all when in a situation where they feel anxiety.

### **Panic Attacks:**

The onset of a panic attack can be completely unprovoked. When a panic attack occurs, a teen will feel intense physical symptoms including:

- A pounding heart
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Numbness
- Tingling

Kids Health cites agoraphobia as an intense fear of panic attacks that causes a person to avoid going anywhere a panic attack could occur.

## **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

PTSD is a result of a traumatic life experience. Symptoms of PTSD include nightmares, flashbacks, and fear.

## **How Does Anxiety Affect My Teen?**

When a person suffers from an anxiety disorder, the symptoms can feel confusing and overwhelming; particularly from the start. Physical symptoms can be scary, especially to a teen. The emotional effects of teen anxiety can make the teenager feel hopeless, out of control, and insecure.

While anxiety disorders are very common, a teenager suffering from the disorder may feel misunderstood or alone. They may feel embarrassed or ashamed of their feelings. Because of this, a teen suffering from anxiety may not seek help. They may feel that they will not be understood or that they will be judged.

Others may see anxiety as a failure. They may blame themselves for not being ‘tough enough’ to handle the emotional stress or the past experience.

The good news is that we are now understanding anxiety disorders more than ever. There is help for your teen.

## **What Treatment is Available for Teenagers with Anxiety?**

When a teen is suffering from anxiety a successful course of treatment is to seek a therapist. A therapist will be able to determine the type of anxiety your teen is suffering from, and create a plan of action in order to teach your teen healthy coping skills and mechanisms.

Residential treatment centers, including a therapeutic element, are a great place to seek help for an anxious teen. Shepherds Hill Academy is a therapeutic boarding School with a [wilderness component](#). Shepherds Hill Academy combines the best [therapeutic methods](#) with academics in order to ensure your teen’s success!

Anxiety often causes your teen to fall behind in school and other social settings. SHA combines a fully accredited boarding school with individual and group therapy. Your teen will receive individualized educational attention with our 5:1 student to staff ratio. He/she will also receive individual therapy to successfully work through and heal from their anxiety disorder.

While on campus, all of our students receive individual, group and [equine therapy](#) as part of our program. Your teen won’t feel ‘ashamed’ or like the odd one out for seeking therapy, as all of their peers on our campus are also working toward success and healing.

Does your teen suffer from an anxiety disorder? We would love to work with your family and bring healing to your teen. Give us a call today or inquire online to learn more about how Shepherds Hill Academy can help your family.

## **Article Resources:**

- <http://teenmentalhealth.org/learn/mental-disorders/generalized-anxiety-disorder/>
- <http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/anxiety.html#>
- <http://www.crchealth.com/troubled-teenagers/teenage-anxiety/>