

*A short E-book on  
Anxiety*



## Anxiety in Children

It is very common for children to suffer from anxiety . There can be many causes of Anxiety and can come from a ranging factors like genetics and environment.

Children with anxiety disorders are often misunderstood. Many parents and teachers mistake their anxiety to be misbehaviour.

There are many treatment options available both medical and non-medical. In addition, there are many ways in which parents can help their child to get rid of the anxiety or at least teach them how to manage it.

If anxiety is left untreated, it can become a problem condition and can cause a lot of stress for the child and their families.

Doctors and therapists are coming up with different solutions to treat children with anxiety disorder.

### **Types of Anxiety Disorders in Children**

There are different types of anxiety disorders. Found in children. Below are the most common types of anxiety disorders in which children can suffer:

- **General anxiety disorder** is worrying excessively and/or getting apprehensive about several events or activities. These feelings occur almost all the time and are not triggered by any one specific issue. Some examples include: fear of failure or poor performance, worries about family's safety, worries about thunderstorms or wars, worries about what others will think of them, and is apprehensive about new situations or meeting new people.
- **Panic Attacks** – Panic attacks are also called as agoraphobia. Children suffering from panic attacks have repeated episodes of shaking, dizziness, chest pains, and intense feelings of fear. They often avoid certain situations for fear of having a panic attack.
- **Phobias** are highly specific and exclusive fears. The child functions normally until confronted by the dreaded object, event, or situation. Some examples include fears of bugs, fears of heights, or fear of flying in an airplane.
- **Separation anxiety disorder** is the child excessive worry about being away from their parents. Children with separation anxiety disorder often fear that their parents will be harmed in some



way or will not return to them as promised. Separation anxiety disorder is often seen in pre-schoolers, but it is also seen in older children. These children are likely to be crying when their mum drops them to school.

- **Social Anxiety** – Children with social anxiety only have symptoms when in social settings. They fear unwanted attention from anyone, including friends.
- **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)** is a condition involving obsessions and compulsions. They perform repetitive rituals as a coping mechanism. Compulsions are behaviours that the child engages in (such as handwashing, checking, redoing, etc.) to make the distress feel better. Some examples of obsessive-compulsive disorder may include excessive concerns about germs.
- **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**. is when a child experiences a traumatic event. Some examples include witnessing or experiencing a natural disaster, being in a serious automobile accident, or witnessing a violent crime.

### What Causes Anxiety In Children

The exact causes of anxiety in young children is not known, but there are several factors that play a part. There could be several things can cause children to suffer from anxiety

- Family history – if you or your partner have been or suffer from anxiety, your child is like to suffer too.
- Anxiety can also be learned. If a parent is anxious and stressed out often, the child can begin to inadvertently mimic the same behaviour. However, just because a family member has an anxiety disorder does not mean that a child will inherit it
- Gender – girls are twice as likely as boys to suffer with anxiety disorders.
- Part of this may be due to genetic causes but it may also be due in part to the ‘transmission’ effect – that a child will learn anxiety, fear or avoidance from their anxious parent.
- Neurobiology – the structure of your child’s brain and how the chemical reactions function in everyone are also thought to play a role in whether or not a child will develop an anxiety disorder. It relates to a of the brain called the amygdala. Hyperactivity of the amygdala or having one amygdala that is smaller than the other has been associated with fear and anxiety disorders
- There are numerous theories that some personality types are more likely to suffer with anxiety than others, for instance those children who are emotionally sensitive or shy are more at risk. However, some researchers would argue that emotionally sensitive children often learn to be resilient and that then protects them from developing conditions such as depression or anxiety later on in life, so there are no set rules.

- Environmental factors seem to be the most common cause of anxiety disorder in children. When children live through a traumatic experience such as death of a close relative, parents divorcing, physical or emotional abuse, they are likely to suffer from anxiety disorder at some time in the future. Major life changes such as moving to a new town or change in a family's financial situation can also trigger anxious feelings in children. Sometimes the birth of a sibling can cause a child to feel jealous and threatened and lead to the development of an anxiety disorder. Life changes can affect a child's sense of security.
- Putting too much pressure on a child for doing homework and extracurricular activities, can get the child anxious. If your child is constantly running from one activity to another, it can cause them to get really stressed. Many kids need downtime. Some children may put themselves under pressure to do well at school. They are constantly feeling the need to be in the good books of the teachers and want to be popular amongst their peers.
- School is full of factors that can cause anxiety. When a child doesn't get along with his or her teacher, it can cause feelings of anxiety towards school. When a child gets bullied, teased, or left out of a social clique, anxiety disorders can develop. Sometimes books or movies can cause kids distress. If they encounter a scary or violent scene from a movie or read about one in a book, it can stay on kids' minds for a very long time.

### **How can you tell if Your Child is Suffering from Anxiety?**

It is natural for children to be anxious to some extent. Many times, I have been asked what amount of anxiety is a child is normal and acceptable before a parent should start getting worried. In babies, becoming startled easily is developmentally appropriate. It is also normal for them to fear strangers. In toddlers, it is normal for them to be afraid of the dark, see imaginary creatures, and to suffer from separation anxiety from their parents. In school-age children, it is normal for them to fear getting hurt and darkness. They might get anxious at the death of someone. The difference between developmentally appropriate anxiety and an anxiety disorder is that developmentally appropriate anxiety goes away over time and doesn't prevent the child from functioning during daily activities.



If you are unsure of your child's anxiety is developmentally appropriate or an anxiety disorder, a psychologist or behavioural therapist can help.

Children experience anxiety in different degrees. Some children may worry about every little thing whereas others may not be affected by anything

Unfortunately, I come across many kids who

suffer from anxiety. Some parents may not realise that their child is suffering and even if they do, they may not want to talk about it. It is very important that you deal with the issue for your child so that he can be given the tools to deal with his/her anxiety. Sometimes not dealing with it can make the kids isolated and they can start feeling very lonely

### **Signs that the child suffers from anxiety.**

- The child seems worried for no apparent reason. And that he has a reason to do so every single day.
- The child avoids going to certain places/ avoids certain situations
- Behaviour includes being clingy
- The child is moody
- Development of nervous habits such as nail biting
- Suddenly starts getting into trouble at school
- Obsessed with schoolwork having to be perfect
- Does not like and/or is scared of going to school
- Worries excessively about his or her own safety or the safety of loved ones
- Complains often about headaches, stomach-aches, fatigue, or muscles aching
- Suffers for Sleep problems
- Can't concentrate on simple tasks
- Gets scared easily

- Fidgets often, can't sit still
- Wants to be near his/ her parents always

It does not mean that a child who suffers from these signs suffers from anxiety, but if these problems prevent the child from completing regular daily activities, then you need to look deeper and maybe seek the advice from school or a professional.

### **Impact of Anxiety For Child And Family**

Having a child with anxiety disorder affects the entire family. It is stressful for everyone. It can be very emotional watching your child suffer from anxiety. It is important to set a calm example. It will not help your child to see you get upset or cry due to his or her anxiety.

Parents need to learn as much as they can about anxiety disorders so they can help their child. The more books you read and more research you learn about, the better you can help your child cope with anxiety disorder. Talking to other parents of children with anxiety disorders can be therapeutic. It will be a relief to hear other parents talk about similar situations you are experiencing.

In addition, parents need to talk about the disorder with the other children in the household so they can better understand their sibling's behaviour. If the other children in the family don't understand their sibling's disorder, they may feel resentment towards the child. Many siblings complain that parents pay more attention to the child with the anxiety disorder. They also complain about the things they don't get to do, because their sibling can't do them. A parent must make it clear to the other children in the family that teasing and treating the child with the disorder badly will not be tolerated. It's also important for parents to listen to the feelings of the other children in the family, so that they will feel important, too. Parents may want to plan special time with the other children in the family, so that they will not feel that you are giving all of your attention to your child with anxiety. Siblings and parents of children with anxiety disorders may need to attend counselling themselves in order to deal with the problem.

Parents also need to take a child's anxiety disorder into consideration when planning family outings and attending social events. Certain vacation destinations such as theme parks can be way too over stimulating for children with anxiety. Calming places such as the beach or the mountains may be more appropriate and relaxing. Traveling in a vehicle for long periods of time or air travel can be stressful to some children. It is important to let children know what to expect and to find out their feelings about it before planning a long trip.

## What Parents Can Do to Help

There are a lot of things parents can do to help an anxious child. They are as follows:

- Don't punish the child for anxious behaviour.
- Know what upsets your child
- Be aware of your child's different moods and feelings.
  
- When your child becomes anxious, talk to him or her in a calming voice.
- Realize that it is very difficult for the child to control his or her anxiety. Praise the child when he or she handles anxiety appropriately.



- Try to maintain a consistent routine. Let the child know if something out of the ordinary will occur in his or her day.
  - Limit your child's exposure to violent or scary books, video games, and movies.
  - Talk to your child's teachers to help them understand your child's condition and explain ways they can help your child during the day.
  - Listen to your child. It can be comforting to a child to know that they can talk to you about their feelings without you judging them.
- When you feel that your child is becoming anxious, try to get them involved in an activity they enjoy such as playing a favourite video game. Offer them distractions.
  - Stick to a regular bedtime and mealtimes. Follow a routine.
  - Encourage healthy habits. Make sure your child is getting his or her daily allowance of vitamins and nutrients. Make sure your child is getting enough sleep. Unhealthy eating and sleep deprivation can cause stress.
  - Help your child during transition situations.
  - Make sure your child has quiet downtime to decompress.

- Communicate with your child's doctor and/or therapist. If you know that an upcoming event will cause anxiety for your child, ask a professional how to handle it. They can suggest ways to help your child through it.

## **Do's and Don'ts related to anxiety**

### **Do's**

Do encourage your child to talk about his or her feelings

Do encourage and help your child break down large tasks into smaller tasks.

Do recognise and praise your child for handling stressful situations.

Do involve your child in household chores so he or she can feel that they are making an important contribution to the family.

Do let your child know that feeling anxious sometimes is ok.

Do role play social situations with your child and model appropriate behaviour

Do take time for yourself. Having a child with anxiety disorder can be stressful, and parents need time away for their own wellbeing.

Do always keep your own personal fears to yourself. You don't want to give your child something else to worry about.

Do make sure that you and you and your spouse are consistent about how you handle your child's anxiety. Children with anxiety disorders need consistency. It makes them feel safe.

### **Don't's**

Don't keep your child away from normal activities.

Don't do everything for your child. He or she must learn to be independent.

Don't overly reassure your child that everything will be ok.

Don't confuse other types of inappropriate behaviour with your child's anxiety. Children need to know that there are consequences for inappropriate behaviour that they can control.





## How can we help

We here at NLP4Kids use Neuro-linguistic Programming (NLP) which has various techniques to help with anxiety and many other life issues. The methods are easily applied at home and children have benefited greatly from using these techniques as they are explained to them in a fun manner.

NLP can help anxiety and give you a new lease of life as well as giving your child the confidence to achieve any other goals that they may have.

NLP was developed in the early 1970s at the University of California, Santa Cruz, by John Grinder (a linguistic professor) and Richard Bandler (a mathematician).

Through extensive research, Grinder and Bandler studied what made some therapists more effective than others. Based on their observations, a set of principles and techniques used to create change during therapy were created. Three of the therapists they examined were Virginia Satir, Milton Erickson and Fritz Perls.

The common NLP Techniques we use are anchoring, reframing, dissociation, belief change and future pacing. Below are brief descriptions of each of these techniques.

- Anchoring: Learning how to respond differently to a triggering situation (like classical conditioning).
- Reframing: Identifying adaptive behaviours that can replace maladaptive behaviours while still achieving the same goal.
- Dissociation: Disconnecting from a painful experience from your past.
- Belief Change: Changing beliefs that hold you back from success.
- Future Pacing: Integrating goals into your life so that you continue to achieve after therapy.

These techniques would be used for an anxiety disorder in similar way as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). However, NLP is considerably more powerful than CBT

If I need to I sometimes blend my NLP training with my education in hypnotherapy to get results and thus success.

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***Achieve with NLP***

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