How to recognise anxiety in children

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Anxiety is a term used to describe a normal feeling people experience when faced with threat, danger, or when stressed. When people become anxious, they typically feel upset, uncomfortable, and tense.
Types of anxiety in children

- Generalised anxiety,
- Separation anxiety,
- Performance anxiety,
- School refusal,
- Perfectionism,
- Fears/phobias,
- Obsessive compulsive disorder,
- Social anxiety,
- Adjustment anxiety.
Signs of anxiety - Thoughts

- Negative thinking (e.g. “I’m no good”, “I’m stupid” or “I can’t do it”),
- Panicking about future events or situations,
- Fears about their own or others safety
Signs of anxiety – Physical

- Increased breathing,
- Increased heartbeat,
- Sweating,
- Stomach pains,
- Shaking and trembling.
Issues of coping with transitions or change in the school routine,
Reduced school/sporting attendance,
Fearful behaviour,
Excessive crying or overt distress,
Poor concentration in class,
Signs of anxiety - Behavioural

- Loneliness on the playground/making or keeping friends,
- Recurrent ‘sad’ face,
- Physical complaints,
- Lack of energy, tiredness,
- Aggression,
- Excessive shyness or,
- Reassurance seeking/asking a lot of questions
Consequences of untreated anxiety

- Poor self-esteem,
- Hopelessness,
- Low resilience to life events,
- Drug abuse,
- Depression
Consequences of untreated anxiety

Anxiety in primary school years is one of the greatest risk factors for dysfunctional behaviour and psychiatric problems in teenage years (Sonderegger, 2009).
What Parents Can Do - Behaviour

- Listen to your child’s negative thoughts and feelings without judgment,
- Share a time when you have felt anxious in situations,
- Encourage some positive self-statements at home such as “I CAN do it!” and “EVERYBODY makes mistakes!”
What Parents Can Do - Behaviour

- Praise your child for their efforts and make it specific. "I noticed that you did not give up and you seemed to be having fun!"

- Talk about past accomplishments to highlight that they CAN do it (e.g. social situations, staying at school). Discuss HOW they managed to accomplish this.
What Parents Can Do - Behaviour

- Pay compliments/eliminate criticisms (highlight what your child can do rather than focusing on what they can’t),
- Aid to calm down your child through diaphragm breathing to reduce physical symptoms (and using this at nighttime!)
- Worry dolls/worry worms
What Parents Can Do - Behaviour

- Maintain a regular routine
- Start homework straight after school
- Encourage activities that help your child unwind from daily events
- Encourage exercise each day to increase endorphin levels
What Parents Can Do – Creative ideas

- Gold medal of qualities/achievements
- The compliment box
- Calendar of upcoming events
- Rewards chart – (feared situations, going to school)
What we put in our body can have a direct impact on how we feel physically and emotionally.
Vitamins and minerals that reduce anxiety levels are:

- vitamin B (wholegrain, seafood, meats, green vegetables)
- selenium (garlic, sunflower seeds, brazil nuts, meat & seafood)
- magnesium (broccoli, nuts & seeds, oysters, soy milk, spinach)
- Calcium (dairy)
What Parents Can Do - Nutrition

Vitamins and minerals that reduce depression levels:

- Vitamin B
- Vitamin C  (citrus fruits, broccoli)
- Magnesium
- Calcium
- Iron  (leafy vegetables, red meat)
- Potassium (potatoes, avocados, bananas)
What Parents Can Do - Nutrition

Vitamins and minerals that reduce hyperactivity levels (e.g. lack of concentration, aggression)

- Zinc (oysters, beef, chickpeas)
- Vitamin B
- Magnesium
What Parents Can Do - Supplements

“The spark plugs for the body”

- Fish Oil,
- Magnesium/Vitamin B
- Provide energy (convert major nutrients such as carbohydrates into energy forms).
- Aids normal function of the NS
- Helpful in bringing relaxation or energy to individuals who are stressed or fatigued
Recommended Books

- ‘Nightlights’ by David Fontana and Anne Civardi (2001)
Recommended Books


- ‘Parenting a child who has intense emotions: Dialectal Behaviour Therapy Skills to Help regulate your Childs Emotions’ Pat Harvey and Janine Penzo
Extra Help?

- GP (best to always check physical complaints with GP first)
- School
- Nutritionist
Thank you!