



### Suggestions for Parents

- Listen to your child's perceptions and feelings
- Accept their concerns and validate them
- Patiently encourage your child to approach the feared situation one step at a time until it becomes familiar and manageable
- Try to keep your feelings in check; be a role model - exhibit calm
- Build your child's strengths
- Encourage them to learn to do things on their own
- Help them to identify and express their feelings
- Teach them to manage stress and anxiety when opportunities arise

### Books and References

#### For Parents

- Worried No More. Help and Hope for Anxious Children. Aureen Pinto Wagner, Ph.D.
- The Anxiety Cure For Kids: A Guide for Parents. Elizabeth DuPont Spencer
- Ready... Set...R.E.L.A.X. Jeffery S. Allen, M.E.d., Joger J. Klein, Psy.D.
- Freeing Your Child from Anxiety. Tamar E. Chansky
- The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook. Martha Davis, Ph.D.

#### Web Sites

- [www.childanxietynetwork.com](http://www.childanxietynetwork.com)
- [www.kidsrelaxation.com](http://www.kidsrelaxation.com)
- [www.worrywisekids.org](http://www.worrywisekids.org)

#### For Kids

- I Can Relax CD. Child anxiety Network
- What to Do When You Worry Too
- Much: A Kids Guide to Overcoming Anxiety. Dawn Huebner
- What to do When You're Scared and Worried: A Guide for Kids. James J. Crist Ph.D.
- Is a Worry Worrying You? Ferida Wolff

# Understanding Childhood Anxiety



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## Children and Anxiety

### What's normal?

Even in the best of situations, all children experience some anxiety in the form of worry, fear or distress. Often times this occurs when the child is first faced with an unfamiliar or stressful situation. These reactions are important protections for safety and there are specific fears that accompany each stage of development.

For all children, anxiety may be met with a temporary retreat from the situation, (clinginess, babyish behaviors), and a reluctance to take chances and a lower sense of self confidence. This will typically resolve when the child learns to master the situation or the situation changes.



## Stages and Typical Fears

### Infancy

Around 7-9 months, stranger anxiety develops and typically resolves by the end of the first year. As early as 6 months, infants can pick up anxiety around them.

### Early Childhood

Attachment to the parent grows, (crying and fear of desertion), and improves over the next three years. With an ever-expanding world around them, new fears emerge as they try to understand what is real or imagined, (i.e. monsters, ghosts). They may experience separation anxiety again around age 18 months. From 3-6 years, fears of the dark are common. As they learn to manage these fears, they are more able to sleep alone.

### School Aged Children

Fears of real world dangers are formed at this age. Experience teaches them that the risks are remote rather than imminent. In middle school, social status leads to comparisons and worries about social acceptance. Athletic and academic abilities are compared. Continuing into High School, more understanding about various physical and mental diseases, concerns about their future success take hold.

## Things to Watch For

- When worry and avoidance are automatic responses
- Becomes easily distressed or agitated
- Complains of body aches and pains with no known cause
- Asks repetitive questions for reassurance, "what if" concerns and doesn't accept logical explanations
- Is self-critical beyond the norm
- Sleep disruptions, (i.e. can't sleep alone, has frequent nightmares, difficulty falling asleep)
- Parents often find themselves spending excessive time comforting their child
- Cannot enjoy age appropriate activities due to anxiety
- Causes disruption in their daily lives such as avoidance of school, activities and/or excessive time spent on normal activities such as hygiene, homework or meals.

