

Warning Signs of Anxiety in Elementary School Children

Children tend to worry about a lot of things. They may worry about sleeping alone, the dark, loud noises, leaving their parents and/or going to school. They may worry about things at school such as big tests or reports, starting a new school, whether other children will like them, new teachers, grades, homework, or finding school work too difficult.

However, these worries usually do not last long or cause big problems in a child's life. Anxiety and/or worries become a problem when they are long-lasting, occur often and are difficult to deal with, and/or when they get in a child's way of participating in school, extracurricular activities or family life.



What are the warning signs of anxiety?

Action warning signs:

What does your child do?

Children may:

- Cry and cling to parents
- Refuse to talk to or interact with peers or adults
- Object to being the center of attention
- Avoid completing their school work for fear of making mistakes
- Avoid/refuse to go to school

Spoken warning signs:

What does your child say?

Children may:

- Express fear that they will be teased for what they do or say
- Worry about not being perfect
- Expect that they won't do a good job with their school work or while playing a sport
- Worry about disappointing others
- Report feelings of inadequacy in their abilities

Emotional warning signs: How does your child feel?

Children may:

- Say that they feel sick, have stomachaches and/or headaches
- Say they have trouble catching their breath
- Wiggle or be jittery, shaky, high strung, tense and/or unable to relax
- Report that they feel dizzy, have a lump in their throat, are sweating, or feel like they are going to throw up

How do I know if my child's anxiety has become problematic?

The following four questions are often useful when determining whether anxiety has made life difficult for your child:

- 1) Does your child worry or ask for reassurance almost every day?
- 2) Does your child usually avoid certain age-appropriate situations or activities, or avoid doing them without a parent?
- 3) Does your child frequently have stomachaches, headaches or episodes of hyperventilation?
- 4) Does your child have daily repetitive rituals?

If your child exhibits any of these behaviors, he/she may need support from a therapist or mental health provider.

For more information about how to select a qualified provider, please visit carescenter.ucla.edu