

## Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Most children have some worries, doubts or funny habits. For example, many young children develop games such as not stepping on cracks in the footpath. However, for some children these feelings become so strong that they take over. These children may have Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). To help manage their overwhelming feelings, children repeat certain actions or thoughts. For example, while children are often asked to wash their hands before eating, children with OCD can become obsessed with cleanliness and will wash their hands over and over again.

## Panic Disorder

A child dealing with a panic disorder experiences repeated unpredictable feelings of fear and anxiety, as well as a range of physical symptoms such as:

- a racing heart
- shortness of breath
- sweating/shivering
- shaking
- stomach or chest pain
- dizziness.

Once the panic attack is over, the child continues to fear another attack. This may cause the child to avoid doing things which he or she fears might cause an attack, for example going outside or leaving parents. Adolescents who experience panic attacks may have had problems as children with separation anxiety.

## What can I do to help?

It is important for you to remain calm and in control. This will give your child confidence to cope with these difficult feelings.

## How can I look after myself?

Caring for a child with an anxiety disorder can often lead to feelings that can be overwhelming such as anger, guilt or sadness. These may be normal responses to the stress that you are experiencing. It is important that you have enough support from family and friends to help you. It may also be helpful to find out about any support groups that you could contact.

By looking after yourself, you will be better able to look after the special needs of your child.

Dealing with a child who has an anxiety disorder can often have an effect on other parts of your life. For example, it can put a strain on your relationships with other family members. Counselling may be helpful in working through some of these issues. Sorting out these problems will also help your child.

## Who can I contact?

If you are concerned about your child, it may be useful to contact:

- your general practitioner
- a paediatrician
- a psychologist
- your local community health centre.

If you feel that your child's situation is urgent and you live in the Western Metropolitan Region you may consider contacting:

- **The Royal Children's Hospital Mental Health Service**  
Intake Service on **1800 44 55 11**  
between 9.00am – 5.00pm,  
Monday to Friday.



# fears & anxieties

## Fears and Anxiety

It is normal for children to feel anxious in certain situations, for example, separating from parents, tests at school, facing something new. It is very common for children in preschool to be scared of some things such as the dark or spiders, but these fears do not last long or effect the way they live their lives. Children with excessive anxiety experience these feelings most of the time. There may be no obvious cause for this anxiety and it often prevents children from doing normal everyday things.

### What can contribute to an anxiety disorder?

The cause of an anxiety disorder varies from person to person. There are some things that may contribute to the development of an anxiety disorder:

- learning anxious behaviour from others
- sensitivity and shyness
- a history of anxiety in the family
- the temperament a child is born with.

### How do I know what to look for?

A child or adolescent with anxiety may:

- have constant fears about the safety of themselves and their parents
- refuse to go to school
- have frequent stomach aches and other physical complaints
- become panicky or have tantrums when separated from parents
- find it difficult to meet or talk to new people
- worry excessively about things before they happen

- need a lot of reassurance to try anything new
- be preoccupied with cleanliness and hand washing
- find it difficult to relax and go to sleep.

Children and adolescents may have a number of physical symptoms as a result of their anxiety, for example:

- restlessness
- sweating and clamminess
- stomach 'butterflies'
- muscle tension
- difficulty sleeping
- aches and pains that don't have a physical cause
- headaches.

If after a few weeks you think your child is not getting better or is getting worse, it is important that you get professional help. If you think your child is likely to harm himself or herself you need to get help sooner.

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The following will provide you with a brief description of the different types of anxieties that your child may be experiencing.

### General Anxiety Disorder

A child or adolescent who is suffering from a general anxiety disorder, finds it difficult to control feelings of worry and anxiety. If your child has any of the following symptoms which significantly interfere with friendships, family relationships or schooling, you should seek professional advice:

- excessive concern with school or sport performance
- muscle tension
- sleep problems
- difficulty concentrating
- irritability.

## Separation Anxiety

Children generally like going to school or kindergarten; however, for some children it can cause great panic. Parents may be concerned if their child often claims to be feeling sick and wants to stay home. Children will often complain that they have stomach or headaches just as it is time to leave for school. Magically, the complaint disappears when the child is allowed to stay home or after the parent has left the child with his or her teacher. In extreme cases the child may simply refuse to go to school.

A child's refusal to go to school can also be as a result of a stressful event such as the death of someone close, family separation or a major life change.

If your child suffers from separation anxiety he or she may:

- be very clingy when being left at places
- worry about bad things happening to family members or friends
- be scared about parents or family not coming back
- not want to go to bed or sleep alone
- refuse to go to school.

A child's fear of leaving home or parents can be treated. A child who is not treated for separation anxiety could develop serious educational or social problems. If you feel that your child has signs of separation anxiety it is important that you seek professional advice.

