

## Could your child be suffering from Anxiety??

Children that suffer from anxiety often are unable to verbalize how they are feeling and parents are left wondering, what is wrong with my child? Most children keep their feelings of turmoil, worry, and fears to themselves and instead their anxiety comes out in a number of other ways. Typically, anxiety in children is exhibited through their behaviors and often times behavioral problems. Especially in younger children, their ability to verbalize what is exactly wrong is poor and the ability to verbalize their feelings improves as they get older. Children act out their anxiety in their behaviors and often parents will mistake normal expression of feelings, which is part of a child's development as laziness, anger, or being stubborn.

Children with anxiety will often have emotional "meltdowns" and will start crying, act out in anger, avoid talking to anyone and shy away from any situation that is uncomfortable, or become very oppositional. Children that suffer from anxiety are often taken to see a therapist and the number one thing that brings parents in to see a mental health professional is "behavioral problems". A good therapist that is trained in working with children will be able to see past the presenting problem of "behavioral problems" and see that a child is suffering from anxiety. These children will start crying over the smallest disappointment or injury and seem to have a difficult time stopping their crying. Parents will often state, "she just seems to freak out over the smallest things." This can be displayed through anger, crying, whining, or the inability to move past the fact that someone did something wrong to them.

Another hallmark symptom seen in children or teenagers that suffer from anxiety is that they avoid everything. They do not seem to want to hang out with friends, they avoid being around kids their age as well as adults, and they do not want to be the center of attention. These are children that typically will avoid situations in which they feel inadequate at all costs (ie.. a class presentation, sports or activities that they do not feel that they have the necessary skills). These are children that rarely exert their own autonomy and parents end up doing most things for them and are very dependent. Also, they avoid contact with family members and mostly "stay to themselves."

In the school environment, children with anxiety feel like they are totally alone and seem to have few friends. They do not make or keep friends easily and mostly feel like an "outsider" in groups. They are easily overwhelmed by the social aspect of school and will complain to parents by saying, "nobody likes me at school" or "everyone is always picking on me." Yes, this is sometimes defined as bullying, but sometimes this is actually a symptom of anxiety. Children with anxiety, also feel different from other kids at school and never feel like they are good enough. Often times, I hear this expressed through children as, "the other kids are better than me." When your child's anxiety becomes so severe and out of control, they will often refuse to go to school and this is often when parents notice a real problem and take their child to a mental health professional. Other signs of anxiety in children are psychosomatic complaints or in other words, your child's anxiety is coming out through their physical complaints. They will complain

of a headache, stomach ache, or back pain, anything to avoid having to go to school. The best recourse is to seek help from a qualified mental health professional as well as your child's pediatrician to rule out a medical problem or concern.

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