



Signs and Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety

A GUIDE FOR CHILDREN
AND ADOLESCENTS

Written & Provided by
The Ecumenical Center

All of us are subject to the stresses of daily life and personal relationships, and different people react differently. As parents you stand with your children — both in times of celebration and in times of emotional need — and your help is valuable. But so is your ability to tell when your child has reached a level of anxiety or depression that calls for clinical counseling or medical help. This booklet is designed to help you learn what to look for and what to say to your child.

Care for Yourself

so you can care for others.

First things first. As a parent it's easy to give so much to your family that you deplete your own resources. Don't let that happen. Remember that you're human and you deserve the same love and care you give your family. So take care of your own body, mind, and spirit. Meanwhile, follow these suggestions to protect your own mental health.

- **Don't take situations so personally** – it's hard, but try.
- **Stay aware of your emotions** – they can teach and motivate you, so don't dismiss them!
- **Take time to be creative** – write, sing, paint, do puzzles, send your soul a message that it's valuable.
- **Get adequate rest** – you need it.
- **Count your blessings** – keep a gratitude journal.
- **Don't try to please everyone** – it can't be done.
- **Practice saying “no” to requests** – listen to your internal voice.

What to know about Anxiety.

Be alert if your child's anxiety seems out of proportion to the daily stress they encounter.

How to recognize signs of anxiety.

Common symptoms and signs of anxiety disorders include:

- Feelings of panic, fear, and uneasiness.
- Problems falling asleep or staying asleep.
- Heart palpitations and/or shortness of breath.
- Restlessness, inability to be still and calm.
- Nausea.
- Muscle tension.
- Feelings of foreboding or dread.

Some anxiety disorders involve panic attacks.

Symptoms include:

- "Racing" heart and/or chest pains, as if there is a tight band around one's chest.
- Sense of terror or sense that one might die or have a heart attack.
- Difficulty breathing.
- "Tunnel vision."
- Feeling dizzy, faint or weak.
- Sweating or having the chills.
- Feeling out of control or a loss of control.

How to talk about anxiety.

Anxiety disorders can disrupt your child's relationships and ability to work or participate in daily activity. So offer encouraging words:

1. **“Talk to an expert.”** Ask your child's school or your church for a list of trusted counselors and/or psychiatrists to call if your child just doesn't seem to feel better.
2. **“Try calming techniques.”** Explore calming techniques or breathing exercises that you can share with your child or family.
3. **Learn more about what may be causing your child's anxiety, including triggers like bullying and stress.**

What to know about Depression.

Learn to differentiate between if your child is simply struggling with stress or if it may be depression.

How to recognize signs of depression.

Common signs and symptoms of depression include:

- Feeling sad or empty most of the day, most days of the week. In children and adolescents, this could also include irritability.
- Lack of interest or pleasure in most activities of the day.
- Changes in weight and appetite – either increased appetite and weight gain or decreased appetite and weight loss.
- Changes in sleep – insomnia or sleeping more than usual and feeling fatigued.
- Feeling restless, or worthless, or excessively guilty nearly every day.
- Recurrent thoughts of death (e.g., “I think my family would be better off if I were just gone”), thinking about suicide without having a plan, attempting suicide or having a specific plan for committing suicide.
- Loss of energy and/or motivation.
- Interpersonal withdrawal.
- Decreased or a total lack of concentration.

How to talk about depression.

Here are some suggestions for what to say and do when your child may be experiencing symptoms of depression.

- 1. “Let me ask you some questions.”** Use the symptoms of depression noted here to assess levels of distress.
- 2. “Do you think a counselor might help?”** Ask your child’s opinion and feelings about seeing a counselor.
- 3. Don’t be afraid to sit down with your child and talk to them about what you see as a problem.** However, parents need to know their limitations when interacting with their child if they feel he/she may be depressed and seek professional help from a counselor or psychiatrist to ask questions or get another opinion.
- 4. Don’t downplay the problem.** Do not minimize emotional distress and possible psychological problems.
- 5. Encourage good health habits.** Talk about eating healthy, sleeping enough at night, and saying no to alcohol, tobacco and drug use.
- 6. Trust therapy to work for your child or family.** The fact is that 80% of individuals who seek therapy for personal problems or psychological disorders report improvement and find psychotherapy to be very helpful.

A full-page background image featuring a sunset over a road. The sun is a bright, glowing orb in the center, with rays of light radiating outwards. The sky is filled with soft, orange and yellow clouds. The road is a dark, paved surface that recedes into the distance, with a large, white, upward-pointing arrow painted on it. The overall color palette is warm and monochromatic, dominated by shades of orange and red.

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HEADQUARTERS

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Made possible in part by Texas Veterans + Family Alliance.