

# KIDS IN CRISIS: Anxiety And How You Can Help

As I write this, we are amidst a post-trauma response from a collection of horrific experiences threatening young people in our community. The added stress and fear among children *and* adults have significantly increased our anxiety. Meanwhile, it was already ranked as the #1 most common mental illness in the US. According to the NIH, nearly one in three adolescents (13-18) will experience an anxiety disorder. This data combined with the doubling rate of hospital admissions for suicidal teens has me a little freaked out.

Anxiety is a normal emotion and one we all rely on for survival. It helps us prepare for challenges and avoid potentially threatening or dangerous situations. But when anxiety begins to keep us from experiencing the everyday joys in our lives, it is considered a disorder. As a significant health threat, it often contributes to irritability, anger, abnormal reactions to everyday stressors, and depression.

Some of the more common symptoms among children include concentration problems, sleep disturbances, bad dreams, appetite changes, frequent fidgeting, expressing constant worry, or uncontrolled outbursts. You might also see unexplainable physical symptoms such as stomachaches, headaches, shortness of breath, chest pain, gagging, or vomiting. It is our job to recognize and acknowledge these behavior changes among our children and keep our blinders off. Chalking it up to a “bad day” or a “typical teenager” can be dangerous.

Anxiety is one of the most contagious emotions we experience. One flare can ignite a bonfire among a group. And an anxious adult can easily trigger a child’s anxiety. So, if you suffer from it, keep seeking healthy ways to manage it such as improved sleep quality, meditation, breathwork, therapy, exercise, and exploring nature.

Next, encourage your child to evaluate their friend circle. Ask about the qualities that raise their vibe as well as those that activate anxiety. Also help them find ways to minimize their use of social media, as it regularly stimulates feelings of inadequacy, dissatisfaction, and isolation.



If you have concerns, contact your child’s teacher, school counselor, or trusted healthcare professional to steer you and your child in the right direction for professional help. If you’re catching early signs, medication should *not* be the first-line treatment.

It’s true that antidepressants are frequently prescribed as first-line therapy for pediatric anxiety disorders, and now that marijuana is considered a viable treatment for anxiety, I see many parents who view weed as an acceptable treatment choice for their teens and young adults. There is reliable evidence that the brain continues to develop into the early twenties, and using cannabis can have a permanent negative effect on brain development. If you are using weed or alcohol to quell your own anxiety, just know that you are modeling how to rely on a drug instead of less invasive, more effective coping mechanisms.

By now you know that I’m not a big fan of our quick-to-medicate approach to most conditions. Meds usually quell the *symptoms* instead of helping at the *root cause* level. Fixing problems at the root cause level is usually less invasive and an all-around better solution.

We have a lot of work to do to emanate kindness and eradicate violence. It won’t happen overnight but remember...every single act of kindness matters!

Read more on this and other contemporary pediatric health concerns in **Brave Parent! Raising Healthy, Happy Kids (against all odds) in Today’s World.**



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