

Signs of Child Anxiety Checklist

Children don't often have the words or the ability to describe the fear they are feeling.

Instead of using words, anxious children might withdraw, act out, or respond in a variety of different ways.

The following checklist shows you the physical and behavioral symptoms to look for in your child:

Physical Symptoms

- Racing heart
- Raised blood pressure
- Rapid breathing / shortness of breath
- Crying
- Headaches / migraines
- Dry mouth
- Stomach upset / nausea / diarrhea
- Shaking hands or legs
- Tingly extremities
- Sweaty palms or feet
- Cool, clammy skin
- Tense, achy muscles
- Dizziness
- Fatigue

Behavioral Symptoms

- Anger / Aggression**
Anger is usually easy to see, but aggression is more subtle. Aggressive behavior might be deliberately breaking a toy, or a sibling's favorite toy, shoving another child.
- Avoidance / Refusal**
This might mean avoiding going to places or seeing people the child had done before, refusing to go to school, place of worship, a friend's house, avoiding family outings or activities (park, movie theater, restaurant.)
- Clinginess**
Exhibiting fear or acting out behaviors to keep a parent or caregiver with them.
- Cognitive Symptoms**
 - Communication difficulties
 - Inability to stay on-task
 - Impulsivity
 - Inability to regulate emotions
 - Lack of self-control
 - Poor memory and concentration

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Chronic Worrying

About things that have happened or have never happened.

Depression

Many anxious children struggle with depression, sadness and feelings of hopelessness. When children are anxious their presenting behavior is often sadness.

Eating Disturbances

Avoiding foods the child previously enjoyed, eating less, eating more, hiding food.

Inflexibility

Child cannot tolerate changes in routine, strong frustration intolerance.

Child is rigid, inflexible with himself and others. Highly critical of self and others.

Irritability

Child seems to be in a constant state of upset, irritated, over-tired, in a bad mood.

The child might not like being touched.

Negative Thinking / Pessimism

Child focuses only on negative outcomes, and exaggerates that things are worse for him:

- “It will probably rain all day.”
- “I will never know how to do my homework.”
- “I will always have a miserable life.”
- “Nobody likes me. I have no friends.”
- “The teacher likes everyone but me.”

This can also manifest itself in the child developing a worst case scenario kind of thinking:

- “If I get on the school bus in a storm it will crash and I will die.”
- “When my mom goes on a business trip she might die and I won’t see her again.”
- “If I get a mosquito bite it will probably cause a dangerous infection and I will end up in the hospital.”

Oppositional Defiance Behaviors

The child may

- Argue with adults (frequently)
- Question rules or refuse to follow rules
- Deliberately upset or bother others
- Seek revenge

Perfectionism

Anxious kids, especially those diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder exhibit behaviors like:

- Erasing their words on a paper repetitively until the paper is worn with holes.
- Rewriting or re-doing their homework until it looks “perfect”.

Restlessness

The child can’t relax and enjoy an activity. In constant motion. Nothing holds child’s attention.

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Sleep Disturbances

The child might

- Fear bedtime and avoid or procrastinate bedtime
- Constantly get out of bed for glasses of water, need to use the bathroom
- Ask for extra “tuck-ins”
- Have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep
- May experience nightmares or night terrors
- Might sleepwalk

Tantrums / Rages

Tantrums are most often seen in younger children who have a sudden outburst of anger or frustration when they don't get their own way.

Rages are exhibited by older children, usually when they are angry or frustrated, and can include behaviors like:

- Throwing or breaking objects
- Ripping a room apart (pulling sheets/bedding off bed, overturning mattress)
- Having self-injurious behavior or hurting others

Now What?

If you have seen these physical or behavioral symptoms in your child, or have any concerns about your child's mental health, the first step is to speak to your child's physician.

If additional mental health counseling is needed, your child's doctor can refer you to a licensed mental health clinician specializing in children's mental health.