WHAT IS ANXIETY?

PART 1

JANUARY 2025 | ***ISSUE #2***

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-5) defines anxiety as excessive and persistent worry that is difficult to control. It's associated with physical symptoms and can cause significant distress or impairment in a person's life.

WHAT IS HEALTHY ANXIETY?

According to Dr. Wendy Silverman, Ph.D, director of the Yale Medicine Child Study Center's Anxiety & Mood Disorders Program, it's normal for a child to be anxious about changes in life, such as the start of a new school year or alterations in family status, such as the birth of a new sibling, a move, or a separation of parents. Temperament is a factor too. Some kids (and grownups) are naturally anxious, while others are easygoing.

DID YOU KNOW...

- **Up to 1 in 5 kids will develop what healthcare providers consider anxiety disorders.**
- **Anxiety disorders are more common in people assigned female at birth.**
- **Teens go through emotional and physical changes. Knowing what is normal behavior and what is not can help parents spot emerging mental health issues.**

Examples of Normal Adolescent Behavior	Examples of Concerning Adolescent Behavior
• **Wanting to spend more time with peers and less time with family** • **Reluctance to get up early for school** • **Needing more sleep or developing a larger appetite during growth spurts** • **Sadness and anxiety following fights with friends or a breakup with a significant other**	• **Not wanting to spend time with either friends or family (shunning all social interactions)** • **Absolute refusal to attend school—especially if this behavior happens suddenly and accompanies other signs of distress or depression** • **Sudden changes in energy levels, i.e. sleeping abnormally long or not being able to sleep at all; sudden changes in appetite, i.e. consistent overeating or undereating accompanied by quick fluctuations in weight** • **Sadness and anxiety that doesn't correct itself or decrease in intensity after a few days to a couple of weeks.**

*Examples provided by Georgetown Behavioral Health Institute

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DIFFERENT TYPES OF ANXIETY IN CHILDREN

According to the Cleveland Clinic, there are different types of anxiety in children:

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Separation anxiety is a normal and important phase of early development that begins in most children when they're 8 to 12 months old. With normal separation anxiety, your child may fear strangers and not feel safe when you're not around. Separation anxiety usually gets better by the time kids enter preschool Separation anxiety disorder is more extreme and continues beyond this typical developmental period. Kids may be worried about parents or other family members and have difficulty going to school or being away from home or family generally, or may have difficulty separating for sleep. If your child shows extreme distress or worry with separations more than other kids their age, or if you don't see improvements or have concerns, talk with your child's healthcare provider.

Specific Phobias: Fear protects us from danger, so a certain amount of fear in kids is expected. Your child might be scared about something in particular, like storms or clowns or any variety of things. But specific phobias are extreme fears that are out of proportion with the actual threat of danger.

Social Anxiety Disorder: This is an intense fear of being judged or rejected in social situations. Your child might avoid public speaking or performing. Or they might be so uncomfortable that they try to avoid interacting with others at school or other familiar settings or have a hard time speaking to new people. They may even avoid social situations altogether.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Generalized anxiety is excessive worry and fear about a range of different things that happen in daily life. Your child may also worry about the future more than other children their age. They may have many worries or worries may change over time, but they're often worried about something.

Panic Disorder: Children with panic disorder have times when they feel extreme fear and anxiety along with physical symptoms like a racing heart (heart palpitations) and dizziness or they might feel like they can't breathe (dyspnea). These panic attacks can come on without warning and tend to go away within minutes to hours.

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HOW DOES WEST ISLIP SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH ANXIETY?

ELEMENTARY

- 1 Full-time Psychologist per building
- 1 Full-time Social Worker per building
- 1 Part-time School Counselor per building
- Partnership with PM Pediatrics

MIDDLE SCHOOL

- 1 Full-time Psychologist per building
- 1 Full-time Social Worker per building
- 2 Full-time School Counselors per building
- Partnership with PM Pediatrics

HIGH SCHOOL

- 3 Full-time Psychologists
- 1 Full-time Social Worker
- 6 Full-time School Counselors
- Provides resources for students on TV in lobby to support social emotional health

RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

- **District support staff contact resource**
- **YES organization**
- **National Institute of Mental Health**
- **Kids Mental Health Foundation**
- **DASH**
- PM Pediatrics-District Partnership
  - For more information, contact the building psychologist or social worker

*This is part one of a two-part newsletter centered around anxiety.