

What Is Anxiety?

A Guide for Parents

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF ANXIETY?

WHEN MIGHT ANXIETY BE A PROBLEM?

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD MANAGE ANXIETY?



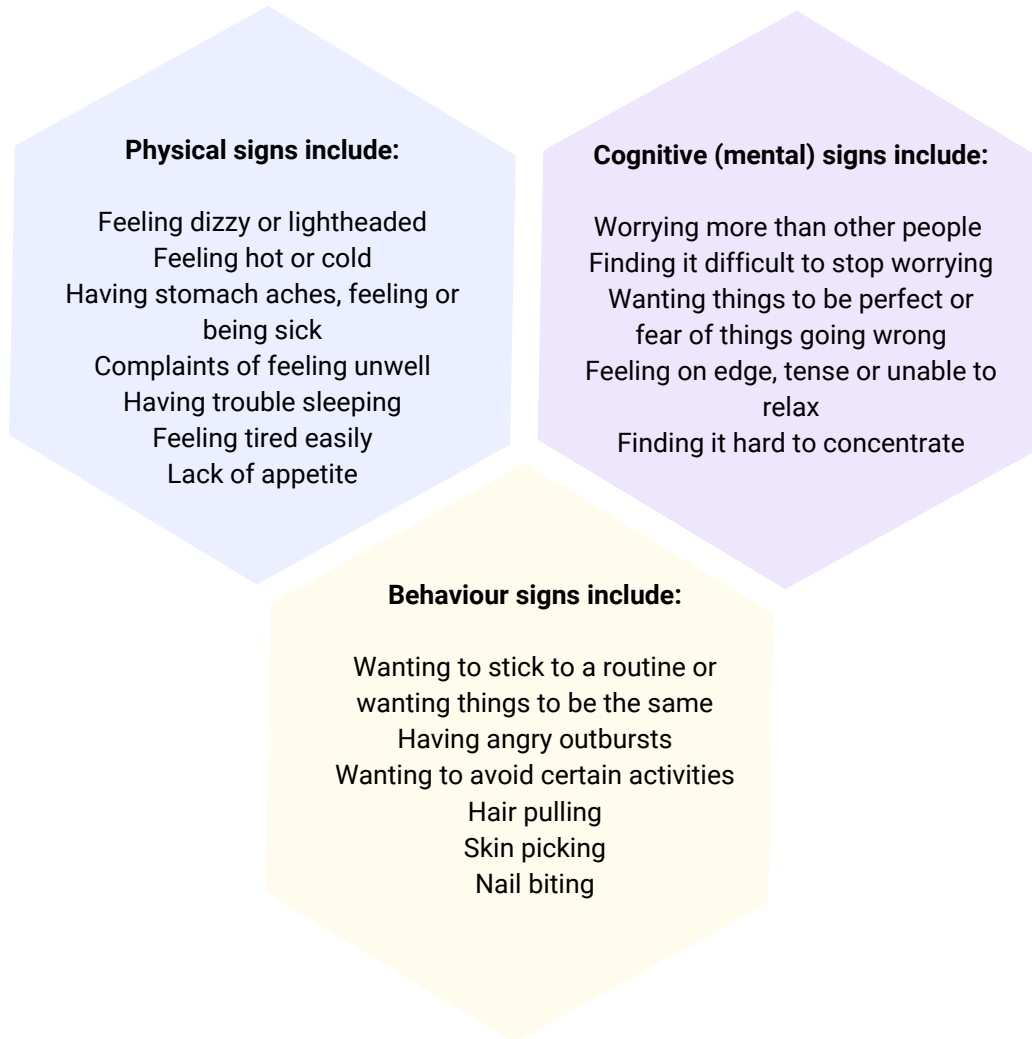
Worries, fears and anxiety are something we all experience. These feelings might sometimes seem like they don't serve much of a purpose but they're an important survival strategy. They make us more aware of risks and prepare us to act in a dangerous situation by either fleeing or fighting (you may have heard this called the 'fight or flight response').

This mechanism is great when we need to escape a physical danger or protect ourselves. However, our brain doesn't quite recognise the difference between having to outrun a predator like our ancestors did and having to sit an exam. Even if we imagine a danger, like someone jumping up behind us and startling us, our brain has the same response. It releases the same stress hormones and causes the same physical responses in our body. We might think of anxiety as being 'all in the head' but it's a physical response throughout our entire body that we can't fully control happening.

It's important to remember that your child isn't choosing to feel this way - it's the brain doing its job. However, sometimes the brain may need some help in making these feelings and reactions more manageable.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF ANXIETY?

Anxiety can express itself in different ways within the mind, body and behaviour. You may notice that your child experiences several of these or that they only experience some.



WHEN MIGHT ANXIETY BE A PROBLEM?

Having worries or being nervous about something is completely normal. When we think about anxiety becoming a problem for someone, it isn't the fact that they have worries or what it is they worry about.

Help may be needed with managing anxiety if these feelings and worries have a significant impact upon daily life. This might be that your child is thinking about their worries all the time, that they avoid doing certain things because of their anxiety, that they always seem to be on alert or that they find it hard to be reassured and relaxed. It can be thought of like a fog - if your child's anxiety make it hard for them to see anything else, feels like it covers everything and gets in the way of their daily activities, their anxiety is likely to be having a significant impact upon them and their life.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD MANAGE ANXIETY?

Working with a trained, qualified counsellor or therapist can help your child manage their anxiety. Having the opportunity to talk through their worries, particularly with someone neutral, can help get those worries out of their head and help those thoughts and feelings become less overwhelming.

A counsellor or therapist can also suggest creative strategies your child can use, such as journaling or drawing/painting their feelings.

There are also strategies you can use to help your child manage their anxiety:

- Model healthy, helpful behaviours yourself. If your child sees you effectively managing your anxieties, this helps promote the idea that anxiety can be managed. You can also use this to introduce practical strategies, such as breathing techniques.
- Acknowledge and validate your child's feelings. We may feel like we are encouraging the anxiety but by saying we understand and accept that our child is feeling this way, we are not saying we think being anxious is 'right' or that their feelings are 'correct'. We are allowing our child to feel heard and understood. Telling our child to not worry or that there's no reason for their feelings can be confusing, make our child reluctant to share or lead them to worry more.
- Work with your child to solve problems. Coming up with solutions together can help your child feel empowered and capable, and remind them that you are there for them.
- Allow your child to have a say in decisions and play an active role in their routines. Feeling like they are doing something rather than something just happening to them can help children feel more in control.

There are many strategies you can try together. It may be discouraging to try something and find it doesn't have the effect you and your child had hoped for but the key is finding what is effective for them.

Working with a counsellor or therapist can also help identify some of these strategies. Your child's counsellor or therapist is here to support them and find the most helpful strategies for them, not to try and make your child fit the strategies.

If you feel like your child might need help with their anxiety, our team is here for you. You can call us on 0800 634 4395, email admin@ypcs.uk or visit our website at www.ypcs.uk.