

# What Is Anxiety?

A Guide for Young People

**WHAT IS ANXIETY?**

**WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF ANXIETY?**

**WHEN MIGHT ANXIETY BE A PROBLEM?**

**HOW CAN I 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 we aren't choosing to feel this way - it's our brain doing its job. However, sometimes our brain may need some help in making these feelings and reactions more manageable for us.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF ANXIETY?

Our anxiety can express itself in different ways within our minds, bodies and behaviour. You might experience lots of these things or only some of them.

### Physical signs include:

- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Feeling hot or cold
- Having stomach aches, feeling or being sick
- Having trouble sleeping
- Feeling tired easily
- Lack of appetite

### Cognitive (mental) signs include:

- Worrying more than other people
- Finding it difficult to stop worrying
- Wanting things to be perfect or fear of things going wrong
- Feeling on edge, tense or like you can't relax
- Finding it hard to concentrate

### Behaviour signs include:

- Wanting to stick to a routine or wanting things to be the same
- Having angry outbursts
- Wanting to avoid certain activities
- Hair pulling
- Skin picking
- Nail biting

## 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.

We might need help with managing anxiety if our worries have a significant impact upon our life. This might be that we find ourselves thinking about our worries all the time, that we avoid doing certain things because of our worries, we always feel on alert or we find it hard to be reassured and relaxed. You can think of it like a fog - if your worries make it hard to see anything else, feel like they cover everything and gets in the way of your daily activities, your worries are likely to be having a significant impact upon you and your life.

### HOW CAN I MANAGE ANXIETY?

Working with a trained, qualified counsellor or therapist can help you manage your anxiety. Talking through your worries can help get them out of your head and your counsellor or therapist can help you find ways to make your anxiety less overwhelming.

A counsellor or therapist can also suggest creative ways you can use, such as journaling or drawing/painting your feelings.

There are also strategies you can use yourself to help your feelings become more manageable:

- Breathing techniques can help remind your brain that there isn't a real danger. When we become anxious, we may find ourselves taking quick, shallow breaths. Taking deep, mindful breaths can help settle our mind and body.
- Writing a to-do list before going to bed can help us release some of our thoughts that might keep us up at night.
- Reminding ourselves of the positive things that have happened during the day can help us shift from a negative mindset to a more positive one.
- Remind yourself that your anxiety is like a wave - sometimes it might be high but this feeling doesn't stay forever. The wave may go up but it also comes down again.
- Physical activity we enjoy can help relieve stress and anxiety, and release feel-good chemicals and hormones.

There are many strategies you can try. You might find that some work better for you than others. It may be discouraging to try something and find it doesn't have the effect you had hoped for but the key is finding what is effective for you.

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

If you feel like you might need help with your anxiety, our team is here for you. You can call us on 0800 634 4395, email [admin@ypcs.uk](mailto:admin@ypcs.uk) or visit our website at [www.ypcs.uk](http://www.ypcs.uk).