



Common Anxiety Disorders

Separation Anxiety Disorder - Characterized by developmentally inappropriate and excessive anxiety about being apart from the individuals to whom a child is most attached.

- A. Normal part of development.
 - 1. Beginning around 6-7 months, peaking around 18 months, and decreasing after 30 months of age.
 - 2. Features may persist into childhood and early adolescence while remaining subclinical.
- B. Frequently consists of persistent reluctance or refusal to go to school or elsewhere due to fear of separation.
- C. Frequent complaint of multiple physical symptoms: headaches, stomachaches, nausea, or vomiting. These can be the result of anxiety or designed to support the need for avoidance of separation.
- D. Interferes with normal development so as a result, academic achievement, peer relationships, and overall maturation are compromised.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder - Characterized by marked worry and anxiety that the individual finds difficult to control and causes impairment in functioning.

- A. Can be a normative part of development- fears, worries, and scary dreams are common in healthy children, occurring at rates of 76%, 68%, and 81% respectively in one study.
- B. Worries are numerous and diffuse, not limited to a specific stimulus or environment.
 - 1. Specific worries include future events, peer relationships, social acceptability, competency, and pleasing others.
 - 2. Often described by parents as “worry warts” and as overly conscientious.
- C. Physiological symptoms increase with age and include: feeling keyed-up or restless, muscle tension, feeling fatigued, and difficulty concentrating.
- D. Higher prevalence rates for girls than boys have been demonstrated in a number of studies, 9% versus 4% respectively.

Panic Disorder – Characterized by recurrent, unexpected panic attacks.

- A. Panic attacks are discrete periods of fear or discomfort that develop abruptly and reach a peak rapidly.
- B. The most commonly reported somatic symptoms among adolescents are trembling, dizziness or faintness, pounding heart, nausea, shortness of breath, and sweating.
- C. May occur with or without Agoraphobia.
 - 1. Characterized by “anxiety about being in places or situations from which escape might be difficult (or embarrassing) or in which help may not be available in the event of a panic attack.”
 - 2. Can result in school avoidance.

Social Anxiety Disorder involves a persistent fear of one or more social situations in which a person is exposed to unfamiliar persons or to scrutiny by others.

- A. Commonly feared situations include speaking in front of others, attending social gatherings, dealing with authority figures, performing in public, and speaking to strangers.
- B. Exposure to the social situation elicits marked anxiety, resulting in interference with functioning or marked distress about experiencing the fear.
- C. Somatic symptoms are common and may be indistinguishable from a full-blown panic attack.
- D. Adolescents and young adults with social phobia may drop out of school or college or avoid classes in which classroom participation or presentation would be required.
- E. Increased incidence of alcohol abuse in adolescence and early adulthood, more suicide ideation and suicide attempts, and more physical and mental health problems.