

# **Your Child & Anxiety - Information & Strategies to Help While You Wait for Diagnosis**

## **General Information:**

Anxiety is a mental illness that occurs in adults as well as young people.

A child suffering from anxiety tends to excessively worry about many things including family, school, friends, etc. These worries become all-encompassing and your child may hyper-focus on certain worries they have.

Anxiety is different from more typical worry:

- Anxiety is more excessive
- Anxiety lasts longer
- There are typically few triggers. That is, there are few instances in which something specific triggers one's anxiety.

## **Signs to look for if you think your child might be experiencing anxiety:**

- Restlessness
- Feeling on edge
- Fatigue
- Poor concentration
- Irritability
- Muscle tension
- Sleep problems
- Outbursts of emotion and/or reactions that "don't make sense" to you
- Change in personality - more angry, sad, frantic, etc.
- May need to be close to you at all times - feeling safe is critical

## **Parenting tips on what can you do while you wait for a diagnosis**

1. When your child is anxious, show your child confidence that he or she will be ok, that he or she will be able to manage it, and that the more he or she faces fears, the anxiety will drop down over time
2. When your child manifests his or her fears, try not to minimize them or exacerbate them. Help your child understand what he or she is anxious about, and provide encouragement that your child can confront his or her fears.

3. It's easy to fall into the trap of asking leading questions. Rather than ask "Are you worried about your test today?" you could ask, "How are you feeling about your test today?" This will allow your child to voice his or her feelings openly.
  
4. Validate their anxiety and fears, rather than denying them. For example, instead of saying "Don't be afraid of that", try saying something that reflects your child's fears, such as "I bet that was really scary for you."

## **Your Child & Depression - Information & Strategies to Help While You Wait for Diagnosis**

### **General information:**

Depression is a mental illness that occurs in adults as well as young people.

A child suffering from depression may have overwhelming feelings of sadness, hopelessness, grumpiness, and a hard time enjoying activities they used to love

These bad feelings are not just felt at one time or at one place. Your child can feel them at school, at home, hanging out with friends, and even during happy times such as holidays or your birthday.

It's important to note that your child is not choosing to behave a certain way if they're battling depression - this is not something under their control.

### **Signs to look for if you think your child might be experiencing depression:**

- A significant change in how your child is functioning
- Irritability or increased sadness
- Quick weight gain or weight loss
- Change in sleep habit: sleeping too much or not sleeping enough
- Restlessness
- Sluggishness
- Feeling worthless or really guilty for no "real" reason
- Difficulty concentrating
- Having thoughts of death, talk of harming themselves, or having tried to harm themselves

### **Parenting tips on what can you do while you wait for a diagnosis**

1. Create a calm time to talk and listen, providing unconditional support
2. Exercise with your child(ren), a loving and interactive activity that encourages togetherness and connection
3. Cook healthy meals together for the same reasons as above

4. Try to encourage healthy sleep habits, especially if your child's sleep is affected
5. Limit electronics to one hour or less per day.
6. Be ready to respond to your child's needs within a loving and supportive home environment.

# **Your Child & Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder - Information & Strategies to Help While You Wait for Diagnosis**

## **General Information:**

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, or OCD, is a mental illness that can occur in adults and young people. It typically develops between ages six and nine years in young people.

With OCD, you feel a really strong and upsetting anxiety associated with unwanted thoughts, images, or urges. These are called obsessions. To make these bad feelings and thoughts go away, you will look for ways to get rid of them in the form of other thoughts, actions, or rituals. These are called compulsions.

## **Signs to look for if you think your child might be experiencing bipolar disorder:**

*Some types of obsessions:*

1. Contamination - this is the most common obsession in young people. With a contamination obsession, children fear being around others they suspect might be spreading "germs" and potentially making them sick.
2. Magical thinking – This is like a superstition. Your child fears that if they do not behave in a very specific manner, then something terrible might occur.
3. Aggressive – Your child might have the intense fear that they could do something terrible, such as harming someone.
4. Just Right Feeling – With this obsession, your child has the need to keep doing something until they get the "just right feeling". This is a tough situation as no matter what behavior your child engages in, they never quite get to this "just right feeling".

*Types of compulsions:*

1. Cleaning – an example is excessive or constant handwashing.
2. Checking – examples include checking to see if locks are locked or checking to see if the oven is left on.
3. Repeating – an example is going in and out of a doorway or opening and shutting doors.
4. Counting – counting objects, numbers, and words
5. Arranging – ordering things so that they are symmetrical or line up in a specific pattern.
6. Saving -- an example is that your child may have a hard time throwing things away.

7. Avoidance – avoiding something that might make obsessions worse. For example, taking a long route to school because if you don't you might pass a landmark that is bad luck

**Parenting tips on what can you do while you wait for a diagnosis:**

- It is important for parents not to reinforce the obsession or compulsion
  - When a parent says something to make their child feel better about an obsession or compulsion, your child might feel better for a little but it won't last for long and may make the obsession/compulsion harder to overcome for your child.
  - Rewards and brief praise provide important motivation for children to deal with their obsessions and compulsions.
- Be patient with your child.