



## STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

## MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

# Understanding Anxiety A Resource for Parents/Caregivers

## What is Anxiety?

Anxiety can result from medical conditions, difficulties at home, work, school and stressful life events. When physical, behavioural and emotional symptoms of worry become excessive and persist over a longer period of time, this can interfere with the ability to learn and do everyday activities. This may be an indication of an Anxiety disorder.

## When Does Anxiety Become Problematic?

Anxiety can result from medical conditions, difficulties at home, work, school and stressful life events. When feelings of worry, physical and behavioural symptoms become excessive and persist over a longer period of time, or start to interfere with the ability to learn and do everyday activities, this may be an indication of any Anxiety Disorder.

Anxiety disorders include:

- ✓ Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- ✓ Selective Mutism
- ✓ Panic Disorder or Agoraphobia
- ✓ Separation Anxiety
- ✓ Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- ✓ Social Anxiety

More information on these anxiety disorders can be found at:

[www.anxietycanada.com/learn-about-anxiety/anxiety-in-children/](http://www.anxietycanada.com/learn-about-anxiety/anxiety-in-children/)

## The Impact of Anxiety on Learning

- Interferes with concentration, attention, processing and ability to retain and retrieve information.
- May impact on student's ability to participate in classroom discussions, group work, recreational clubs or give presentations. For example, not wanting to demonstrate knowledge in front of the other students, answering questions and oral presentations.
- May impact social interactions and ability to initially make connections in group situations.
- Can lead to school avoidance and increased absences.
- Can lead to sleep disturbances and increased fatigue at school.
- Children/Youth with learning difficulties may struggle to express their thoughts and connecting these thoughts to their behaviours.
- The impact of anxiety on learning depends upon severity and other psycho-social and environmental factors.
- **On-going communication between school and home is important to ensure that children and youth are developing the academic and social-emotional skills to flourish and achieve their goals.**

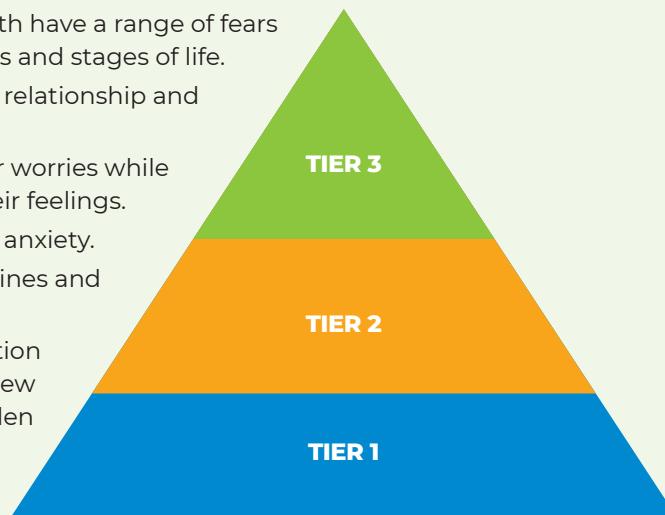
## Normal Fears Across Ages and Stages

- **Infants:** Stranger Anxiety
- **Toddlers:** Separation, Something sudden, intense or new
- **Preschool:** Things perceived as large, Harmful, Dark and/or Imaginary
- **Elementary:** Dangers related to the world
- **Middle Childhood:** Academic, Social, Natural disaster, death
- **Adolescence:** Non-specific situations/thoughts, relationships, the future

# Understanding Anxiety

## How to Support a Child With Anxiety

- Remember that anxiety is a normal emotion.
- Be aware that children and youth have a range of fears that are normal at different ages and stages of life.
- Focus first on building a secure relationship and work on strategies over time.
- Let the child/youth tell you their worries while you listen and acknowledge their feelings.
- Be alert to signs of problematic anxiety.
- Maintain calm, predictable routines and plan ahead for changes.
- Use a slow and gentle introduction to a fearful situation such as a new class or school rather than sudden and unexpected.
- Promote positive self-talk and practice this in your home.
- Model a growth mindset, everyone makes mistakes. View them as a learning process.
- Help children/youth identify triggers and common situations or emotions that lead to heightened anxiety.
- 'Fact find' with your child, by asking questions that will help them identify perceived or actual threats.
- Develop consistent sleep routines of 8-9 hours.
- Promote self-care, relaxation and breathing exercises. Explore coping strategies such as music, colouring, bubble bath, being active and reading.
- Limit viewing of fearful or traumatic images.



**TIER 3:**  
**Individual**  
**Counselling**

**TIER 2:**  
**Small Group**  
**Targeted**  
**Intervention**

**TIER 1:**  
**Staff training,**  
**Parent Resources.**

Support school-based interventions

Promote positive mental health and wellness

Accommodations to learning

Depending on the severity and the impact on daily life, your child/youth may need to see a doctor and/or mental health professional.

## Resources

**Contact Brant:** 519-758-8228

**Contact Haldimand-Norfolk:** 519-587-2441

**Anxiety Canada:** [www.anxietycanada.com](http://www.anxietycanada.com)

## Reach Out

[au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-manage-your-anxiety-and-stress](http://au.reachout.com/articles/how-to-manage-your-anxiety-and-stress)

## Books

**What to do when you worry too much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety** by Dawn Huebner, Ph.D.

**Anxious Kids Anxious Parents** by Lynn Lyons and Reid Wilson

**Drop the Worry Ball** by Alex Russell and Tim Falconer

**Books by Dr. A. Wagner and Dr. Katharina Manassis**

## Videos

**Fight, Flight or Freeze - A guide to Anxiety for kids** – Anxiety Canada

**Fight, Flight or Freeze - Anxiety Explained for Teens** – Anxiety Canada