

COMMON MENTAL HEALTH/PSYCHIATRIC DIAGNOSIS AND THEIR SYMPTOMS

Anxiety Disorders

Children and teens with anxiety disorders typically experience intense fear, worry, or uneasiness that can last for long periods of time and significantly affect their lives. If not treated early, anxiety disorders can lead to:

- Repeated school absences or an inability to finish school
- Impaired relations with peers
- Low self-esteem
- Alcohol or other drug use
- Problems adjusting to work situations
- Anxiety disorder in adulthood

How Common Are Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental, emotional, and behavioral problems to occur during childhood and adolescence. About 13 of every child ages 9 to 17 experience some kind of anxiety disorder; girls are affected more than boys. About half of all children and adolescents with anxiety disorders have a second anxiety disorder or other mental or behavioral disorder, such as depression. In addition, anxiety disorders may coexist with physical health conditions requiring treatment.

Who Is At Risk?

Researchers have found that the basic temperament of young people may play a role in some childhood and adolescent anxiety disorders. For example, some children tend to be very shy and restrained in unfamiliar situations, a possible sign that they are at risk for developing an anxiety disorder. Research in this area is very complex, because children's fears often change as they age.

Researchers also suggest watching for signs of anxiety disorders when children are between the ages of 6 and 8. During this time, children generally grow less afraid of the dark and imaginary creatures and become more anxious about school performance and social relationships. An excessive amount of anxiety in children this age may be a warning sign of increased risk of developing anxiety disorders later in life.

Studies suggest that children are more likely to have anxiety disorder if they have a parent with anxiety disorders. However, the studies do not prove whether the disorders are caused by biology, environment, or both. More data are needed to clarify whether anxiety disorders can be inherited.

Types and signs of anxiety disorders

Many different anxiety disorders affect children and adolescents. Several disorders and their signs are described below:

Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Children and teens with this disorder engage in extreme, unrealistic worry about everyday life activities. They worry unduly about their academic performance, sporting activities, or even about being on time. Typically, these young

people are very self-conscious, feel tense, and have a strong need for assurance. They may complain about stomachaches or other discomforts that do not appear to have any physical cause.

Separation Anxiety Disorder: Children with Separation Anxiety often have difficulty leaving their parents to attend school or camp, stay at a friend's house, or being alone. Often they "cling" to parents and have trouble falling asleep. Separation Anxiety disorder may be accompanied by depression, sadness, withdrawal, or fear that a family member might die. About one in every 25 children experiences separation anxiety disorder.

Phobias: Children with phobias have unrealistic and excessive fears on certain situations or objects. Many phobias have specific names, and the disorder usually centers on animals, storms, water, heights or situations, such as being in an enclosed space. Children with social phobias are terrified of being criticized or judged harshly by other. They will try to avoid the objects and situations they fear, so the disorder can greatly restrict their lives.

Panic Disorders: Repeated "panic attacks" in children and adolescents without an apparent cause are signs of a panic disorder. Panic attacks are periods of intense fear accompanied by a pounding heartbeat, sweating, dizziness, nausea, or feeling of imminent death. The experience is so scary that young people live in dread of another attack. Children with the disorder may go great lengths to avoid situations that may bring on a panic attack. They may not want to go to school or be separated from their parents.

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: Children with obsessive-compulsive disorder, sometimes called OCD, become trapped in a pattern of repetitive thoughts and behaviors. Even though they may recognize that the thoughts or behaviors appear senseless and distressing, the pattern is very hard to stop. Compulsive behaviors may include repeated hand washing, counting or arranging and rearranging objects. About two in every 100 teens experience OCD (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 1999)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Children can develop PTSD after they experience a very stressful event. Such events include experiencing physical or sexual abuse; being a victim of or witnessing violence; or living through a disaster, such as a bombing or hurricane. Young people with PTSD can experience the event over and over through strong memories, flashbacks, or other kinds of troublesome thoughts. As a result, they may try to avoid anything associated with the trauma. They may also overreact when startled or have difficulty sleeping.

What Help Is Available For Young People With Anxiety Disorders?

Children with anxiety disorders can benefit from a variety of treatments and services. Following an accurate diagnosis, possible treatments include:

- Cognitive-behavioral treatment, in which young people learn to deal with fears by
 - Modifying the ways they think and behave
- Relaxation techniques
- Biofeedback (to control stress and muscle tension)

- Family therapy
- Parent Training
- Medication

While cognitive-behavioral approaches are effective in treating some anxiety disorders, medications work well with others. Some people with anxiety disorders benefit from a combination of these treatments. More research is needed to determine what treatments work best for the various types of anxiety disorders.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Clinical Depression is an illness that can affect anybody, including teenagers. It can affect their thoughts, feelings, behavior, and overall health. Most people with depression can be helped with treatment, but most depressed people never get the help they need. When depression isn't treated, it can get worse, last longer, and interfere with a person's life. There are two kinds of depression:

- The sad kind, called Major Depression, Dysthymia or reactive depression
- Manic-depression, also called bi-polar illness, is when feeling down and depressed alternates with being speeded up and sometimes acting reckless

A mental health professional should be consulted if a teenager has any of the following symptoms and they last for several weeks, or if these symptoms cause a significant change in the teen's routine.

Symptoms of Depression

- Feeling sad or crying a lot and it does not go away
- Feeling guilty for no reason; feeling like you're no good; you've lost your confidence
- Life seems meaningless or like nothing good is ever going to happen again.
- Having a negative attitude a lot of the time
- Not wanting to do some of things you used to enjoy-like music, sports, being with friends, going out-and wanting to be left alone most of the time
- Forgetting things, having difficulty concentrating
- Getting irritated often; overreacting to frustration
- Sleeping a lot more or having trouble sleeping at night. Waking up early most mornings and not being able to get back to sleep
- Loss of appetite or eating more
- Feeling restless and tired most of the time
- Thinking about death, feeling like you're dying, or having thoughts about suicide

Symptoms of Mania

Manic-depression is characterized by highs and lows in feelings and behaviors. Lows can mirror the symptoms of depression.

Symptoms of mania can look like this:

- Feeling high as a kite...like you're "on top of the world"
- Having grandiose ideas about the great things you can do

- Racing thoughts, jumping from one subject to another, talking a lot
- Partying non-stop, constantly running around
- Doing wild or risky things; with driving too fast, with spending money, with sex, etc..
- Being so “up” you don’t need much sleep
- Being irritable and unable to get along at home, or school, or with friends

Most people with depression can be helped with counseling, provided by a mental health professional (Licensed Social Worker, Licensed Psychologist, Licensed Mental Health Clinician). Some are treated with a combination of counseling and medication. These antidepressant medications are not “uppers” and are not addictive but do need to be monitored by a psychopharmacologist. Counseling can help teenagers with depression or manic-depression, change the thoughts, feelings or behaviors that are causing the depression.

WHAT IS ATTENTION-DEFICIT DISORDER WITH OR WITHOUT HYPERACTIVITY? (ADHD or ADD)

ADHD is a condition affecting children and adults that is characterized by problems with attention, impulsivity, and over activity. It affects between 4-6 percent of school-aged children and 2-4 percent of adults. Occasionally, we may all have difficulty sitting still, paying attention, or controlling impulsive behavior. For some people, difficulty sitting still, paying attention, or controlling impulsive behavior is so serious that it interferes with their daily life.

Although individuals with this disorder can be very successful in life, if the disorder is not recognized and properly treated, it can lead to serious consequences, including school failure, depression, and problems with relationships, conduct disorder, substance abuse, and job failure. Early identification and treatment are extremely important:

Symptoms of ADHD-predominately inattentive type:

- Failing to give close attention to details or making careless mistakes
- Having difficulty sustaining attention
- Appearing not to be listening
- Struggling to follow through on instructions
- Having difficulty with organization
- Avoiding or disliking tasks requiring sustained mental effort
- Losing things often
- Being easily distracted
- Being forgetful in daily activities

Symptoms of ADHD-predominately hyperactive-impulsive type:

- Fidgeting with hands or squirming while sitting
- Having difficulty remained seated
- Running about or climbing excessively

- Having difficulty engaged in activities quietly
- Acting as if driven by a motor
- Talking excessively
- Blurting out answers before questions have been completed
- Having difficulty waiting or taking turns
- Interrupting or intruding upon others

Symptoms of ADHD-combined type

- Individual meets both sets of inattention and hyperactive/impulsive criteria
- Children who suffer from combined type may frequently present with other conditions, such as depression, anxiety, or learning disabilities. Teenagers with combined type can have unique problems connected with impulsivity and face challenges in dealing with peer pressure, exposure to illegal drugs, emerging sexuality, and the challenges of teenage driving.
- Adults with combined type may be easily distracted, have difficulty sustaining attention and concentrating, are often impulsive and impatient, may have mood swings and short tempers, may be disorganized and have difficulty planning ahead. They may also feel fidgety and restless internally.
- Adults may also experience career difficulties leading to periods of sadness or depression. They may also lose jobs due to poor performance, or attention, organizational and interpersonal problems. With adequate treatment though, these individuals can thrive professionally, especially in positions that rely upon their strengths.

The treatment of ADD/ADHD is based on a comprehensive approach and it involves a “multimodal” approach that often includes :

- Parent training
- Behavioral Intervention Strategies
- An appropriate educational program
- Education regarding ADD/ADHD
- Individual and family counseling
- Medication

Research indicates that multimodal treatment is very effective, and children who receive medication alone, or in combination with behavioral treatment significantly improve in their behavior, school functioning, peer and family relationships.

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