

## Young people with anxiety

Anxiety is a condition that can affect anyone – it doesn't distinguish between age, background or social group. Even some of the most confident people you know may have suffered with anxiety. Recent research suggests that as many as 1 in 6 young people will experience an anxiety condition at some point in their lives, this means that up to 5 people in your class may be living with anxiety, whether that be OCD (obsessive compulsive disorder), social anxiety and shyness, exam stress, worry or panic attacks.

Many anxiety disorders begin in childhood and adolescence, and the average time a person waits to seek help for their condition (particularly for OCD and chronic worrying or GAD as it is known) is over 10 years! That is a long time to be feeling anxious.

### Prevalence of anxiety & depression in UK 16-18s

1 in 10 young people experience a mental health disorder (Green et al 2005)

Increase in prevalence of mental health problems at 16-19 (Singleton et al 2001)

Over half of all mental ill health starts by age 14 and 75% develops by age 18 (Murphy and Fonagy 2012)

Anxiety and depression are most common mental health difficulties and these have high co-morbidity (Green et al 2005)

School learning, stress tolerance, confidence, motivation, personal relationships will be adversely affected (Layard 2008)

Untreated anxiety or depression can have a significant impact on employment, income and relationship stability in adult life (Goodman Joyce and Smith 2011; Green et al 2005)

It can often be difficult to discuss how you feel with other people, especially if you think that no one else feels the same, or that they won't understand. You may feel that you don't fully understand what is happening to you, which can make it very hard to explain to others exactly what you are going through. Often, experiencing anxiety can leave you feeling tired, upset and frustrated. This can make you feel that you are unable to cope or that there is nothing that you can do to improve the situation.

Anxiety can affect us all in very different ways. Experiences of anxiety can vary greatly from person to person and no two people are the same.

First of all, anxiety is completely normal! It is something that we all experience to some level. Anxiety is useful to us as it tells us that something is dangerous and that we need to be careful. However, if anxiety gets out of control or stops you from doing everyday things, then this can lead to us feeling unhappy, upset and frustrated.

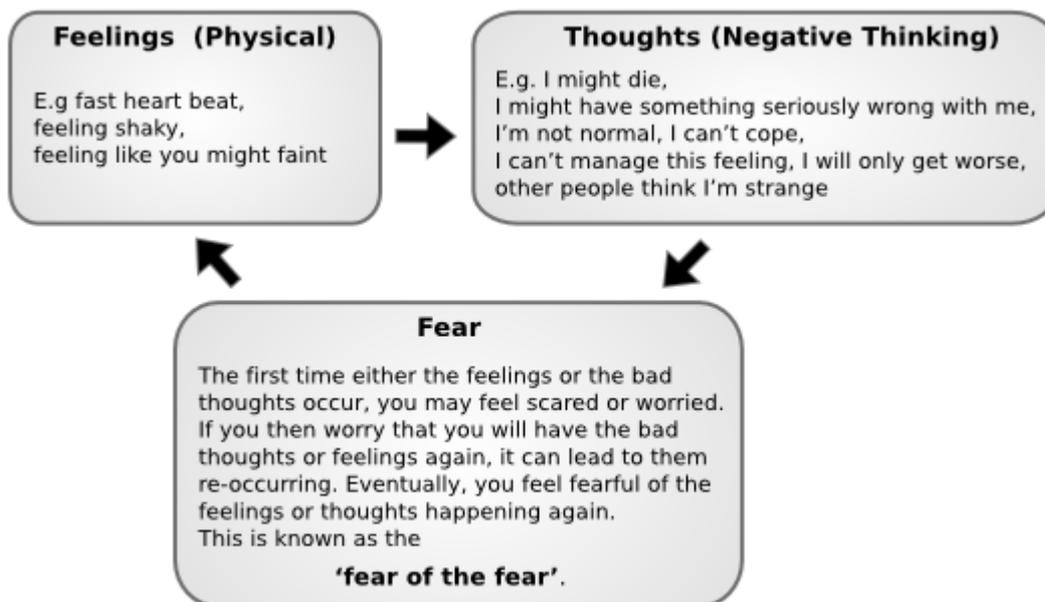
Here are some examples of how you might feel if you are anxious:

- Worried

- Upset
- Feeling sick
- Feeling shaky/dizzy
- Feeling like you might faint/pass out
- Thinking unpleasant thoughts
- Thinking that you might “go crazy”

When anxiety gets really strong, you might experience what we call a “panic attack”. This is when your body is getting ready to fight, freeze or to run away from the situation that we are viewing as dangerous. This is known as the fight, flight or freeze response. Again, it can be quite scary to experience, although we know that it will not hurt you.

One of the ways to reduce the anxiety that you are feeling is to understand it better. By understanding how anxiety works, you can then understand why you feel that way and it will help you to break the vicious circle of anxiety that just makes things worse. The picture below can help to explain what happens when we get anxious.



The “*fear of the fear*” often makes us feel worse as we are literally on edge waiting for bad feelings to happen; we stop doing things that we link with the negative (bad) feelings or thoughts. This is called avoidance. The more that we avoid the thing that we link with feeling bad, the more we think of it as being dangerous.

This means that the next time we have to face the situation or event, our body tells us that it is dangerous and the fight, flight or freeze response kicks in. We feel that we either need to run away from the “dangerous” thing, fight it or we feel that our body is frozen to the spot.

Either way, our body is not happy when we feel all of these horrible feelings and think horrible things. By understanding why we feel this way, we can then take away the “scared” feeling because we know that it is just our body reacting to something that it

thinks is scary, even though it is actually harmless. No-one ever died from having anxiety!

## Children and Anxiety fact sheet

[DOWNLOAD THE FACTSHEET](#)

## Anxiety Information Video

### Statistics on anxiety

1. 13.3% of 16 – 19 year olds and 15.8% of 20 – 24 year olds have suffered from anxiety (neurotic episode)
2. 1.7% of 16 – 19 year olds and 2.2% of 20 -24 year olds have suffered from a depressive episode
3. 0.9% of 16 – 19 year olds and 1.9% of 20 – 24 year olds have suffered from obsessive compulsive disorder.

There are many different types of anxiety; you may find that you experience any one of the following conditions, or all of them together! Nobody's experience of anxiety is the same as the next person's. Don't worry if you think that what you are feeling isn't exactly the same as what is described, there are many more types of anxiety and you can be certain that other people are feeling the same way.

Here are a few different types of anxiety that you may feel:



### Exam Stress/Anxiety

Everyone feels stressed during exams. This usually means that you feel tired, under pressure, confused, worried that you won't do well... [more](#)



### Chronic worrying or GAD

This is the feeling of being anxious about almost everything and anything... [more](#)



### Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety is a term used to explain a feeling of anxiety or stress when you are away from your parents/family/guardians... [more](#)



### Selective Mutism (SM)

This is when you cannot speak in certain places such as school or when you have to meet people that you don't know... [more](#)



### Specific Phobias

One of the most common ways that young people experience anxiety is through a specific phobia... [more](#)



### Social Phobia

People who are affected by social phobia may worry about entering into social situations and what people may think of them.... [more](#)

## Getting Help

The good news is that anxiety is treatable! This means that there are things that can be done to reduce feelings of anxiety. The first step is to speak to someone that you trust about how you are feeling. This could be a teacher, a parent, a relative or another adult that you trust. Talking to someone will reduce the pressure of anxiety and stress, it may also help you to realise that you are not alone in how you are feeling.

### Talking to others

Often, because the anxious feelings and thoughts are so bad, we don't want to tell anyone how we feel as we believe that they might not understand or they might laugh at us. However, this is the best way to get help to change how you feel. By looking at this page, you are already aware that you are not happy with how things are. Talking to someone about how you feel can help.



- Choose someone that you trust for example, a parent/family member/teacher etc.
- Tell them how you have been feeling and try to give them an example so that they understand clearly.
- If you are finding it hard to talk about this, try writing them a letter or showing them this page.
- Remember: It is OK to be upset and it is OK to ask for help  
Once you have spoken to someone, they will be able to get help for you.



You can also call Anxiety UK infoline number: 03444 775 774 to talk to someone in complete confidence between 9.30 and 5.30, Monday to Friday.

### Email information service

Many people want support to help them decide what information they need to manage their anxiety. If you are affected by an anxiety condition and want to email us for information or to point you in the best direction to get some help, please email us on [support@anxietyuk.org.uk](mailto:support@anxietyuk.org.uk). The service is free and we will not tell anyone about the information that you put into the email. This service is not a counselling service but we can point you in the direction of further help and support. Don't be worried about anything that you write in the email – all of the volunteers who answer the emails are trained to deal with anxiety and also have personal experience themselves so they understand how anxiety feels feeling.

### Professionals

Sometimes, although we are trying to reduce our anxiety by undertaking certain activities on our own initiative, this might not be enough to help us cope with the anxiety and we may need to gain the help of a professional. A professional is someone who can discuss how you are feeling and help you to put things into place to make it better. All of the professionals you may encounter have to make sure that they keep all of the information that you tell them private so don't worry about anyone finding out.

The following professionals are ones which you may come into contact with:

### Counsellors

A counsellor is someone who you are able to talk to about how you are feeling with your anxiety. They will provide you with a safe place to talk about your experiences. Most counsellors will help you to look at where these feelings have come from and why you may be feeling that way. Going to see a counsellor does not mean that you are "mad" or that you will "go crazy"! Lots of people see counsellors to help them with all sorts of problems. Friends finding out that you are seeing a counsellor is often a very big worry for many young people. What will they say? Will they think that I am weird? Will they tease me? Will they understand?

The best thing about seeing a counsellor is that it is completely confidential. This means that the counsellor is not allowed to talk about what you say to them to anyone. Therefore, the only person who can tell the people at school that you are seeing a counsellor is you.

## Cognitive Behaviour Therapists (CBT)

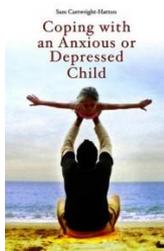
This sounds like a very complicated therapy but actually it is very simple! “Cognitive” just means our thoughts and the things that we are thinking, whereas “Behaviour” means exactly what it says on the tin; it is the acts that we carry out and the things that we do. This type of therapist will look at how you are feeling in the “here and now” and how the problem can be managed more effectively. They will look at getting you to practice certain behaviours and thoughts to try to improve what you are feeling. Often the things that you are asked to practice are the opposite to what the anxiety wants you to do. This makes it a bit harder but it is like riding a bike- the more that you practice, the less you fall off!!

## Clinical Hypnotherapists

Hypnotherapy is not about getting you up on a stage where you will be made to do all sorts of silly things in front of an audience! It is completely different to stage hypnotism and clinical hypnotherapists will aim to make you feel relaxed and safe whilst they use visualisation techniques (e.g. asking you to picture events going well and places that you feel safe) to improve your anxiety.

Remember: Anxiety is treatable and it doesn't have to keep making you feel unhappy. Things can change and you can control your stress and anxiety.

## Other Resources



Coping with an anxious or depressed child by Dr Sam Cartwright-Hatton This book has been written by Anxiety UK Patron and leading researcher on child anxiety, Dr Sam Cartwright-Hatton. It offers practical advice about managing your child's anxiety and includes worksheets, tips on the use of praise or consequences and how you can engage the school in helping your child. It is a great first read for parents who are struggling to manage their child's behaviour, and helps parents decide which treatment or therapist would provide the most help. You can purchase it from the Anxiety UK shop by clicking [here](#).

## Useful Websites

- Coventry and Warwickshire Partnership NHS Trust has produced two useful booklets for young people with OCD and their parents/carers. To download a free copy, click on the relevant link below:

[Obsessive Compulsive Disorder \(A young person's self help guide\)](#)  
[Helping your child with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder](#)

## Press articles

You can read two interesting articles about dealing with stress and anxiety in children and young people below

[www.webmd.boots.com/children/10-tips-for-dealing-with-teenage-anxiety](http://www.webmd.boots.com/children/10-tips-for-dealing-with-teenage-anxiety)  
[www.webmd.boots.com/children/features/10-signs-of-stress-in-kids](http://www.webmd.boots.com/children/features/10-signs-of-stress-in-kids)

## Personal Experiences

Do you suffer from anxiety and want to share your experience with other young people? Post your personal experience in the comments box below where it will be sent to our moderator for approval. Many people find this part of the site very useful when trying to understand their disorder so your comments really do make a difference.

*I have had agoraphobia since I was 8 years old. No one noticed there was anything wrong until it got so bad that I couldn't go to school. I have been unable to attend school for about 7 months and I have only just started getting the help I need. I want to go back to school to see my friends but I worry that everyone will ask me loads of questions. My friend has been telling people at school that I'm dead. She has also been making up lies about me and telling my two best friends that I hate them and that I keep saying things about them behind their backs. My mum said she is not going to send me back to school until next year (the end of year 11) so that I can do my exams, however, because I have missed a year, I now have to stay on to 6 form. I am worrying about so many things at the moment and I have so much homework to do. I am also very worried about what people are saying about me at school. My agoraphobia has got so bad that I'm not even going outside now, most of the time I can't even leave my room. I want to be able to go out places and to go back to school. I want to see my friends again and I would like to do the dance class that I started, however, at the moment I can't even leave the house without feeling that I will faint. My dad keeps saying there is nothing wrong with me and that I should be in school. My agoraphobia got really bad over Christmas as we had to go to my Nan's on Boxing Day. I nearly fainted when I walked in to the house. Not many people believe that I have agoraphobia and not a lot of people understand what agoraphobia is so I don't really have anyone to talk to.*

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## Credits

Please note, all comments submitted to the Anxiety UK website may be used by Anxiety UK for (but not limited to) publicity and promotional material.