

Parenting Teenagers – Recognising and Responding to Anxiety

13-16 year olds

Anxiety is an emotion everyone experiences. Sometimes it is in response to small life events that would not normally create any difficulty for us, but it can also be a response to a significant life event or worry.

Most teenagers feel anxious at times; this can be as a response to their friendships, school, family relationships/separation or a medical condition they may have. Teenagers, like everyone else are also exposed to growing social media influences putting them under pressure to behave and look in certain ways, which can impact their self-confidence and self-esteem.

As a parent you will most likely be best placed to identify when your teenager appears to be feeling anxious. This can be evident through their behaviour such as being angry, withdrawn or overly emotional as a response to an event in their lives. Growing up and becoming an adolescent is full of new challenges physically and emotionally, and anxiety can be a normal reaction to this. Navigating adolescence can be a minefield for both you as a parent and your teenager.

Sometimes teenagers find it difficult to express themselves; this can come across as displays of anger or saying and doing things they don't mean. During stressful times, be kind to yourself and remember that parents are human - sometimes our responses to our teenager's behaviour are not what it should be. In these instances give space in order to keep the door and lines of communication open.

Some common symptoms of anxiety:

- feeling nervous, on edge, or panicky all the time
- avoiding social situations
- feeling overwhelmed or full of dread
- feeling out of control
- having trouble sleeping
- low appetite
- finding it difficult to concentrate
- feeling tired and grumpy
- heart beating really fast or thinking you're having a heart attack
- having a dry mouth
- trembling
- feeling faint
- sweating more than usual
- wobbly legs
- getting very hot

The good news is that anxiety is something that teenagers can overcome or, at the very least, learn to manage. Your teenagers will need your support and understanding to manage this emotion. As their parent, it can help if you try to understand that teenagers are finding their way and underlying much of what they say and do may be a feeling of anxiety or awkwardness.

Helping your teenager manage their anxiety

- Support them to keep a daily diary listing the positives in their day. This will remind them that there are good things happening in their lives. For example, anything they have achieved during the day or anything that made them feel happy.
- Help them set small goals each day. Try to make each one realistically achievable and celebrate any wins.
- Support them to exercise and go outside! Taking part in any exercise that raises your heart rate will cause the body to release endorphins. Endorphins make us feel happy. Also, nature has been proven to relax the mind. Even if it's just a short walk each day it will help them feel happier and more relaxed.

Some teenagers do experience a more significant level of anxiety, which may result in risk-taking behaviours' and/or hurting themselves. If this happens to your child, it is important that additional support is sought via your GP and specialised services.

Further resources

[Dr John Colman's](#) website provides resources and information for parents to support their young people. Dr Coleman has a long standing interest in teenager behaviour.

A [self help guide](#) that will help teenagers learn more about anxiety and provide them with the skills to manage this

The [YoungMinds Crisis Messenger](#) text service provides free, 24/7 crisis support across the UK. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis and need support, you can text YM to 85258.

[No Panic](#) is a registered charity which helps people who suffer from Panic Attacks, Phobias, Obsessive Compulsive Disorders and other related anxiety disorders. No Panic also provides support for the carers of people who suffer from anxiety disorders.

[Childline](#) is a free, private and confidential service provided by the NSPCC where children can talk about anything.

[The Mix](#) is the UK's leading support service for young people under 25. They help young people take on any challenge they are facing via online, social or free, confidential helpline.