

Symptoms of anxiety in children: The checklist

Something as small as a snappy remark could be enough for you to realise that something isn't quite right in the curious world of your child's mind.

The symptoms listed below are common for children experiencing anxiety, however, it's important that as a parent you are able to stay rational and stay focused on the facts.

Remember to keep in mind that anxiety is not a weakness, you just need some tools to help you and your child figure it out together.

Childhood anxiety symptom checklist and examples

1. Avoidance of certain situations

For example: You sense a certain amount of trepidation in your child when you reference a particular environment or situation.

2. Trouble speaking about the way they feel

For example: If you ask your child how they are and answer 'fine' or 'good' but you know they're not being completely honest, this is a signifier that they're withholding some of their emotions from you.

A lot of children react this way when they don't want to burden you, or they think that if they tell you, they're worried that you'll worry too.

3. Refusing to go to school

For example: Your child may suddenly tell you they are unwell and beg for time off from school. They could refuse to attend parents evening, or perhaps uncharacteristically don't want to go to a regular after-school activity.

4. Sleep difficulties, including falling asleep, nightmares and trouble sleeping alone

For example: You notice your child becomes jittery and unsettled close to bedtime. Make sure mobile phones and Xbox aren't the culprits here. If your child wants to get to sleep, but can't, this is a signifier that they may be experiencing anxiety.

5. Strong worries and fears and a constant need for reassurance

For example: Your child could be afraid of *anything*, sometimes your child might be ashamed of their worries. This is common with children with OCD, an anxiety disorder doctors are becoming to realise is far more common in children than once thought.

These fears might include whether:

- they, or someone else, will become a bad person, get sick, hurt, or die
- they said a bad word, had a bad thought, or made a mistake
- they have broken a rule, done a bad thing, or sinned
- something is clean, dirty, or germy
- something is straight, even, or placed in an exact way
- something is lucky or unlucky, bad or good, safe or harmful

The nature of these kinds of fears means your child is very unlikely to open up on their own and speak to you.

Should you trust parent intuition? Not always! You'll have a lot of your own emotions attached to your child's feelings, and it's easy to jump to an exaggerated assumption about your child's well-being.

This means that you can blow things out of proportion. Make a list when your child exhibits any of the above behaviours, along with any notable life event, or any logical reason why they could be behaving in this way.

For example, if you've noticed a change in your child's anger and irritability, make sure arguments with siblings aren't the catalyst.

If difficulty sleeping is the problem, check pillows, any broken bed slats. By making a note of the facts, it is easier to build a picture around exactly when your child feels a certain way so you can approach the conversation at the right time.