

Coping with Anxiety at Home and School



Common Mental Health Concern

Public health agency reports anxiety is the most common Canadian mental health concern.

Many people experience anxiety at one point in their life, but when it interferes with the ability to enjoy daily life functioning, it is time to address the problem. Anxiety reactions can be different from person to person. Responses can be **affective** (emotional reactions such as crying, anger), **behavioural** (refusal to go, temper tantrums, cutting wrists), **cognitive** (thought patterns such as unrealistic high expectations, self doubt, low confidence) and/or **physiological** (stomach aches, increased heart rate, sweating).

Types of Anxiety?

Anxiety can coexist with other mental health concerns such as depression, and are common during dark, cold months during report card season, exam periods, and BEFORE major holidays. Anxiety runs in families. Some common anxiety concerns include: separation anxiety and school avoidance, phobias (e.g., bats, snakes, math), post traumatic stress (i.e., due to trauma such as hospitalization, car accident), social anxiety (extreme shyness, voluntary mutism), panic disorder (i.e., fear of leaving home to save embarrassment and feelings associated with a panic attack). Other specialized anxiety conditions such as anorexia/bulimia, general anxiety disorder and obsessive compulsive disorder require professional support.

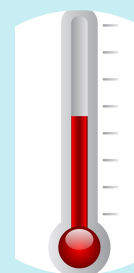
BRAIN RESPONSE



Anxiety is an adaptive reaction, affecting a **fight, flight, or freeze** reaction from primitive parts of the brain. Anxiety was helpful for cavemen in dangerous situations!

Parent Tips

Label the emotions your child is feeling using a fear thermometer.



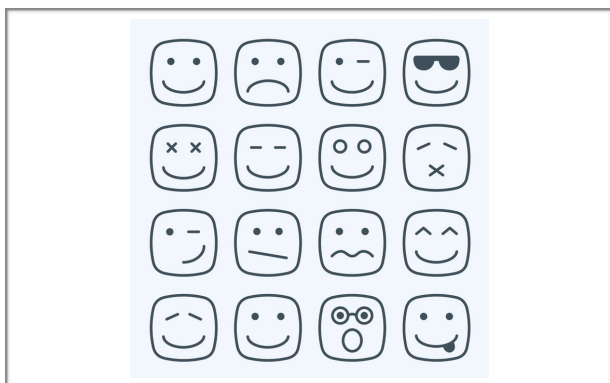
Contact Dr. Sheri-Lynn Skwarchuk, for more information. Email: s.skwarchuk@uwinnipeg.ca

Pathways to Success

People who suffer from anxiety assume that the worse case scenario will happen, they overestimate the odds of something bad happening, and they underestimate their abilities to cope. Recognizing patterns in a person's functioning, and identifying causes of concern are the first steps to success. Keep a journal or record on your calendar to notice patterns. If you are concerned about anxiety, contact your family doctor or school counsellor who can put you in contact with supports. Private fee for service counselling is also available (with some insurance plans covering this service). Cognitive behaviour therapy and/or medication have been used to manage anxiety. **For more information, contact: <https://www.anxietycanada.com>**

Tips for Helping with Anxiety

(1) Notice the Triggers - Everyone can be bothered by sensory stimulation in their environment (whistling, clocks ticking, apple crunching, plate scraping, tags on the back of a shirt, perfume are common irritants). Be aware of the triggers that affect yourself and your family. Maybe these sensations can be managed on a good day, but not on another.



Use picture charts to talk about emotions

(2) Unplug - When a person is anxious, they may react in critical ways. Try not to take these messages personally, and confrontation may ramp up the person. Work on de-escalating the situation and do not get hooked into their verbal messages. They need you.

(3) Give an I CARE Message - Provide sincere messages to show the person that you care for them. Praise, encouragement, hugs and cuddles can help, but support will look different for different people. Think about what makes your special person feel special.

(4) Face the Fear - Decide what fear is causing the anxiety (e.g., spiders, escalators). Go cold turkey, or baby steps, but work toward exposing the fear and showing that nothing bad will happen.

(5) Stop the Feedback Loop - Make sure your child has the relevant information needed, and then say we are not going to talk about this anymore.



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Thanks to Dr. Walker formerly from St. Boniface Hospital anxiety clinic for his inspiring work in this area.

