

# MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT (BETTER INFORMED TOGETHER) RECOGNIZING AND TREATING ANXIETY IN ADOLESCENTS

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/A/DP  
JANURARY 2022 MENTAL HEALTH TIDBIT

Anxiety in adolescents often differs from anxiety in younger children. While younger children are often anxious about external fears (i.e the dark, insects, monsters under the bed, something happening to their parents), adolescents are anxious about themselves. For adolescents the main causes of anxiety are performance in school/extracurriculars, how they are perceived by others, and their changing bodies. Adolescents who were never anxious as younger children may become anxious as they hit their teenaged years. In this month's TidBIT, we will explore signs you may notice in your adolescent that likely signals anxiety, some potential behaviors associated with untreated anxiety, and what to do if you believe your adolescent may be suffering from anxiety.

## Signs that your adolescent may be suffering from anxiety

- Recurring fears and worries about routine parts of everyday life
- Irritability
- Trouble concentrating
- Extreme self-consciousness or sensitivity to criticism
- Withdrawal from school activities
- Avoidance of difficult or new situations
- Chronic complaints of stomachaches or headaches
- Drop in grades
- Repeated assurance seeking
- Sleep Problems

Left untreated, anxiety may lead to concerning behaviors impacting your adolescent's everyday life. The following are two of the most common concerns seen in adolescents with anxiety.

**School Refusal**-Children are connected to school for more than just academics (i.e., social life, activities, clubs, sports), school refusal may be about more than school itself. Gaining understanding of the problem is important to seeking a solution. The actual problem could be one of many different matters. While one child may be anxious about giving a presentation in front of the class and messing up, another child could be anxious about recent turmoil in his or her friend group. Ask questions to figure out the root reason your child is refusing to go to school. Doing this will allow you and your child to work together to come up with a solution.

**Substance Use**-It is not uncommon for adolescents suffering from anxiety to turn to substances as a means of coping. While drugs and alcohol may alleviate anxiety in the short term, it is a poor means of coping long term. Relying on any substance, including legal substances, can further mask the real issues and cause your adolescent to become dependent on substances to get through their day. Using substances to cope with mental health concerns is something that can carry on into adulthood, so it is best to intervene as soon as possible.

## What you can do

As a parent, it is important to recognize areas of concern and seek treatment for your child as quickly as possible. Reaching out to your child's pediatrician is often a good starting point as they can provide referral for therapy and/or medication if necessary. CBT (Cognitive behavioral therapy) is one of the most effective treatments for adolescents with anxiety and can be sought through a mental health outpatient provider. In addition to speaking to your child's pediatrician, you can also access information on mental health providers by calling the number on the back of your child's insurance card designated for behavioral/mental health. If at any point your child reports any suicidal or homicidal thoughts or their symptoms are causing them to not be able to function in their daily life, contact Dauphin County Crisis Intervention at 717-232-7511.

Excerpted from: <https://childmind.org/article/signs-of-anxiety-in-teenagers/>