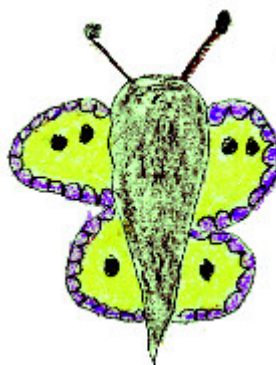


# Anxiety Disorders and Young People



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## **Anxiety Disorders**

Anxiety disorders are common for young people aged between 13 to 17 – the figure is around one in 25. Unfortunately anxiety disorders are commonly under recognised and under treated. The consequences of untreated anxiety can be substantial, interfering with the person's capacity to achieve their full potential.

### **What is anxiety?**

The word anxiety is used to describe the mental, physical and behavioural responses to feared and threatening situations. Anxiety is a normal response experienced by everyone at different times in their life. The reaction may include increased heart rate, sweating, trembling or the restlessness, amongst many other things.

In contrast, a person experiencing an anxiety disorder will usually have feelings of anxiety that are more intense and persistent, accompanied by a broad range of changes in their thoughts, behaviours and physical well-being which cause distress and affect performance and enjoyment in a range of life areas.

### **Types of anxiety disorder**

There are many different types of anxiety disorder. These include:-

- Specific phobias e.g. fear of animals, heights, seeing blood.
- Panic disorder – fear of collapse / sudden death.
- Social phobia – fear of negative comment from others.
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder – fear of contamination, or harm to others.
- Post traumatic stress disorder – fear of repetition of the initial trauma.
- Generalised anxiety disorder – fear of everything.

### **What to look for**

Whilst each disorder has its own specific pattern of symptoms, anxiety disorders have a number of features in common, in particular the physical response.

When our mind perceives some sort of danger, it automatically triggers the activation of our sympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system is that part of the nervous system which prepares people for action (the so called flight of fight mechanism). This in turn creates a "state of tension" or "arousal" with increased heart rate, increased breathing rate, muscle tension, sweats, shakes and a feeling of butterflies in the stomach.

People prone to anxiety will either be in a constant state of tension or have repeated intense bursts of tension / arousal called panic attacks.

Other common symptoms included are:-

- The persistent worrying and fears out of proportion to the situation.
- Inability to relax.
- Avoidance of feared situations.
- Excessive shyness.
- Social isolation or being withdrawn.
- Difficulties in concentration and attention.
- Poor sleep.
- Interference with working, social or family.

In general any young person who appears unusually fearful, uptight or avoidant may have an anxiety problem. It is also common for anxiety problems to impact on a young people's school / work performance and peer relationships.

## **Other problems**

Many young people who develop anxiety problems become quite depressed about their problem and may simultaneously suffer from a depressive disorder.

## **What can be done?**

The different disorders require slightly different approaches to treatment. One of the most commonly used treatments for disorders such as panic disorder, social phobia and generalised anxiety disorder is Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). In certain cases medication may also be required.

## **What can you do?**

Most young people in need of help seek support from people they know and trust. This usually means their peers, family members or other adults they perceive to be caring. They are generally reluctant to seek psychiatric help because of the stigma and myths associated with mental illness.

As a result young people are often more likely to seek psychiatric help within non-psychiatric settings, such as their own doctors, community health centres, youth workers, teachers and other non-government agencies. Because of this, professionals in these settings are extremely experienced in dealing with young people's emotional difficulties

and can in many instances provide treatment for young people with anxiety disorders. Sometimes young people need specialist treatment from a mental health service due to the severity of their symptoms.

## **Advice and referral**

If you are working with a young person who you think may have an anxiety disorder and you are not sure what to do, it is always best to contact someone with experience in this field and discuss the situation with them. Referral to a GP, a trained counsellor or specialist mental health worker may be necessary.

# Lancashire Early Intervention Service

## Spoke Teams

### **East Lancashire Spoke Team**

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