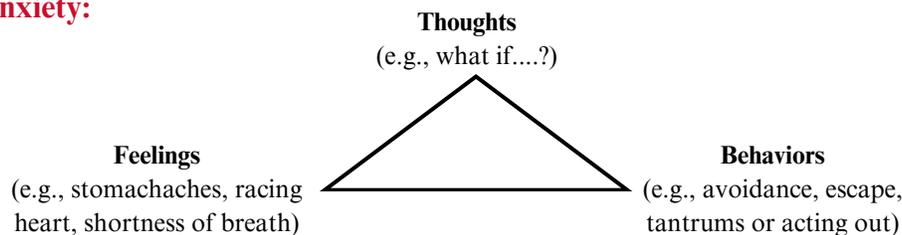




Quick Tips for Providers: *Educating Families about Anxiety*

Everyone has anxiety sometimes, and it can be helpful. For example, it stops us from running into the street, and reminds us to study for exams. Anxiety becomes a problem when it gets in the way of everyday activities and is overwhelming. For example, youth with anxiety disorders may struggle to participate in school and other activities, make or keep friendships, and/or have difficulty at home. Without help, anxiety and its difficulties can last into adulthood, leading to trouble with work, relationships, and other mental health disorders, like depression and substance abuse.

There are three parts to anxiety:



There are several different anxiety disorders. The most common ones that youth experience are:

- **Separation anxiety:** difficulty with being separated from caregivers. For example, being alone in a different room in the house, going to school, trouble sleeping alone, and worry that something bad is going to happen to them or their caregiver when they are not together.
- **Social anxiety:** excessive worry or fears in social situations with peers and adults. Youth may worry about being judged by others and/or have performance fears such as making mistakes in front of others or participating in class. These fears often lead kids to avoid social situations or they are very distressing.
- **Generalized anxiety:** excessive worry about everyday things, such as doing well in school, being perfect, health of self and others, perceived danger (e.g., being robbed/attacked, break-ins, car accidents, bad weather), and the future. This worry is hard to “turn off” and youth may have trouble sleeping, headaches, irritability, and other physical symptoms.
- **Specific phobias:** excessive fear about a variety of things, such as shots/blood draws, animals/insects, situations in the environment (dark, storms, heights, transportation), and other situations (choking, costumed characters). While these situations may make many people fearful, youth with a phobia show extreme distress and avoid these situations when presented with them.

What to do if your child is experiencing excessive anxiety:

There are several treatments available to help with problematic anxiety:

- **Therapy:** Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is the gold-standard psychotherapy for youth with anxiety. CBT involves teaching coping skills to reduce the fight or flight response (e.g., relaxation) and to help worry thoughts. Most importantly, CBT helps kids and families approach anxiety-provoking situations so kids learn to gradually tolerate and manage their anxiety in real-life situations, instead of avoiding them. This is called exposure therapy and has been shown to be the most helpful with improving anxiety.
- **Medication:** Selective-serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) are the gold-standard medication option for youth anxiety.
- **Combination of CBT and medication:** For youth with moderate to severe anxiety, the combination of CBT and medication has been shown to be the most helpful with improving anxiety symptoms.