

Addressing Anxiety and Supporting Your Child's Mental Health

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Anxiety is a common concern that can affect young people. Research indicates that individuals with learning difficulties are more prone to experiencing emotions like anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The experience of anxiety can involve a range of uncomfortable thoughts and feelings or behaviours in response to a stimulus (such as doing homework, going somewhere new, or thinking about school tomorrow). Emotional challenges can manifest in various ways, such as disruptive behaviour, difficulty focusing, tantrums, physical symptoms like stomach aches or heart palpitations, and reluctance to engage in school or college activities.

While anxiety is a normal part of life, it's crucial to be aware of its impact on your child's well-being.

Adolescents frequently navigate periods of anxiety and frustration, and with time and family support, they often overcome these temporary difficulties.

If your child is experiencing sustained, significant anxiety which impacts on their ability to engage in age-appropriate activities, they might benefit from assistance in developing effective coping strategies. Should you notice your child struggling to cope, there are proactive measures you can take and organizations available to offer support.

Supportive Steps for Parents:

Open Communication: Engage in honest conversations with your child, assuring them that you're there to listen whenever they're ready to talk. Model your own problem solving talk in age-appropriate ways to demonstrate to your child that you too need to problem solve.

Encourage Interests: Motivate your child to pursue extracurricular interests. If school or college proves challenging, helping them discover enjoyable activities can significantly boost their self-esteem.

Physical Activity: Promote physical activity, as it offers both physical and mental benefits. Participation in club or team sports fosters a sense of belonging and enhances self-esteem.

Healthy Eating: Encourage your child to maintain a balanced diet, as nutritional choices can impact mood and overall well-being.

Engage with School: Communicate with your child's teachers or counsellors. Schools often possess experience in assisting students and families. They can sometimes designate a staff member, like a counsellor, mentor, or nurse, who your child can turn to for support during the day or offer other support.

Professional Assistance: Consult your GP for guidance. They might recommend counselling or, if necessary, refer you to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

Sleep: Adequate sleep is an essential pillar of mental health, fostering cognitive resilience and emotional well-being by facilitating neural rejuvenation and stress regulation. Neglecting sleep can detrimentally impact mood, cognition, and overall mental wellness.

Support Services: Reach out to support organizations that specialize in aiding young individuals and their parents. A list of such organizations is provided below.

Remember, your active involvement and understanding can significantly contribute to your child's emotional well-being. By addressing anxiety and offering a supportive environment, you're helping them build resilience and effective coping skills for the future.

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Support articles and resources:

- The Dyslexia-Stress-Anxiety Connection Implications for Academic Performance and Social Interaction. International Dyslexia Association - bit.ly/45pfRx3
- Mental Health in Schools. Victorian Department of Education – Resources - bit.ly/3OSG69Y
- Social and Emotional Problems Related to Dyslexia. International Dyslexia Association - dyslexiaida.org/social-emotional/
- Specific Learning Disorders. Australian Psychological Society - bit.ly/45t1d82
- Understanding Learning Difficulties: a practical guide for parents - uldforparents.com/

Helpful organisations:

- **Australian Association of Psychologists**

For parents looking for a Psychologist.
Website: <https://www.aapi.org.au/>

- **Australian Psychological Society**

For parents looking for a Psychologist.
Website: psychology.org.au
Telephone: Toll free: 1800 333 497 (Phone: (03) 8662 3300)

- **Beyond Blue**

Anyone feeling depressed or anxious.
Website: beyondblue.org.au
Telephone: 1800 224 636

- **Kids Helpline**

Counselling for young people aged 5 to 25.
Website: kidshelpline.com.au
Telephone 1800 551 800

- **Lifeline**

Anyone having a personal crisis.
Website: lifeline.org.au
Telephone 13 11 14

These organizations can offer valuable insights and assistance as you navigate this journey alongside your child.