

**Anxiety in Children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

How common is anxiety in ADHD?

* Children and young people who have ADHD are more at risk of developing further mental health difficulties, including anxiety.
* Between 15% and 35% of children with ADHD have significant difficulties with anxiety.
* Children with ADHD are up to three times more likely to have an anxiety disorder than children without ADHD.
* The most common anxiety disorders in young people with ADHD are social (48%), generalised (34%), and separation (32%).
* As many as 25% of children with ADHD aged 6 to 8 years also meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder, compared with 8% of children the same age who do not have ADHD.

What’s the link between ADHD and anxiety?

* Children with ADHD have difficulties with their executive functions. These are skills which help children organise themselves, plan, manage time, and follow routines. Struggling with these skills can be stressful, and chronic stress can lead to anxiety.
* Children who have ADHD may struggle to manage stress due to their ADHD affecting how they manage their emotions. Children with ADHD may be overwhelmed with emotion and have difficulties thinking clearly about how to cope with stressful situations.
* Children and young people may develop anxiety after stressful events. This could include frequently moving house or school, the death of a close friend or relative, school-related issues such as exams or bullying, and witnessing parents fighting or arguing.

What are some signs of anxiety in children with ADHD?

* Some of ADHD’s core symptoms and symptoms of anxiety overlap. These include:
* Restlessness
* Difficulties with concentration
* Decreased attention
* More distractible
* Mood swings
* Having angry outbursts.
* Other behaviours that may be signs of anxiety in a young person with ADHD include:
* Clowning around too much in class
* Seeming irritable or argumentative
* Lying about schoolwork or other responsibilities which haven’t been met
* Withdrawing from other people
* Playing video games or watching TV nonstop
* Having an anxiety disorder alongside ADHD can exacerbate ADHD symptoms and problematic behaviour. This has been linked to reduced social functioning and quality of life.
* Sometimes anxiety can be misdiagnosed as ADHD, or vice versa. The two can look similar on the surface but be caused by very different reasons, as outlined below:
* Difficulties with paying attention could be due to a young person being distracted by their worries (anxiety), or by differences in the brain affecting focus (ADHD).
* Constant fidgeting could be due to nervous energy caused by anxiety, or by hyperactivity or difficulties with impulse control in ADHD.
* Having difficulties in making friends may be due to a child’s social anxiety, making them fearful of social situations. Children with ADHD may have difficulties in reading social cues due to being unable to focus, or their impulsive behaviour could alienate them from other children.
* There are also some key differences between ADHD and anxiety, including:
* Children with anxiety disorders often display compulsive or perfectionist behaviour, which isn’t as common in young people with ADHD.
* Children who have anxiety tend to worry more about socialising than children with ADHD.
* Children with anxiety may develop physical symptoms such as stomachaches, sweaty palms, and rapid breathing.
* Young people with ADHD tend to struggle with organisation. This isn’t as common in children with anxiety.

What things can help?

* **Tuning into children’s behaviour** – there is a lot of overlap between symptoms of ADHD and anxiety. If you notice them acting up more than usual or withdrawing, ask if something is causing them worry or unease.
* **Validating children’s feelings** – if a young person talks about anxiety, validate their feelings and work together to figure out the next steps to take.
* **Trying not to take things personally** - it can be really upsetting if a child comes home from school and says something rude or offensive. When children do this, they’re often letting off steam after a stressful day. You could take some time to think of ways to help children ‘decompress’, such as offering quiet time before asking about school.
* **Helping children see the big picture** – encourage children to reflect on what is causing their feelings. Talk about what you could do next time to relieve some of that anxiety.
* **Counselling and therapy** – counselling can help children to understand what’s making them anxious and allow them to work through the situation. Talking therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) can help children to manage their anxiety by changing the way they think and behave.
* Youth Access provides some counselling services across the UK for children and young people - [www.youthaccess.org.uk/](http://www.youthaccess.org.uk/)
* **Medication** – medicines for anxiety may be offered to children if their anxiety is severe or does not get better with talking therapies. Some treatments of ADHD may also treat some symptoms of anxiety.

Useful links and resources

* **Understood** – a good resource for understanding anxiety and how it presents in children with ADHD.
* [www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/add-adhd/adhd-and-anxiety-what-you-need-to-know](http://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/add-adhd/adhd-and-anxiety-what-you-need-to-know)
* **Young Minds** – accessible information for children and young people about anxiety.
* [www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/)
* **NHS** – information about anxiety in children and young people from the NHS.
* [www.nhs.uk/conditions/anxiety-disorders-in-children/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anxiety-disorders-in-children/) (England and Wales)
* [www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/anxiety-disorders-in-children](http://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/anxiety-disorders-in-children) (Scotland)
* **Childline** – accessible information about manging anxiety for children and young people.
* [www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/managing-your-anxiety/](http://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/your-feelings/anxiety-stress-panic/managing-your-anxiety/)

Telephone numbers

* **Front Door Children’s Services –** If you have any concerns about being able to keep any of your children safe. Tel. 0345 2000 109.
* **Care and Connect –** A service for individuals, families, children and young people in North Tyneside which provides advice and support to stay independent and connected with the community. Support is provided by telephone or face to face in community settings. Tel. 0191 643 7474.
* Website – [www.services.northtyneside.gov.uk/sign/Public.Provider.aspx?ID=4](http://www.services.northtyneside.gov.uk/sign/Public.Provider.aspx?ID=4)