



Living Well Newsletter

A monthly e-publication provided by Esse Health

Anxiety in Childhood

By Dr. Pat Amato, Esse Health Pediatrician

Is your child afraid of everything? Does your child have headaches, stomachaches, or fatigue than cannot be explained by medical illnesses? Is your child resistant to go to school? These can all be signs of an anxiety disorder. Anxiety in childhood is not an uncommon occurrence.

Anxiety is well known to be natural in certain times of life. We all know about separation anxiety in babies and school transition problems in childhood. We all have anxiety at some time in our life, but when is it pathologic or when does it become problematic?



Anxiety that disturbs normal everyday activities—inability to eat, trouble staying asleep or falling asleep, refusal to go to school or carry on normal activities—may be problematic.

Although we know that external stressors can contribute to anxiety, we also know that anxiety has a genetic basis. That is, it is not unusual for children that have anxiety disorders to have other family members that may be similarly affected. Also, we know that anxiety may be associated with other disorders, including obsessive compulsive disorder and depression.

What can a parent do to help their children deal with anxiety?

Some parents take over for their child rather than encouraging them to face their fears. Also, children tend to pattern their parents so it is important that if the parent has anxiety, that they try not to act frightened or afraid.

It may be useful to get the assistance of a counselor or psychologist who is skilled in cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT is a specific way to teach children to face their fears. The counselor will also help the child to learn relaxation techniques to help with the physical symptoms that accompany anxiety. At times, the anxiety may be overwhelming and it may be necessary to treat the child with anti-anxiety medication as well as counseling.

Remember, you are not alone. Talk to your pediatrician if you are concerned about anxiety. Many parents are reluctant to ask for help with behavioral issues, but your pediatrician will be able to help you find useful resources to deal with this problem. Anxious children may become anxious adults, so why not give your child coping skills for life?

Pat Amato, M.D., is a Pediatrician at
Esse Health Pediatric & Adolescent Medicine at Watson Road
9930 Watson Road, Suite 100
St. Louis, MO 63126
Phone: 314-965-5437

For more articles, please visit www.essehealth.com.

