

Generalized Anxiety Disorder in Children: Care Instructions



Your Care Instructions

We all worry. It's a normal part of life. But when your child has generalized anxiety disorder, he or she worries about lots of things. Your child has a hard time not worrying. This worry or anxiety interferes with your child's relationships, school, and life.

Your child may worry most days about things like school or friends. That may make your child feel tired, tense, or cranky. It can make it hard to think. It may get in the way of healthy sleep. Your child also may have stomachaches or headaches.

Counseling and medicine can both work to treat anxiety. They are often used together with lifestyle changes. Treatment can include a type of counseling called cognitive-behavioral therapy, or CBT. It can help your child learn to notice and replace thoughts that make your child worry. You also may have family counseling. It can help family members learn how to support your child.

Follow-up care is a key part of your child's treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if your child is having problems. It's also a good idea to know your child's test results and keep a list of the medicines your child takes.

How can you care for your child at home?

- Find a counselor who uses cognitive behavioral therapy.
- Work with your child's teachers and school counselor to help create support for your child at school.
- Encourage your child to be active for at least an hour each day. Your child may like to take a walk with you, ride a bike, or play sports.
- Help your child learn relaxation exercises. Your child's counselor can help. Free online videos and podcasts are also good resources. Examples of relaxation exercises include:
 - Deep breathing. This means taking slow, deep breaths.
 - Guided imagery. Your child imagines themselves in a certain setting that helps them feel calm and relaxed.
 - Progressive muscle relaxation. This involves tensing and relaxing each muscle group to reduce anxiety and muscle tension.
- Find things that help calm your child. Some ideas include drawing, playing with a pet, listening to music, and snuggling a favorite stuffed animal.
- Help your child get enough sleep.

- Set up a bedtime routine to help your child get ready for bed.
- Have your child go to bed at the same time every night and wake up at the same time every morning.
- Let your child talk about their fears. Be understanding when your child makes a mistake. This can help build trust.
- Give your child a chance to do something on their own, such as making crafts. That can help your child feel confident.
- Call your doctor if you think your child is having a problem with any medicines.

When should you call for help?

Call anytime you think your child may need emergency care. For example, call if:

- Your child feels that they can't stop from hurting themselves or someone else.

Where to get help 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

If your child talks about suicide, self-harm, a mental health crisis, a substance use crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress, get help right away. You can:

- Call the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline at **988**.
- Call **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**.
- Text **HOME** to **741741** to access the Crisis Text Line.

Consider saving these numbers in your phone.

Go to [988lifeline.org](https://www.988lifeline.org) for more information or to chat online.

Call your doctor now or seek immediate medical care if:

- Your child has new anxiety or anxiety that gets worse.
- Your child has been feeling sad, depressed, or hopeless or has lost interest in things that your child usually enjoys.
- Your child does not get better as expected.

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