

Anxiety in children and young people

Guidance for Parents and Carers

Gateshead Psychological Service
Wellbeing for Education Return Project



What is anxiety?

Anxiety is something we will all experience. It is a bodily response to threats which we have developed to survive. When we feel threatened, anxiety kicks in and makes us **fight, flee or freeze**.

Imagine a caveman responding to a bear outside their cave. They know that the bear will attack them so they either:

- try to **fight** it,
- try to **run away** from it,
- or **freeze**/play dead.



This is exactly how anxiety works, only nowadays the threats in our lives are not (usually) bears. When something happens to us and we perceive it is as a threat, we will respond to it with the fight, flee or freeze response.

Anxiety is a way of saving ourselves from harm but experiencing it too much when our lives are not in danger can **cause problems with our mental health and wellbeing**. [Here is a comic strip on anxiety to share with children](#)

What does anxiety look like in children and young people?

Common behavioural signs of anxiety are (but are not limited to):

- Being irritable, tearful or clingy
- Having difficulty sleeping, bad dreams or bed wetting
- Angry outbursts
- Avoiding activities they usually like
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Worrying a lot
- Having negative thoughts

Covid -19 and anxiety

Our experiences of Covid-19 have all been different and have impacted us all differently – the same goes for our children. They may be **anxious about the pandemic as a whole**, the news reports and their family and friends catching the virus (or perhaps even dying from it).

They may be **anxious about how the pandemic has impacted their own world** especially when it comes to things they are currently missing out on.

We have some videos for children and young people to help them with feelings of uncertainty. There's one for adults too.

[Managing Uncertainty – Children](#)

[Managing Uncertainty – Young People](#)

[Managing Uncertainty - Adults](#)



What should I do to support my child or young person?

Here are some top tips and [links](#) to support your child or young person if they are feeling anxious. If you feel that these don't help, seek support from your school or specialist services.

- Set aside time to [talk to your child](#) regularly.
- Talk about worries and anxieties during a mutual [activity](#) like drawing, building or during a walk.
- Create a self [soothe box](#) with your child for them to use when they feel very anxious.
- Help your child express their feelings with some [sentence starters](#).
- If you don't know where to start, try asking [these questions](#) to help get the conversation going.
- Try [tracking feelings](#) with your child regularly.
- Try some strategies from this [toolkit for parents](#).
- Here is a [useful resource on managing feelings about lockdown](#) from Mind for young people.