



Au Pair Extraordinaire

For parents who care

268 Bryanston Drive
Bryanston
2191
South Africa
Tel: 011 463-4438
Fax: 086 619-5491
Cell: 082 603-3512

enquiries@aupair-extraordinaire.co.za
www.aupair-extraordinaire.co.za
Reg. no. 2007/233816/23

Understanding childhood anxiety

written by Justine Loewenthal

Stress, worry and anxiety are common problems in children in today's fast-paced times, where children are expected to perform on all levels and are exposed to many stressors— academic, social and emotional.

Anxiety disorders and anxiety symptoms affect approximately one in eight children. Research has shown that most adults diagnosed with anxiety disorders showed signs of anxiety in childhood but were left untreated. With the correct holistic treatment plan for children, anxiety can be effectively managed.

Anxiety is normal, even necessary, for children to stay motivated to study for a test so they can do well or to practice hard for a sport so they can get into the team. But when constant anxiety stops a child from participating in, and enjoying, age appropriate activities, the anxiety may be a problem.

Anxiety disorders can co-occur with other disorders, such as depression, eating disorders and ADHD. Most children experience irrational anxiety at some time of their life, such as separation anxiety from one or both parents, fear of monsters, fear of the dark, fear of certain animals, and fear of strangers. These are normal fears that will usually pass, and not reason to believe the child has an anxiety disorder.

Types of anxiety disorders

There are six main groups of anxiety disorders:

- Generalised Anxiety Disorder
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Panic Disorder
- Phobia
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder.

Triggers for anxiety include

- birth of a sibling
- moving house
- changing schools
- parental conflict and separation
- illness or death of a family member
- natural disasters
- inability to master tasks in and out of school

Symptoms of anxiety

The feeling of anxiety is a subjective sense of worry, fear, and distress. This may be accompanied by physical symptoms, such as nausea, vomiting, excessive sweating, racing heartbeat, light-headedness, and headache. Sometimes these feelings of anxiety may be warranted, but for children who suffer from anxiety disorders, the anxiety is inappropriate for the situation. Other symptoms of anxiety include blushing, chest



Au Pair Extraordinaire

For parents who care

268 Bryanston Drive
Bryanston
2191
South Africa
Tel: 011 463-4438
Fax: 086 619-5491
Cell: 082 603-3512

enquiries@aupair-extraordinaire.co.za
www.aupair-extraordinaire.co.za
Reg. no. 2007/233816/23

pain, chronic fatigue, cold chills, dizziness, hyperactivity, tremors, night sweats, TMJ, phobias, difficulty concentrating, nightmares, incessant mind chatter, and irritability.

Signs of anxiety in children

1. Anticipating the worst; negative about life; depressed; pessimism; self criticism
2. Agitation or restlessness in many situations; anger; aggression; tantrums; oppositional and defiant behavior; irritability
3. Overly emotional behavior; crying often
4. Perfectionism
5. Obsessive tendencies and behavior
6. Sleeping difficulties, such as difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep, nightmares and night terrors
7. Watching for signs of danger, even when the situation is not threatening
8. Difficulty concentrating and poor memory because the child is preoccupied with worry and fear
9. Over or under eating

Tips for parents of anxious children

1. Be aware of your child's feelings and validate these. Your child will feel more calm if they feel understood and respected.
2. Be calm and rational when your child becomes anxious over a situation
3. Praise your child often for accomplishments
4. Be consistent in your child's routine
5. If an event is to happen in your child's life that is out of the ordinary, prepare him / her well in advance
6. Beware of passing on your own fears and insecurities to your child
7. Be consistent with discipline
8. Nurture your child's self esteem

Treatment options for childhood anxiety

Psychologists can offer help to children to overcome their fears and deal with their anxieties. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is often the therapeutic intervention of choice. Neurotherapy is an extremely effective, non-invasive treatment option, which addresses the brainwave dysregulations linked to the anxiety in order to treat the cause, and not the symptoms, of the anxiety. Medication may also be used to relieve anxiety in children, but it is recommended to see a psychologist at the same time. Two classes of medication are used: long-acting SSRIs and short-acting Anxiolytics. These must be prescribed and managed by a child psychiatrist.

