

# Parenting During the Pandemic: Helping Anxious Children & Parents

Conrad Hamric LCSW, LMFT <http://conradhamric.com>

Sarah Reidy LCSW, SEP [www.wholeselftherapydallas.com](http://www.wholeselftherapydallas.com)

## 8 WAYS A CHILD'S ANXIETY SHOWS UP AS SOMETHING ELSE

### 1. Anger

The perception of danger, stress or opposition is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.



Chandelliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.

### 4. Chandelliering



### 2. Difficulty Sleeping

In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.



### 5. Lack of Focus

Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.

## FOCUS

### 6. Avoidance

Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.



### 7. Negativity

People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.

### 3. Defiance

Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child's defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.



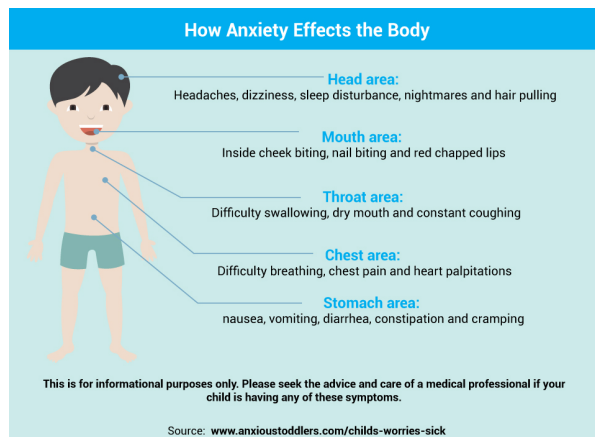
### 8. Overplanning

Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.



## Anxiety Symptoms in Kids

- Anxiety doesn't always present the same in kids as it does in adults
- A few others not mentioned - "What if" questions, excessive need for reassurance, excessive physical complaints, and perfectionism
- The graphic above is from <https://gozen.com/8-ways-a-childs-anxiety-shows-up-as-something-else/>



## For adults, common anxiety signs and symptoms include:

- Feeling nervous, restless or tense
- Having a sense of impending danger, panic or doom
- Having an increased heart rate
- Breathing rapidly (hyperventilation)
- Sweating
- Trembling
- Feeling weak or tired
- Trouble concentrating or thinking about anything other than the present worry
- Having trouble sleeping
- Experiencing gastrointestinal (GI) problems
- Having difficulty controlling worry
- Having the urge to avoid things that trigger anxiety

## Child Therapist's List of Top Worries by Age



All kids have fears. Your baby may panic if a stranger picks her up. Your toddler may be afraid of dogs. Your third grader may get a stomachache the day he's starting a new school. But some kids worry a lot more than others. It's always painful to watch a child suffer from anxiety, but it's especially difficult if you're not sure whether she's worrying too much and might need help.

The difference between normal worry and an anxiety disorder is severity. Although feeling anxious is a natural reaction to a stressful or dangerous situation, a child may need help if his anxiety is out of proportion, if it persists, or if it interferes with his life and healthy development.

### AGE 2 - 4 YEARS OLD



- Fear of the potty
- Fear of the dark
- Fear of shadows
- Fear of sleeping alone
- Fear of weather
- Fear of loud noises

### AGE 5 - 7 YEARS OLD

- Fear of the dark
- Fear of fire
- Fear of bad guys
- Fear of taking tests
- Fear of peer rejection
- Fear of doctors & shots
- Fear of bugs & animals



### AGE 8 - 11 YEARS OLD



- Fear of bad guys & ghosts
- Fear of being home alone
- Fear of dying
- Fear of sickness
- Fear of school failure
- Fear of throwing up at school
- Fear of peer rejection

### AGE 12 - 18 YEARS OLD



- Fear of their safety
- Fear of sickness
- Fear of throwing up at school
- Fear of failure in school or in sports
- Fear of school presentations
- Fear of how they look to others
- Fear of violence and global issues



### AGE 18 - 20 YEARS OLD



- Fear of germs & health
- Fear of being homeless
- Fear of death
- Fear of academic performance
- Fear of romantic rejection
- Fear of life purpose
- Fear of being an adult

[www.anxioustoddlers.com](http://www.anxioustoddlers.com)

## What does your child need?

- to feel safe
- to belong
- to have a feeling of control

## How can you help?

### Manage moods

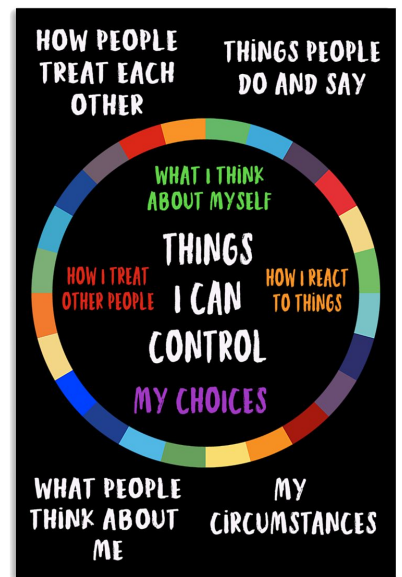
- Turn off the news and step away from social media. It's really overwhelming for many adults, which in turn affects the children. Try to be mindful and not let kids be exposed to too much news if possible. There is so much going on that is out of our control, which feels scary for both adults and kids.
- Focus on what you CAN control. Sometimes it's helpful to do this graphic shown with adults as well as kids. (see *graphic to the right*)
- Focus on facts regarding the virus. When they don't know what to expect, the fears can multiply.
- Work on positive self talk.
- Make sure to get some exercise and/or time outdoors.
- Herbal remedies like valerian root, GABA, and melatonin can be helpful at night.

### Maintain a consistent routine

- Keeping a schedule can be really helpful for parents and children. A predictable schedule offers structure that helps kids feel safe and secure. It takes away a lot of the drama over when it's time to do work vs play. The family identity gets solidified with routines where everyone has a role, the message is: We are a family who eats together, plays together, etc. (see *graphic to the right as example*)
- Continue to eat at regular times to avoid the all day snack fest that can also lead to tummy upset and irregular blood sugar levels.

### Connect

- Some children like to draw and express themselves that way. When a child has a specific fear, it can be helpful to ask them what they can imagine to fix it and have them draw the solution.
- Normalize the experience of anxiety right now. Model for kids how you deal with your anxiety. Practice meditation or yoga together, there are lots of great apps and you tube videos that can help with guidance.
- Make sure to get some exercise and/or time outdoors.
- Read together, play games together, create scavenger hunts to do together (some neighborhoods will join together to hang things in their windows for kids to look for while on walks.)



## Ideas to help kids with socialization

- If you have tablets or electronics available, facetime and zoom play dates can be really helpful. It's more difficult for smaller children, but kids around 5 can play imaginatively and share toys via video.
- Games like Battleship and Guess Who are easy to play via video when both parties have the games. Mad Libs are always fun and easy. Slightly older kids can play Scategories, Outburst, chess, checkers, or monopoly with duplicate sets of the games. You can also prop the screen up and have kids take turns drawing and guessing what the other is drawing or play hangman. You can have virtual lego challenges or art challenges.
- Older kids can also create word searches to send to friends as well as mailing letters or pictures.
- Caribu is an app that is geared more towards smaller children and allows them to share a screen for drawing or books to read together.
- Nintendo Switch and other video games can allow kids to connect with their friends and play virtually.
- For kids who are comfortable reading aloud, it can be fun for them to take turns reading to each other.
- For outdoor play dates, it can be helpful to set up blankets for kids to sit on that are 6 feet apart. That helps them stay in their designated area. They can also take turns drawing with chalk and creating obstacle courses to take turns doing.



## Links

Books About Managing Anxiety and Worry  
<https://www.amightygirl.com/blog?p=22612>

NPR Comic for Kids Explaining the Virus  
<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/02/28/809580453/just-for-kids-a-comic-exploring-the-new-coronavirus>

Working and Learning from Home During the COVID-19 Outbreak  
<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/COVID-19/Pages/Working-and-Learning-from-Home-COVID-19.aspx>

How to Avoid Burnout When You Have Little Ones  
<https://www.nytimes.com/article/parental-burnout-guide.html?referringSource=articleShare>

School's Out. Parental Burnout Isn't Going Away.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/23/parenting/parental-burnout-coronavirus.html?referringSource=articleShare>

List of children's books about nature  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/20/books/review/picture-books-nature-under-the-lilacs-eb-goodale.html?referringSource=articleShare>

## List of online resources

Free stories on audible  
<https://stories.audible.com/discovery>

Mega list of free subscriptions  
<https://kidsactivitiesblog.com/135609/list-of-education-companies-offering-free-subscriptions/>

Shark story time  
<https://www.facebook.com/atlanticwhiteshark/>

Storyline  
<https://www.storylineonline.net>

Scholastic Learn at Home:  
[classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/learnathome.html](http://classroommagazines.scholastic.com/support/learnathome.html)

Lunch doodles with Mo Willems!  
[www.kennedy-center.org/mowillems?fbclid=IwAR3bxqf2QS4xGv2LHh2LJZ1z-W8EgypM7QUjHkISUWAyXExy3j1\\_wAM107M](http://www.kennedy-center.org/mowillems?fbclid=IwAR3bxqf2QS4xGv2LHh2LJZ1z-W8EgypM7QUjHkISUWAyXExy3j1_wAM107M)

The Yo Yo and Mo Show  
<https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/mo-willems/>

Sciencemom is hosting daily classes. You can watch live or on youtube  
[www.youtube.com/channel/UC-QcZISbFb9EiIEQ41cVhxw](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-QcZISbFb9EiIEQ41cVhxw)

Animal cameras at the San Diego Zoo:  
[animals.sandiegozoo.org/live-cams](http://animals.sandiegozoo.org/live-cams)

Yoga for kids on youtube  
<https://awakeandmindful.com/best-kids-yoga-videos-on-youtube/>

Disney's Imagineering in a Box course at Khan Academy.  
[www.khanacademy.org/humanities/hass-storytelling/imagineering-in-a-box?CMP=ILC-DPFY19Q4wo0808190814190031F](http://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/hass-storytelling/imagineering-in-a-box?CMP=ILC-DPFY19Q4wo0808190814190031F)

Google arts and culture, list of museums  
<https://artsandculture.google.com/partner?hl=en>

Virtual tours through museums  
[www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours](http://www.travelandleisure.com/attractions/museums-galleries/museums-with-virtual-tours)