

# **ANXIETY IN YOUNG CHILDREN**

## **A Military Parents' Guide through Transition**

### **A Coordinated Approach to Diagnosis and Support**



One in the  
"Leaving Your Footprints" Series of  
Military Family Guides through Transition



# **ANXIETY in YOUNG CHILDREN**

## **A Military Parents' Guide through Transition**

This document is a parents' guide to understanding anxiety in young children and learning how to communicate with professionals and other parents about issues related to transitions for highly mobile children with anxiety disorder. Although written with parents in mind, it also is instructive and useful for educators and other professionals.

You will find in this document:

1. Three Infographics, designed to provide a concise overview of anxiety disorder:
  - ✦ Key Points in Identifying Anxiety Disorders
  - ✦ Key Points in Treating and Managing Anxiety Disorders
  - ✦ Key Family, School and Community Roles
2. A four-page Anxiety in Young Children Dialogue Guide that provides instruction and advice for parents and professionals who would like to host a facilitator-guided conversation about transitions with children who have been diagnosed with anxiety disorders.
3. Recommended resources from numerous professional organizations.

***You are encouraged to print and reproduce all documents.***

*We encourage you to share the material in any medium or format with appropriate acknowledgment of the Military Child Education Coalition®. You may adapt the material as long as the intent remains unchanged and the modifications are explicitly noted.*

*These Infographics and Dialogue Guide were developed as a collaborative project by personnel from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC), and the Child and Family Behavioral Health System-Program Management Office, United States Army Medical Command.*

# IDENTIFYING ANXIETY DISORDER

## Anxiety

- A natural response to stress
- Key to healthy development and normal functioning with challenges in life
- Concerning when excessive
- Early identification of anxiety disorder can decrease negative functioning and persistence into adulthood

## The Signs of Anxiety Disorder (the Four "Ds")

- **DISPROPORTIONATE?** greater response to stress than is normal
- **DISRUPTIVE?** interferes with child's daily functioning
- **DISTRESSING?** to the child, family and other
- **DURATION?** continues over a period of time

## Military Lifestyle

- Presents stressors but is NOT the cause of anxiety
- 1/3 of military children screened positive on measures assessing risk for anxiety

## Anxiety Disorder Prevalence

- 8-10% in pre-adolescents
- 9-15% in adolescents
- High rates of anxiety in children who are also ADHD (40%) and on the autism spectrum (80%)

## Evaluation Requires...

- Interview & screening, to include family history
- Appropriate physical exam, including labs
- Team approach, that includes:
  - Parent and child
  - School-based professionals
  - Medical providers
  - Therapists

## TREATING & MANAGING ANXIETY DISORDER

### Treatment of...

- **Mild Anxiety Disorder:** Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- **Moderate to Severe Anxiety Disorder:** CBT and medications

### CBT Model

- **Exposure:** graduated and controlled exposure to feared situation
- **Cognitive Restructuring:** identify maladaptive thoughts and introduce coping-focused thinking
- **Somatic Management :** techniques such as deep breathing, relaxation, etc.
- **Maintenance (Relapse Prevention) -** consolidate anxiety management skills

### When Medication is Recommended

- SSRIs are the medication of choice (Fluoxetine, Sertraline and Escitalopram)
- SSRIs can be effectively provided by the Primary Care Manager
- A "Start Low, Go Slow" dosing approach is best for optimal results
- Maintenance is necessary to prevent relapse
- Discontinuation of medication should be at a low stress time such as summer

## KEY FAMILY, SCHOOL & COMMUNITY ROLES

### All Stakeholders

- Create a trusted network of relationships among child and the family, school, military support systems & community-based supports
- Connect to each other - EFMP can be a good bridge
- Collaborate - share resources
- Communicate - intentional and purposeful conversation
- Common goal - to help children thrive

### Schools

- Every child must have a trusted adult to connect with daily while at school
- Connect school with other professionals if your child is being treated
- Anxiety in school can look like many other behaviors/disorders.

### Families

- Create a positive mindset of hope: "I can do it!"
- Effectively praise child
- Model positive coping behaviors
- Practice self-care
- Support and teach children to manage day-to-day stress without eliminating it (to build resiliency)
- Reduce the stigma
- Listen to and believe children

### Military Families in Particular

- Remain vigilant during transitions
- Ask for referrals for qualified practitioners at new location
- Know resources in the community and military:
  - Military Treatment Facility/Tricare
  - Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP)
  - Military Family Life Consultants (MFLC)
  - School Liaison Officers
  - School District Services
  - Support Groups

# ANXIETY in YOUNG CHILDREN DIALOGUE GUIDE

## *For Military Families*

### Introduction

Military connected students generally move six to eight times during their twelve years of schooling. They transfer back and forth between DODEA and public schools in communities where they are assigned. As they move among school settings, they learn that not all schools and health providers are equally prepared to provide needed services for children who have ongoing behavioral health challenges.

During the 2019 Military Child Education Coalition National Training Seminar (NTS), MCEC convened experts, practitioners and families to consider how families could be better empowered to act on behalf of students with two childhood behavioral health issues: anxiety disorders and depression. These stakeholders co-created *Infographics* to communicate basic information in a concise way about both of these challenges. Using these infographics, *Dialogue Guides* were created to help families, military staff members, educators and local providers hold conversations to build sensitivity, understanding and support for children who cope with these challenges. These Guides are particularly helpful as families prepare to move away from communities or after they have moved into new communities.

This booklet contains the Infographics and Dialogue Guide for **anxiety in young children**.

### What is Anxiety?

Almost all children feel some level of anxiety in new situations, such as the first day of school, introductions to a new social group, or preparing for a big test. In most cases, those feelings disappear as the child eases into the situation and becomes comfortable with the environment. When these feelings do not disappear but continue -- and even intensify -- they may be a sign of a childhood **anxiety disorder**.

Military families, of course, are not exempt from the diagnosis of childhood anxiety disorder or from the fear that their child is exhibiting symptoms of the disorder. Because of frequent Permanent Change of Station (PCS) moves, they may, however, discover inconsistencies in medical care from one community to the next. When that happens, families often feel alone in their search to find appropriate caregivers and support. This set of Infographics and the attached Dialogue Guide provide a starting point for creating both understanding and common discussion points to be shared with others in the same situation.

The Infographics are designed to provide the basis for understanding for families and others, as they:

1. Identify anxiety disorders
2. Understand the treatment and management of anxiety disorders
3. Determine the roles that can be shared by families, the community and the schools in supporting children with anxiety disorders

The Dialogue Guide provides conversation starters to support communication among those who should be a part of the support community.

## Exploring the infographics

The three infographics capture the major themes shared by the panel of experts\* during the NTS.

As you examine the three infographics:

1. Ask yourself if there is anything new or surprising to you.
2. Imagine how these issues impact the life of a child and a family.
3. Now, think about the number of times these issues must be explored with a new set of providers and educators in a new community.

And, now you're ready to enter into a dialogue!

## Participating in a Dialogue

Dialogue is a special kind of conversation. It is not a debate or a discussion. In dialogue, we endeavor to learn what others know and believe. More importantly, we want to create understanding that helps people act together on an issue. There are two types of questions that focus the dialogue: **Reaction Questions** and **Application Questions**.

**Reaction questions** surface perspectives of the individuals involved in the conversation. They seek to uncover what people know and believe. In conversing through reaction questions, it is helpful to hold interaction until everyone in the group has had a chance to respond to a question. Then, the facilitator can begin to take comments or questions from among the participants and permit them to address questions to each other.

In dialogue, we are not trying to convince anyone of our position. Rather, we are seeking to understand the perspective of another that may contribute to a greater understanding of the issue in general, or the issue in a particular situation.

### **Sample Reaction Questions:**

#### About the issue:

1. Why is the impact of a diagnosis of anxiety disorder on military connected students important to you?
  - in terms of programs and services?
  - in terms of relationships between families and schools?
2. In your experience, how does a diagnosis of anxiety disorder contribute to the stress that families experience in changing assignments?
3. What do your colleagues say about the need to build understanding between families and schools around a diagnosis of anxiety disorder?

#### About the Anxiety Disorder Diagnosis:

1. In what ways does an anxiety disorder diagnosis differ from other conditions? What are the implications?

2. In your experience, how do families react to a diagnosis of anxiety disorder in their young children?
3. In your experience, what do parents say about the use of medication for anxiety disorder in young children?
4. In your experience, how do school staff talk about the use of medication to manage anxiety disorder?
5. Why is a common understanding of an anxiety disorder diagnosis important to you?
  - in terms of programs and services?
  - In terms of relationships among the parents, pediatrician/family doctor and school.

#### About Anxiety Disorder Interventions:

1. The research suggests that the combination of medication and cognitive behavioral therapy (e.g., parent training, behavior management, etc.) is most effective. In your view, what would this teaming look like?
2. For those children requiring medication, research suggests that establishing the correct dosage is important in managing anxiety. In what ways does teaming together (practitioners, families, school, etc.) aid in the correct dosing and maintenance, and the effectiveness of a behavioral intervention?

**Application Questions** help participants use the information they have gained in addressing a problem they face. They help the group to think and act together. Application questions help the group to identify leverage points, propose actionable strategies and find key allies.

#### ***Sample Application Questions***

1. Recall a time when you needed support in managing anxiety symptoms. How might the approaches described in the infographics have changed that story?
2. Given the information on the infographics, how might parents be expected to respond to the information? Administrators and teachers? Doctors?
3. Where could this information impact current practice?
4. How might parents, teachers, administrators, medical staff, related service providers, students, coaches, chaperones. etc. be better prepared to understand the need to put these ideas into practice?
5. Recall a time when a young child diagnosed with anxiety disorder had to make a transition from one location and school to another. How might the information in this infographic have helped the family plan for that transition?
6. Students have an active role to play in managing their anxiety symptoms. How can we involve students in the teaming process in age appropriate ways?
7. How might we prepare students for a greater self-advocacy around anxiety?

## Hosting a Dialogue

The purpose of a dialogue is to help people discover that they have a common need to work together on the issue. When we consider the possible impact of a diagnosis of anxiety disorder on an entire family, we must build a common understanding of what to look for, what we're looking at, who has the need for support and what support they need.

Who should be invited to the dialogue? All interested stakeholder, to include (but not limited to):

- Parents of children who have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder or similar behavioral issues
- Educators, to include teachers, in addition to those responsible for behavioral health oversight
- EFMP (Exceptional Family Member Program) personnel from the military installation
- Mental health professionals

A facilitator manages the conversation by setting and maintaining ground rules that guide interaction. Choose a dialogue facilitator that will be welcoming and neutral in interacting with the group. Working together, members of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education's IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) Partnership created a Facilitator's Guide. This guide will help you to think about organizing and hosting a dialogue, and it can be found at this link:

[www.ideapartnership.org/media/documents/Dialogue\\_Guide\\_Facilitator\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.ideapartnership.org/media/documents/Dialogue_Guide_Facilitator_Handbook.pdf)

The Georgia Department of Education also has a very useful guide based on the dialogue strategy. Their guide (<http://www.gaspedg.org/resource/circles-adults-focusing-educationcafe-dialogue-implementation-guide>) suggests a particular practice that they have found to be quite effective. In their dialogues, there is no crosstalk until all have spoken. Participants do not react or ask question of each other until everyone has contributed. In their view, this helps participants think about their perspective in relation to the array of other perspectives before they speak.

## Taking the First Step

This material is meant to help you begin important conversations about anxiety, and it can also support conversations about other important issues. Take the first step to open the conversation. Your advocacy will help in **leaving a footprint behind** as you work to foster a greater understanding in your community about anxiety disorders and all behavioral health issues.



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\*Panel participants:

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## TOOLS and RESOURCES about ANXIETY

### **Anxiety Disorders in Children - Websites**

- Anxiety and Depression Association of America resources:  
<https://adaa.org/>
- Comprehensive Information about Childhood Anxiety:  
<https://infoaboutkids.org/emotions/common-emotional-conditions/anxiety/>
- General Information and Effective Treatments:  
<https://effectivechildtherapy.org/concerns-symptoms-disorders/disorders/fear-worry-and-anxiety/>
- Child Mind Institute, an independent, national nonprofit dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders.  
<https://childmind.org/topics/concerns/anxiety/> and  
<https://childmind.org/topics/disorders/anxiety-disorders/>
- Child Mind Institute – Study: Understanding the Online Lives of Children and Adolescents  
[file:///C:/Users/Joan%20Barrett/Documents/M.C.E.C/INSTRUCTIONAL%20SYSTEMS%20DESIGN%20I/NFO/Resources%20--%20General/Childrens Mental Health Report 2019.pdf](file:///C:/Users/Joan%20Barrett/Documents/M.C.E.C/INSTRUCTIONAL%20SYSTEMS%20DESIGN%20I/NFO/Resources%20--%20General/Childrens%20Mental%20Health%20Report%202019.pdf)
- One in Five Minds Campaign, focused on supporting families through their journeys with behavioral health issues primarily in the San Antonio, TX, area. The resources are universal.  
<https://www.1in5minds.org/who-we-are/about-us>
- Intervention Central: Behavioral Interventions:  
<https://www.interventioncentral.org/behavioral-intervention-modification>
- PBIS World (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) resources:  
[www.pbisworld.com](http://www.pbisworld.com)

### **Books for Parents**

- CBT Toolbox for Children and Adolescents by Lisa Phifer
- Freeing Your Child from Anxiety by Tamar E. Chansky, PhD
- Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step By Step Guide for Parents by Ronald Rapee and Ann Wignall
- Interventions for Achievement and Behavior Problems in a Three-Tier Model Including RTI, Edited by Mark Shinn and Hill Walker, Published by NASP
- Parenting Your Anxious Child with Mindfulness and Acceptance – Christopher McCurry
- Pre-Referral Intervention Manual, 4th Edition, by Stephen McCarney and Kathy Cummins Wunderlich
- Treating Childhood and Adolescent Anxiety: A Guide for Caregivers by Eli Lebowitz and Haim Omer
- Worried No More: Help and Hope for Anxious Children by Aureen P. Wagner

## **Books for Children and Adolescents**

- [Anxiety Sucks! A Teen Survival Guide](#) by Natasha Daniels
- [David and the Worry Beast](#) by Anne Marie Guanci
- [Hey Warrior!](#) By Karen Young
- [My Anxious Mind: A Teen's Guide to Managing Anxiety and Panic](#) by Michael A. Tompkins
- [Outsmarting Worry: An Older Kids' Guide to Managing Anxiety](#) by Dawn Huebner
- [The Huge Bag of Worries](#) by Virginia Ironside
- [Wemberley Worried](#) by Kevin Henkes
- [What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety](#) by Dawn Huebner
- [When My Worries Get Too Big! A Relaxation Book for Children Who Live With Anxiety](#) by Kari Dunn Buron
- [Wilma Jean the Worry Machine](#) by Julia Cook

## **Tools, Apps, and Activities**

### **Glitter jars**

- <https://www.firefliesandmudpies.com/glitter-timers/>

### **STAR breathing charts and other coping tools**

- <https://store.copingskillsforkids.com/products/deep-breathing-printables>
- <http://www.plantlovegrow.com/anxiety--insecurity.html>
- <https://www.anxietybc.com/parenting/worksheets>

### **Mindfulness apps and activities**

- <https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health/top-meditation-iphone-android-apps>
- <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/mindfulness-for-children-kids-activities/>
- <https://gozen.com/>
- <http://leftbrainbuddha.com/resources-for-teaching-mindfulness-to-your-children/>