



ANXIETY AND TEENS

Cats Connected: Anxiety and Teens

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More American Teenagers Than Ever Are Suffering From Severe Anxiety

By: Benoit Denizet-Lewis at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/11/magazine/why-are-more-american-teenagers-than-ever-suffering-from-severe-anxiety.html>

Anxiety is the most common mental-health disorder in the United States, affecting **nearly one-third of both adolescents and adults**, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

Sometimes there are good reasons to feel anxious. For many young people, particularly those raised in abusive families or who live in neighborhoods besieged by poverty or violence, anxiety is a rational reaction to unstable, dangerous circumstances.

Teenagers raised in more affluent communities might seemingly have less to feel anxious about. But Suniya Luthar, a professor of psychology at Arizona State University who has studied distress and resilience in both well-off and disadvantaged teenagers, has found that privileged youths are among the most emotionally distressed young people in America.

Over the last decade, **anxiety has overtaken depression** as the most common reason college students seek counseling services. In its annual survey of students, the American College Health Association found a significant increase — to **62 percent in 2016 from 50 percent in 2011** — of undergraduates reporting “overwhelming anxiety” in the previous year.

Surveys that look at symptoms related to anxiety are also telling. In 1985, the Higher Education Research Institute at U.C.L.A. **began asking incoming college freshmen** if they “felt overwhelmed by all I had to do” during the previous year. In 1985, 18 percent said they did. By 2010, that number had increased to 29 percent. Last year, **it surged to 41 percent**. Severe anxiety is becoming a larger and larger problems for American teens and young adults.



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Stress

By: Teens Health at Nemours at <http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/stress.html?ref=search&WT.ac=msh-t-dtop-en-search-clk>

Feeling like there are too many pressures and demands on you? Losing sleep worrying about tests and schoolwork? Eating on the run because your schedule is just too busy?

You're not alone. Everyone feels stressed out at times. But you can avoid getting too stressed out by handling everyday pressures and problems, staying calm, asking for help when you need it, and making time to relax.

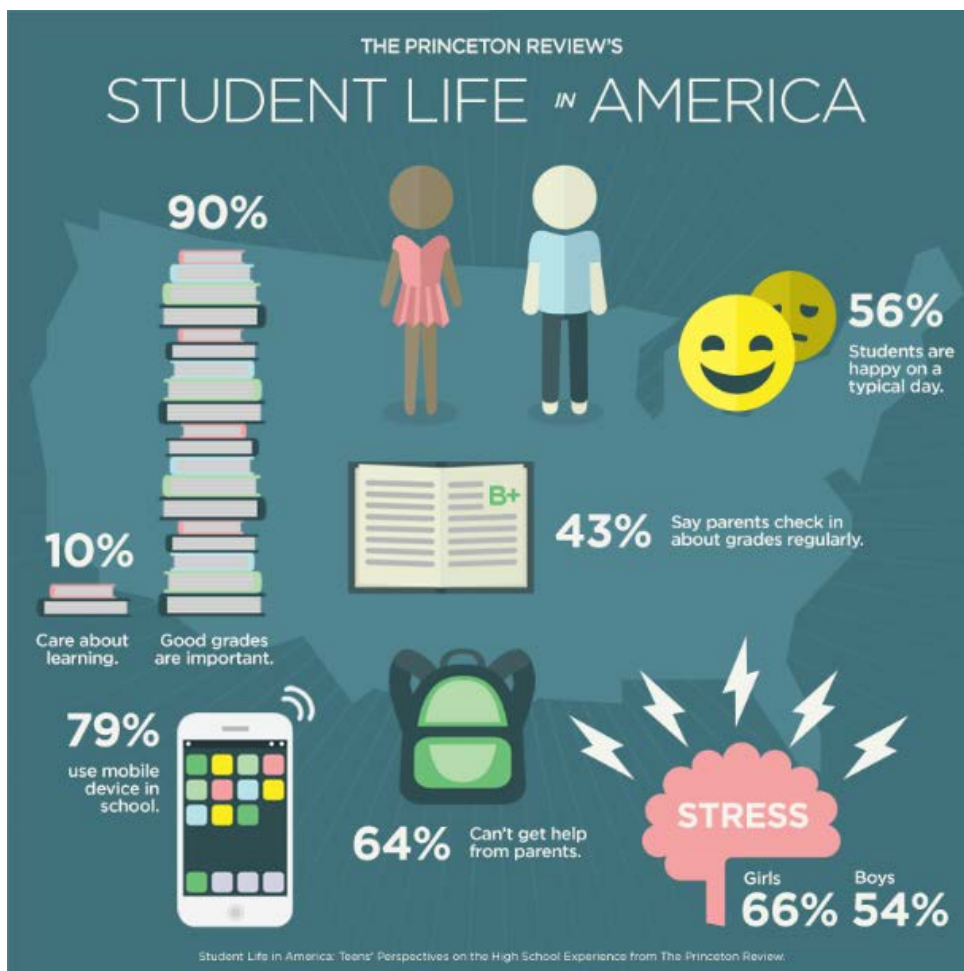
What Is Stress?

Stress is a response to pressure or threat. Under stress we may feel tense, nervous, or on edge. The stress response is physical, too. Stress triggers a surge of a hormone called **adrenaline** that temporarily affects the nervous system. As a result, when you're nervous or stressed you might feel your heartbeat or breathing get faster, your palms get sweaty, or your knees get shaky.

The stress response is also called the **fight-or-flight-response**. It's an automatic response that prepares us to deal with danger.

But a situation doesn't have to be physically dangerous to activate the stress response. Everyday pressures can activate it, too. For example, you might feel stress before taking a test or a giving class presentation, facing a tough opponent in a sport, or going on stage for a performance.

Even in these situations (which are hardly life-or-death), the stress response activates to help you perform well under pressure. It can help you rise to a challenge and meet it with alertness, focus, and strength. Facing these challenges — rather than backing away from them — is a part of learning and growing.



When Stress Doesn't Ease Up

Stress doesn't always happen in response to things that are immediate and over with quickly. Ongoing or long-term events, like coping with a divorce or moving to a new neighborhood or school, can cause stress, too.

Long-term stressful situations can produce a lasting, low-level stress that can leave a person feeling tired or overwhelmed. Finding ways to cope with the difficult situation can prevent this from happening, and ease stress that's been lasting. Sometimes, people need help to deal with difficult situations that lead to intense or lasting stress.



Keep Stress Under Control

Here are some things that can help keep stress under control:

- 🐾 **Take a stand against overscheduling.** If you're feeling stretched, consider cutting out an activity or two, choosing just the ones that are most important to you.
- 🐾 **Be realistic.** Don't try to be perfect — no one is. Don't put unnecessary pressure on yourself. If you need help with something like schoolwork or dealing with a loss, ask for it.
- 🐾 **Get a good night's sleep.** Getting **enough sleep** helps keep your body and mind in top shape, making you better equipped to deal with any negative stressors. Because the biological "sleep clock" shifts during adolescence, many teens prefer staying up a little later at night and sleeping a little later in the morning. But if you stay up late and still need to get up early for school, you may not get all the hours of sleep you need.
- 🐾 **Learn to relax.** The body's natural antidote to stress is called the **relaxation response**. It's the opposite of stress, and is a feeling of well-being and calm. You can activate the relaxation response simply by relaxing. Learn and practice easy breathing exercises, then use them when you're caught up in stressful situations.

- 🐾 **Make time for fun.** Build time into your schedule for activities you enjoy — read a good book, play with your pet, laugh, do a hobby, make art or music, spend time with positive people, or be in nature.
- 🐾 **Treat your body well.** Get **regular exercise** and eat well to help your body function at its best. When you're stressed out, it's easy to eat on the run or eat junk food. But under stressful conditions, you need good nutrition more than ever.
- 🐾 **Find the upside.** Your outlook, attitude, and thoughts influence the way you see things. Is your cup half full or half empty? A healthy dose of **optimism** can help you make the best of stressful circumstances — and even recognize something you've learned from the situation.
- 🐾 **Solve the little problems.** Take action to solve problems that crop up. For example, if you're stressed out over **homework**, size up the situation and figure out ways to handle it better.
- 🐾 **Build positive relationships.** Knowing that there are people who believe in us boosts our ability to deal with challenges. **Ask for help** and support when you need it. Share what you're going through — including the good things that are happening.

You can do things to handle the stress that comes along with any new challenge, good or bad. Stress-management skills work best when they're practiced ahead of time, not just when the pressure's on. Knowing how to "de-stress" and calm yourself can help you get through challenging circumstances.

Do your best.

Instead of aiming for perfection, which isn't possible, be proud of however close you get.



What is Anxiety?

By: Teens Health at Nemours at <http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/anxiety.html#>

It's completely normal to worry when things get hectic and complicated. But if worries become overwhelming, you may feel that they're running your life. If you spend an excessive amount of time feeling worried or nervous, or you have difficulty sleeping because of your anxiety, pay attention to your thoughts and feelings. They may be symptoms of an anxiety problem or disorder.

Anxiety is a natural human reaction that involves mind and body. It serves an important basic survival function: Anxiety is an alarm system that is activated whenever a person perceives danger or threat.

When the body and mind react to danger or threat, a person feels physical sensations of anxiety — things like a faster heartbeat and breathing, tense muscles, sweaty palms, a queasy stomach, and trembling hands or legs. These sensations are part of the body's fight-flight response. They are caused by a rush of adrenaline and other chemicals that prepare the body to make a quick getaway from danger. They can be mild or extreme.

The fight-flight response happens instantly when a person senses a threat. It takes a few seconds longer for the thinking part of the brain (the **cortex**) to process the situation and evaluate whether the threat is real, and if so, how to handle it. If the cortex sends the all-clear signal, the fight-flight response is deactivated and the nervous system can relax.

If the mind reasons that a threat might last, feelings of anxiety might linger, keeping the person alert. Physical sensations such as rapid, shallow breathing; a pounding heart; tense muscles; and sweaty palms might continue, too.

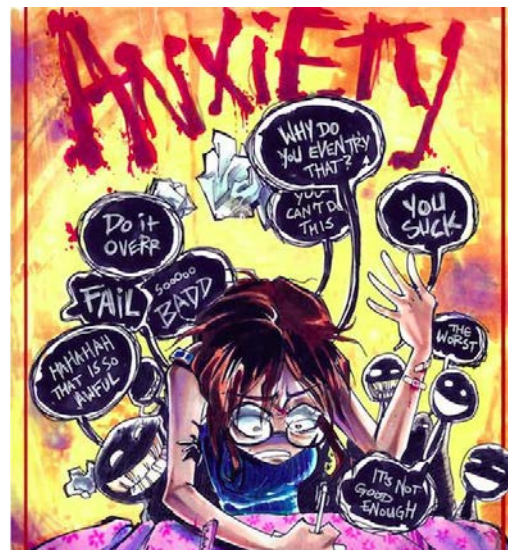
Normal Anxiety

Everyone experiences feelings of anxiety from time to time. Anxiety can be described as a sense of uneasiness, nervousness, worry, fear, or dread of what's about to happen or what might happen. While fear is the emotion we feel in the presence of threat, anxiety is a sense of anticipated danger, trouble, or threat.

Feelings of anxiety can be mild or intense (or anywhere in between), depending on the person and the situation. Mild anxiety can feel like a sense of uneasiness or nervousness. More intense anxiety can feel like fear, dread, or panic. Worrying and feelings of tension and stress are forms of anxiety. So are stage fright and the shyness that can come with meeting new people.

It's natural for new, unfamiliar, or challenging situations to prompt feelings of anxiety or nervousness. Facing an important test, a big date, or a major class presentation can trigger normal anxiety. Although these situations don't actually threaten a person's safety, they can cause someone to feel "threatened" by potential embarrassment, worry about making a mistake, fitting in, stumbling over words, being accepted or rejected, or losing pride. Physical sensations — such as a pounding heart, sweaty hands, or a nervous stomach — can be part of normal anxiety, too.

Because anxiety makes a person alert, focused, and ready to head off potential problems, a little anxiety can help us do our best in situations that involve performance. But anxiety that's too strong can interfere with doing our best. Too much anxiety can cause people to feel overwhelmed, tongue-tied, or unable to do what they need to do.



General worriers tend to spend an average of 55 minutes a day worrying, while people with an anxiety disorder often spend over 300 minutes a day worrying – **over 5 times as much.**

Anxiety Disorders

Anxiety disorders are mental health conditions that involve excessive amounts of anxiety, fear, nervousness, worry, or dread. Anxiety that is too constant or too intense can cause a person to feel preoccupied, distracted, tense, and always on alert.

Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health conditions. They affect people of all ages — adults, children, and teens. There are many different types of anxiety disorders, with different symptoms. They all have one thing in common, though: Anxiety occurs too often, is too strong, is out of proportion to the present situation, and affects a person's daily life and happiness.

Symptoms of an anxiety disorder can come on suddenly, or they can build gradually and linger until a person begins to realize that something is wrong. Sometimes anxiety creates a sense of doom and foreboding that seems to come out of nowhere. It's common for those with an anxiety disorder to not know what's causing the emotions, worries, and sensations they have.

Different anxiety disorders are named to reflect their specific symptoms.

- ❁ **Generalized anxiety.** With this common anxiety disorder, a person worries excessively about many things. Someone with generalized anxiety may worry excessively about school, the health or safety of family members, and the future. They may always think of the worst that could happen. Along with the worry and dread, people with generalized anxiety have physical symptoms, such as chest pain, headache, tiredness, tight muscles, stomachaches, or vomiting. Generalized anxiety can lead a person to miss school or avoid social activities. With generalized anxiety, worries can feel like a burden, making life feel overwhelming or out of control.
- ❁ **Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD).** For a person with OCD, anxiety takes the form of obsessions (bad thoughts) and compulsions (actions that try to relieve anxiety).
- ❁ **Phobias.** These are intense fears of specific situations or things that are not actually dangerous, such as heights, dogs, or flying in an airplane. Phobias usually cause people to avoid the things they are afraid of.
- ❁ **Social phobia (social anxiety).** This intense anxiety is triggered by social situations or speaking in front of others. An extreme form called **selective mutism** causes some kids and teens to be too fearful to talk at all in certain situations.
- ❁ **Panic attacks.** These episodes of anxiety can occur for no apparent reason. With a panic attack, a person has sudden and intense physical symptoms that can include a pounding heart, shortness of breath, dizziness, numbness, or tingling feelings caused by over-activity of the body's normal fear response. **Agoraphobia** is an intense fear of panic attacks that causes a person to avoid going anywhere a panic attack could possibly occur.
- ❁ **Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).** This type of anxiety disorder results from a traumatic or terrifying past experience. Symptoms include flashbacks, nightmares, or constant fear after the fact.

DID YOU KNOW?

Anxiety disorders affect **25.1%** of children between 13 and 18 years old. Research shows that untreated children with anxiety disorders are at higher risk to perform poorly in school, miss out on important social experiences, and engage in substance abuse.

National Institute of Mental Health

How Anxiety Disorders Affect People

For people dealing with anxiety disorders, symptoms can feel strange and confusing at first. For some, the physical sensations can be strong and upsetting. For others, feelings of doom or fear that can happen for no apparent reason can make them feel scared, unprotected, and on guard. Constant worries can make a person feel overwhelmed by every little thing. All this can affect someone's concentration, confidence, sleep, appetite, and outlook.

People with anxiety disorders might avoid talking about their worries, thinking that others might not understand. They may fear being unfairly judged, or considered weak or scared. Although anxiety disorders are common, people who have them may feel misunderstood or alone.

Some people with anxiety disorders might blame themselves. They may feel embarrassed or ashamed, or mistakenly think that anxiety is a weakness or a personal failing. Anxiety can keep people from going places or doing things they enjoy. The good news is, doctors today understand anxiety disorders better than ever before and, with treatment, a person can feel better.

What Causes Anxiety Disorders?

Experts don't know exactly what causes anxiety disorders. Several things seem to play a role, including genetics, brain biochemistry, an overactive fight-flight response, stressful life circumstances, and learned behavior.

Someone with a family member who has an anxiety disorder has a greater chance of developing one, too. This may be related to genes that can affect brain chemistry and the regulation of chemicals called neurotransmitters. But not everyone with a family member who has an anxiety disorder will develop problems with anxiety.

Things that happen in a person's life can also set the stage for anxiety disorders. Frightening traumatic events that can lead to PTSD are a good example.

Growing up in a family where others are fearful or anxious can "teach" a child to view the world as a dangerous place. Likewise, someone who grows up in an environment that is actually dangerous (if there is violence in the family or community, for example) may learn to be fearful or expect the worst.

Although everyone experiences normal anxiety in certain situations, most people — even those who experience traumatic situations — don't develop anxiety disorders. And people who develop anxiety disorders can get relief with proper treatment and care. They can learn ways to manage anxiety and to feel more relaxed and at peace.



Social Anxiety Disorder is equally common among men and women and typically begins around age 13.



What to Do

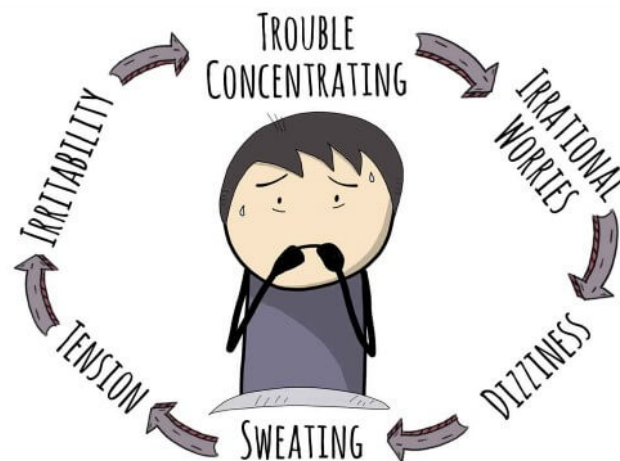
Getting the problem treated can help a person feel like himself or herself again — relaxed and ready for the good things in life. Someone who might be dealing with an anxiety disorder should:

- Tell a parent or other adult about physical sensations, worries, or fears.** Because anxiety disorders don't go away unless they are treated, it's important to tell someone who can help. If a parent doesn't seem to understand right away, talk to a school counselor, religious leader, or other trusted adult.
- Get a checkup.** See a doctor to make sure there are no physical conditions that could be causing symptoms.
- Work with a mental health professional.** Ask a doctor, nurse, or school counselor for a referral to someone who treats anxiety problems. Finding out what's causing the symptoms can be a great relief.
- Get regular exercise, good nutrition, and sleep.** These provide your body and brain with the right fuel and time to recharge.

Try to stay patient and positive. It can take time to feel better, and courage to face fears. But letting go of worry allows space for more happiness and fun.

5 Ways to Deal with Anxiety

By: Teens Health at Nemours at <http://kidshealth.org/en/teens/anxiety-tips.html?WT.ac=t-ra>



Everyone has feelings of anxiety, nervousness, tension, and stress from time to time. Here are 5 ways to help manage them:

- 1. Become a relaxation expert.** We all *think* we know how to relax. But chilling out in front of the TV or computer isn't true relaxation. (Depending on what you're watching or doing, it could even make you more tense.) The same is true for alcohol, drugs, or tobacco. They may seem to relieve anxiety or stress, but it's a false state of relaxation that's only temporary. What the body really needs is daily practice of a relaxation technique — like deep breathing, tai chi, or yoga — that has a physical effect on the mind. For example, deep breathing helps to relax a major nerve that runs from the diaphragm to the brain, sending a message to the entire body to let go and loosen up.
- 2. Get enough sleep, nourishment, and exercise.** Want your mind and body to feel peaceful and strong enough to handle life's ups and downs? Get the right amount of sleep for your needs — not too much or too little. Eat well: Choose fruit, vegetables, lean proteins, and whole grains for long-term energy (instead of the short bursts that come from too much sugar or caffeine). And exercise to send oxygen to every cell in the body so your brain and body can operate at their best.
- 3. Connect with others.** Spend time with friends or family. Organized activities are great, but just hanging out works too. Doing things with those we feel close to deepens our bonds, allowing us to feel supported and secure. And the fun and sharing that go with it allow us to feel happier and less upset about things. If you feel worried or nervous about something, talking about it with someone who listens and cares can help you feel more understood and better able to cope. You'll be reminded that everyone has these feelings sometimes. You're not alone.
- 4. Connect with nature.** Heading out for a walk in the park or a hike in the woods can help anyone feel peaceful and grounded. (Choose somewhere you feel safe so you can relax and enjoy your surroundings.) Walking, hiking, trail biking, or snowshoeing offer the additional benefit of exercise. Invite a friend or two — or a family member — along and enjoy feeling connected to people as well.
- 5. Pay attention to the good things.** A great way to keep our minds off the worry track is to focus our thoughts on things that are good, beautiful, and positive. Appreciate the small, everyday blessings. Allow yourself to dream, wish, and imagine the best that could happen.

The WPHS SAFE Program needs your help to bring bullying prevention, suicide prevention, and drug and alcohol prevention programs to our students. If you would like to make a donation to implement these programs, please go to schoolpay.com. Your support may save a life.