

Anxiety Disorders

Condition:

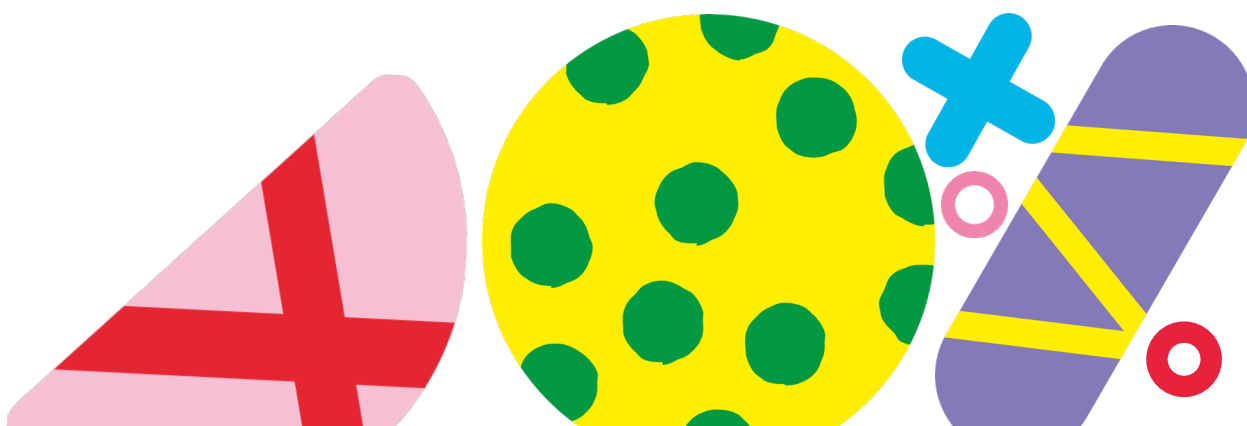
Anxiety can be experienced in lots of different ways. If a child's or young person's experiences meet certain criteria, they might be diagnosed with a specific anxiety disorder.

- There are many different types of anxiety disorder, some are covered elsewhere in this series, but others include:
- Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD) – this means having regular or uncontrollable worries about many different things in a person's everyday life.
- Social Anxiety Disorder – this diagnosis means people experience extreme fear or anxiety triggered by social situations (such as parties, school or workplaces, or everyday situations where they have to talk to another person). It is also known as social phobia.
- Panic disorder – this means having regular or frequent panic attacks without a clear cause or trigger. Experiencing panic disorder can mean that people feel constantly afraid of having another panic attack, to the point that this fear itself can trigger a panic attack.
- Phobias – a phobia is an extreme fear or anxiety triggered by a particular situation (such as going outside) or a particular object (such as spiders).
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – this is a diagnosis a person may be given if they develop anxiety problems after going through something they found traumatic.
- Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) – this means a person experiences obsessions and compulsions relating to their physical appearance.

It's very common to experience anxiety alongside other mental health problems, such as depression or suicidal feelings. If a young person has symptoms of both anxiety and depression but don't fit one more clearly than the other, they might be given a diagnosis of 'mixed anxiety and depressive disorder'.

Problem Areas:

Everyone's experience of anxiety is different, so it's hard to know exactly what causes anxiety issues. There are probably lots of factors involved, although some things can make anxiety issues more likely to happen:





- Past or current experiences such as abuse or bullying
- Other physical or mental health conditions
- Prescription medication or other drugs

A child or young person may experience anxiety relating to coming to the children's/youth group, as a consequence of being at the children's/youth group, due to the activities being provided there, due to the presence of someone or something else, or a wide range of other possible triggers.

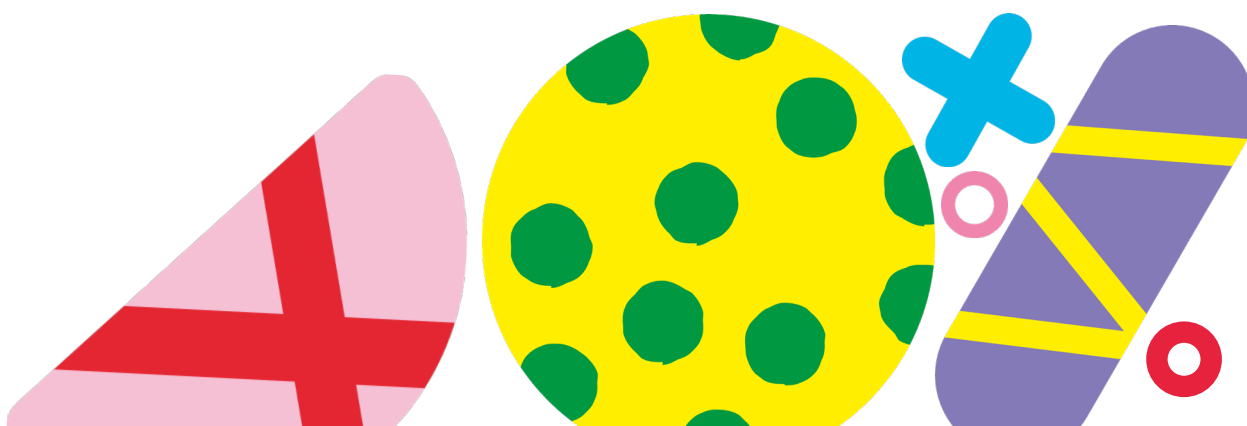
It is possible that a child or young person's response to rising anxiety will be to have a panic attack. Panic attacks are a type of fear response. They're an exaggeration of the body's normal response to danger, stress or excitement.

During a panic attack, physical symptoms can build up very quickly. These can include:

- a pounding or racing heartbeat
- feeling faint, dizzy, or light-headed
- feeling very hot or very cold
- sweating, trembling, or shaking
- nausea (feeling sick)
- pain in the chest or abdomen
- struggling to breathe or feeling like they are choking
- feeling like their legs are shaky or are turning to jelly
- feeling disconnected from their mind, body, or surroundings

During a panic attack they might feel very afraid that they are:

- losing control
- going to faint
- having a heart attack
- going to die





Support strategies for your Group:

If a child or young person is having a panic attack it can be very frightening for them, but there are things that can be done to help:

- Focus on their breathing. It can help them to concentrate on breathing slowly in and out while counting to five.
- Stamp on the spot. Some people find this helps control their breathing.
- Focus on their senses. For example, taste mint-flavoured sweets or gum, or touch or cuddle something soft.
- Try grounding techniques. Grounding techniques can help them feel more in control.
 - breathing slowly
 - listening to sounds around them
 - walking barefoot
 - wrapping them in a blanket and letting them feel it around them
 - touching something textured, or sniffing something with a strong smell

After a panic attack, think about self-care. It's important to pay attention to what their body needs after a child or young person has had a panic attack. For example, they might need to rest somewhere quietly, or eat or drink something.

Further information:

Mind <https://www.mind.org.uk>

Thanks to Mind for much of the material used in writing this article.

'Invited to Belong' has been developed in partnership between Urban Saints and Youthscape.



Youthscape

www.urbansaints.org/invitedtobelong