



Family Centre Information Package

Anxiety in Children and Youth



WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is an emotional state characterized by worrying or being fearful or nervous.

SYMPTOMS/SIGNS

Your child may describe, or you may notice, the following:

- A feeling of butterflies in his/her stomach or an upset stomach
- Sweaty or shaking hands
- Being frequently tired
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping
- Excessive worrying—having persistent anxious thoughts about everyday things
- Being irritable or “on-edge”

Additionally, other symptoms may be present, depending on the type of anxiety the child is facing. The websites listed under [Resources](#) at the end of this document can provide more details on specific anxiety disorders.

IS ANXIETY ALWAYS A PROBLEM?

It is perfectly normal for children (and adults) to feel anxious sometimes. Anxiety can even be helpful during times of stress, helping us to solve problems or do better on a test or playing a sport. Anxiety triggers a “fight or flight” response, which is why we experience the physical and mental symptoms mentioned above. This response was useful when humans had to face saber-tooth tigers and other threats; however, the stresses we face in our modern world usually do not require this kind of reaction, making anxiety more of a problem than a help for some people.

HOW DO I KNOW IF ANXIETY IS A PROBLEM FOR MY CHILD?

Anxiety in children becomes a problem when:

- They worry or are nervous/fearful most of the time.
- They worry excessively in situations that usually do not cause children to worry excessively (e.g. staying home sick from school).
- These feelings begin to interfere with their day-to-day life.

FACTS

- Anxiety is one of the more common mental health issues among children.
- When children are anxious, they are not seeking attention or “acting out”; they are worrying about a world they do not fully understand.
- There are many different reasons why someone might become anxious, and different people may experience different symptoms.
- Anyone can get anxiety – you don’t have to be a natural “worry wart” or a nervous person.
- Worrying itself does not cause anxiety disorders. It is normal to worry sometimes. It becomes a problem if there is *excessive* worrying.
- Our thoughts can make us feel more anxious at times of stress. The good news is we can learn to change those thoughts to help us feel less anxious!
- Anxiety is treatable, and medication is not the only treatment.

FAMILY CENTRE SERVICES

Family Centre offers [Worry Dragons](#), a six-week group for children (ages 7 to 12) where they can: learn to express their fears, worries, and anxieties; understand and explore how fears affect the body, thoughts and behaviours; learn to use skills they already have and develop new skills to better cope with anxiety. Parents are incorporated into these groups to assist with their children’s growth as parents play an active role in maintaining their children’s growth and learning.

Family Centre also offers individual and family counselling services (ages 7+). If you are interested in scheduling a counselling session, please call Family Centre (403) 320-4232 extension 240, to speak to an intake counsellor.

Family Centre offers the Kin Family Resource Library. Visitors to the library have access to books, videos, DVDs, and magazines that cover a variety of topics, including anxiety. The library offers resources that are targeted towards parents as well as resources suitable for children. The Kin Family Resource Library is a free service; all that is required is a Family Centre library card, which is available at reception. To search and reserve available resources click [here](#).

HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD

Research on anxiety and experience from people with anxiety suggest that the following activities may be helpful for dealing with anxiety. You may find they are helpful to your child as well. These are not intended as a “cure” or a substitute for therapy.

- Relaxation, such as [progressive muscle relaxation for young children](#), or [progressive muscle relaxation for older children and teens](#)
- [Breathing exercises](#)
- Exercise, such as going for a walk, dancing to music, swimming, karate, etc.
- Laughter – watch a funny movie or read a funny book
- Take a bubble bath or a long shower
- Write a letter to a friend
- Draw a picture
- Play a board/video game
- Talk to someone



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As a parent, you greatly influence your child. You may find it helpful to participate in some counselling sessions in order to help your child be successful in dealing with their anxiety. For example, if you are feeling anxious yourself, your child could sense that and may become anxious as a result. Or you may notice your own anxiety levels increasing as a result of trying to help your child. Family Centre offers both individual and family counselling services. If you are interested in scheduling counselling sessions, or if you would like more information about counselling, please contact [Intake at Family Centre](#).

RESOURCES

LOCAL RESOURCES

- Lethbridge Family Services Counselling 403-327-5724
 - 1107 2A Avenue N., Lethbridge, AB T1H 0E6
 - LFS provides counselling services to individuals, both adults and children, who are experiencing difficulties in their lives, including anxiety. Subsidies may be available.
- Canadian Mental Health Association (Lethbridge) 403-329-4775
 - 426 6 Street S., Lethbridge, AB T1J 2C9
 - The local office of CMHA provides crisis intervention, education and training in mental health issues, and peer support and self-help programs, including a youth group focussed on building community.
- Community Mental Health (Alberta Health Services) 403-381-5280
 - 200 5 Avenue S., Lethbridge, AB T1J 4L1 (Provincial Building)
 - Customer focussed services include crisis intervention and stabilization, prevention, community support, intervention services.

- Associates Counselling Services 403-381-6000
 - 239 12B Street N., Lethbridge, AB, T1H 2K8
 - Associates is an association of independent professionals and offers a wide range of counselling services, including family and child/youth counselling. Subsidies may be available.

- Crossroads Counselling Centre 403-327-7080
 - 202 – 542 7 St. S, Lethbridge, AB, T1J 2H1
 - Crossroads offers counselling to individuals, couples, and families for a variety of concerns. Subsidies may be available.

WEBSITES

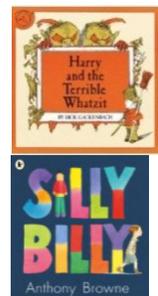
- The Child Anxiety Network: <http://www.childanxiety.net/>
- Anxiety BC: <http://www.anxietybc.com/>
- Canadian Mental Health Association: <http://lethbridge.cmha.ca/> (local) or <http://www.cmha.ca/> (national)
- Kids Help Phone: <http://kidshelpphone.ca>

VIDEO

- [Childhood Anxiety Video](#) at Anxiety BC: This video, lasting approximately 5 minutes, discusses what anxiety looks like in youth, including some symptoms, and provides some strategies for dealing with children who are showing signs of anxiety.
- *Monster House* (2006): A group of children decide to find out for themselves if a neighbourhood house is haunted, and face the cranky old neighbour and their own fears in the process. Rated PG.
- *Nim's Island* (2008): When a young girl's father goes missing, she seeks the help of an author who is struggling with agoraphobia, an anxiety disorder. Rated PG.

BOOKS

- *Harry and the Terrible Whatzit* by Dick Gackenbach: When his mother goes to the cellar and doesn't return right away, Harry shoves aside his fears to search for her and confronts the terrible two-headed whatzit.
- *Silly Billy* by Anthony Browne: A story about a young boy who worries so much he can't sleep. His Grandmother helps him to overcome his fears when she presents him with a set of Guatemalan Worry Dolls.



- *What to do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety* by Dawn Huebner:
This is an interactive, self-help book for children with anxiety and their parents. It is a guide to some cognitive-behaviour therapy, which is a common treatment for anxiety.
- *I Think, I Am!: Teaching Kids the Power of Affirmations* by Louise Hay and Kristina Tracy:
This book will teach children how to change negative thoughts to positive thoughts.



To find these four books, along with many other great resources, please visit the Kin Family Resource Library at Family Centre. Additional books can also be found using the following sites:

- (For very young children)
<http://www.littleparachutes.com/subcategory.php?sid=83>
- (For school aged- children) <http://blog.playdrhutch.com/2012/10/29/playdrmoms-favorite-childrens-books-about-anxiety/>
- (For teens)
http://scll.bibliocommons.com/list/show/71513322_sclld_librarians_for_teens/89572164_teen_issues_-_crazy_like_me

OTHER

- Access Mental Health 403-943-1500
 - Assists community members in accessing appropriate, non-emergency, services for mental health and addiction issues
- AHS Mental Health Help Line 1-877-303-2642
 - Provides confidential crisis intervention, mental health information, and referrals when necessary
- Distress Line 403-327-7905
 - Crisis intervention. Listeners are available 24 hours a day
- Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868
 - Provides confidential, bilingual telephone and web counselling to children and young adults (up to age 25) experiencing problems or concerns

REFERENCES

- <http://www.childanxiety.net/>
- <http://www.anxietybc.com/>
- <http://imdb.com/>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.