

THE  
**PARENT'S  
GUIDEBOOK**

**TO TEEN ANXIETY**

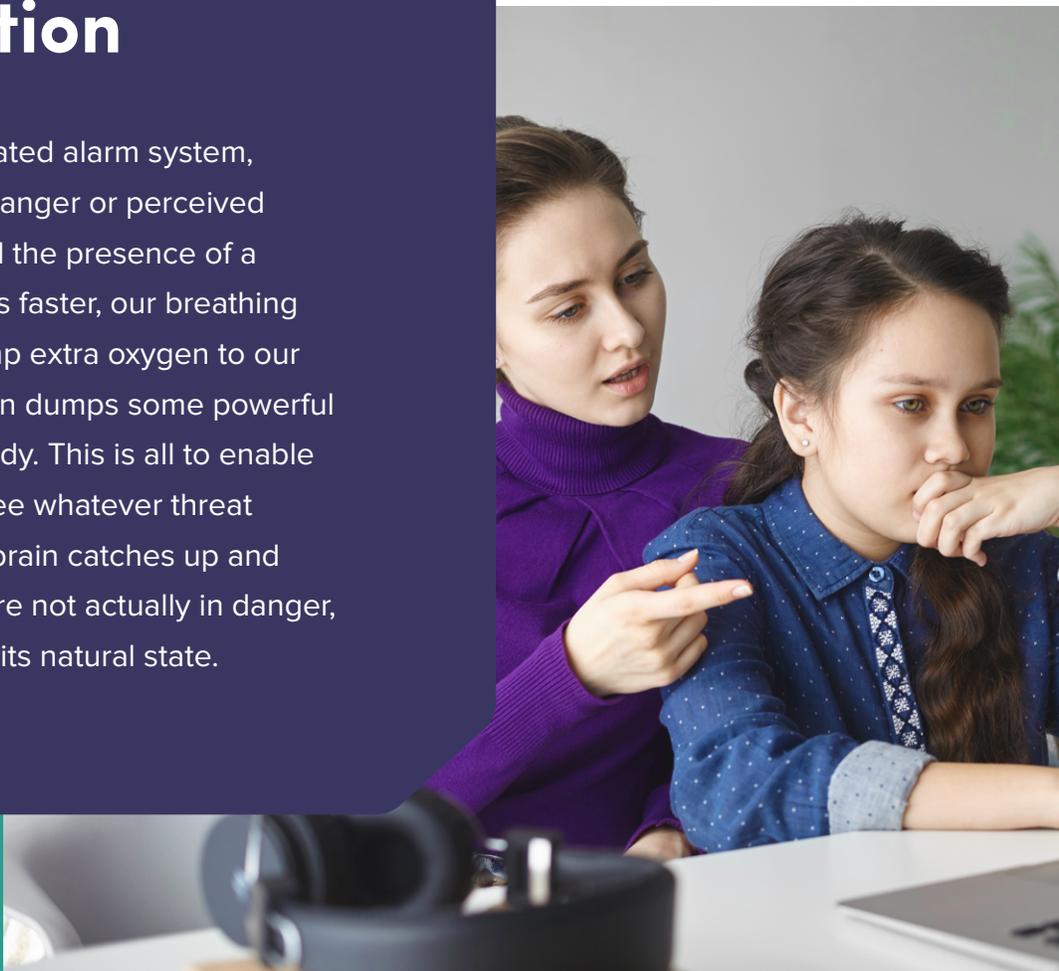
**What to Look for and How to Help**





# Introduction

Anxiety is a sophisticated alarm system, making us aware of danger or perceived threats. When we feel the presence of a threat, our heart beats faster, our breathing rate increases to pump extra oxygen to our muscles, and our brain dumps some powerful chemicals into our body. This is all to enable us to either fight or flee whatever threat is at hand. Once the brain catches up and determines that we are not actually in danger, it returns the body to its natural state.



For most teenagers, anxiety comes and goes as a part of daily life. Anytime there is a new, challenging or unfamiliar situation, a sense of nervousness is perfectly normal. But for some teens, anxiety can be so overwhelming it keeps them from functioning in social or academic settings.

Teen anxiety is not altogether uncommon. In fact, according to the National

Institutes of Health, nearly 1 in 31 of all adolescents ages 13 to 18 will

experience an anxiety disorder, and these numbers are on the rise. That's why we've put together The Parent's Guidebook to Teen Anxiety, so we can equip parents to feel confident in knowing what to look for and how to help their teen.



# Common Anxiety or Anxiety Disorder:

## HOW CAN A PARENT TELL THE DIFFERENCE?

A teen's life is filled with opportunities to feel anxious. New friends, new schools, new teachers, new coaches, tests, public speaking, jobs, driving . . . the list of possible triggers is relentless for a teen. Add to that societal, academic, parental, and peer pressures and your teen is bound to experience some level of anxiety, perhaps daily.

How can a parent tell when their teen is experiencing typical anxiety and when their anxiety has crossed over into more of a mental health issue? We've divided the symptoms into six primary categories that spell the word S-T-R-E-S-S.

### Social Withdrawal

A common form of anxiety in teens is related to their peers and social interactions. The need to fit in, measure up, keep up, and be seen doing the right things with the right people is overwhelming and a regular part of a teen's life. With so much at stake, it's easy to see the signs of anxiety pop up here first.



Watch for these common signs of social withdrawal:

- No longer enjoys social interactions with usual friends
- Avoids extracurricular activities
- Spends more and more time alone



## Trouble Sleeping

When it comes to teens, you can be certain of one thing, they love to sleep, which as it turns out is a great thing because the Academy of Pediatrics recommends teens get at least 8-10 hours of sleep every night. When a teen has an increasingly difficult time regulating their anxiety, their sleep is sure to suffer.

When nighttime comes and their schedule slows down enough for them to rest, that's when a teen's anxious thoughts can take over and wreak havoc on their sleep schedule.



Keep an eye out for these signs of anxiety related sleep issues:

- Has trouble falling asleep
- Has trouble staying asleep
- Does not feel rested after a full night's sleep

## Reduced Academic Performance

The desire to avoid school and all its many pressures can be a perfectly normal part of your student's life, but it can also be a sure sign of anxiety in your teen. The key here is to look for changes in your student's academic performance.



These might include:

- Frequently missed assignments
- Sudden downward jump in grades
- Procrastinates or describes feeling overwhelmed by workload



## Emotional Changes

It's almost comical to say, "Watch for emotional changes," because as any parent of a teen knows, every day can be a roller coaster of emotional changes. Your teen's brain is developing so rapidly amidst a virtual hurricane of hormones, no doubt a recipe for some emotional meltdowns.



But, as it relates to pervasive or persistent anxiety, watch for these signs:

- Feeling on edge or "keyed up" much of the time
- Constantly irritable with unexplained outbursts
- Difficulty concentrating and restless

## Signs of Physical Distress

Living under the weight of constant anxiety can produce real physical symptoms in your teen. The longer they live under the weight of the anxiety, the greater the symptoms will be.



Keep an eye out for these common complaints:

- Frequent headaches, migraines, or excessive fatigue
- Gastrointestinal problems or unexplained aches and pains
- Changes in eating habits, including sudden weight gain or loss



## Sudden Panic

An anxiety attack is a slow and gradual acceleration in anxiety. It can render the teen unable to function. A panic attack is a sudden onset of anxiety occurring without warning and often without any apparent trigger.



Common symptoms include:

- Chest pain or difficulty breathing
- Numbness or tingling in the extremities, dizziness, or nausea
- Disassociation

Being aware of the common S-T-R-E-S-S signs of anxiety in your teen is one of the most important roles you can play in helping them. But once you've identified the signs, what can a parent do to help your student?





# Antidotes to Teen Anxiety:

## HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR TEEN?

When you have a teen who is struggling in any area, it can be very difficult as a parent to know what the next step is to helping them. You may spend countless hours scouring the Internet, crowdsourcing solutions, and possibly looking for professional intervention. What you're hoping for is some way to get through to your teen and help them over the hurdle of their anxiety.

The good news is, they can be helped, and you're a big part of the solution.

## See the Signs

There's an old saying that goes, "If you have a teenager, get a dog. At least someone in the house will be happy to see you every day." While it might seem like your teen would rather do anything than hang out with you, just know that no matter how much they push you away, studies show that teens not only want to have a close relationship with their parent (beyond just the role of caretaker) but they actually need it. Having strong attachment relationships with a parent or a strong bond with another adult, can do much to relieve some of the stress associated with teen anxiety.

Additionally, knowing your teen well enough to know when something is off is critical. It's your connected relationship with your teen that is going to help you be aware of any struggle they may be having. Seeing the signs of your teen's anxiety is a big factor in ultimately helping them overcome them.





## Set Reasonable Expectations

Just as parents are a critical first step in identifying when their teen may be struggling with anxiety, it's important to be sure that parents aren't adding to their teen's anxiety. The desire to meet parent's expectations and the expectations of others can be a contributing factor in ongoing anxiety-related issues.

When it comes to expectations for your students, the first place to start is with your own. Make sure you are setting reasonable expectations for your students in terms of scholastic and extra-curricular achievement, while also helping them to set reasonable expectations for themselves.

Give your student permission to fail and then walk with them through that failure. No one is perfect, and the sooner a student comes to terms with that, the better they'll be able to cope with the pressure to succeed.





# Smart and Safe Social Media Use

After more than a decade of social media use among teens, scientists and psychologists are only just now becoming aware of the potential mental health ramifications that come from social media. Isolating your teen from social media entirely might seem ideal, but it's not really a practical solution to the problem.

As parents, our best practice is to teach our teen to have a smart and safe approach to social media.



Help your teen understand it's time to step away from the screen:

- If they experience feelings of depression or worthlessness after being on social media for a short period of time.
- If they feel pressured to like or comment on posts to keep friendships intact or if they feel pressured to post often in order to be liked.
- If they feel restless, nervous, or triggered in any way.

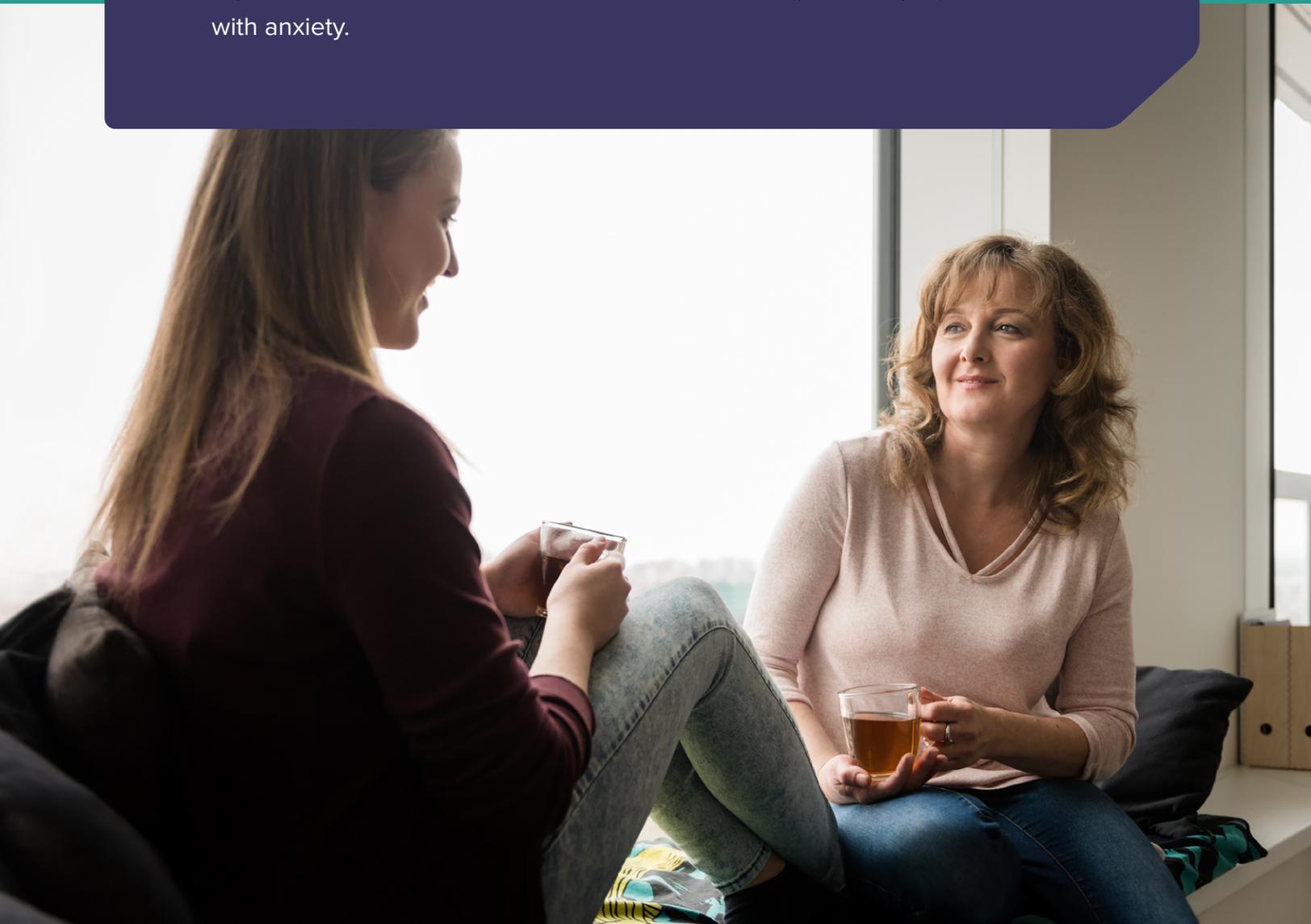


## Share the Positive

Anxiety can often create a negative loop cycle in the brain where your teen may replay certain negative thoughts over and over and over. This can lead to a negative outlook on most experiences, leading to negative beliefs that translate to all experiences.

Sharing the positives that you see in your student and teaching them to see the positives for themselves can help to alleviate negative beliefs and can soothe anxiety caused from negative situations.

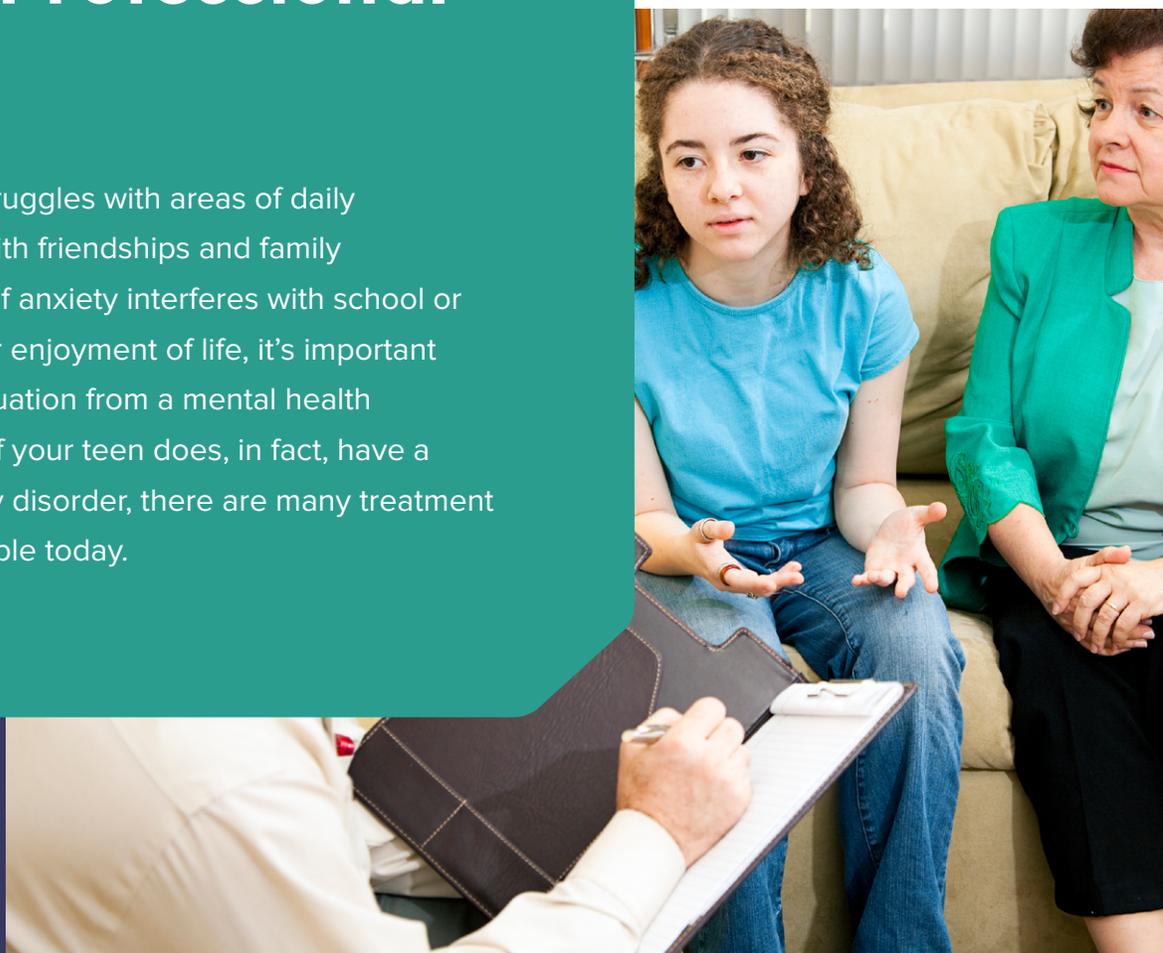
A positive mindset can do wonders to rewire the negative loop cycle in teens with anxiety.





## Seek Professional Help

If your teen struggles with areas of daily functioning, with friendships and family relationships; if anxiety interferes with school or sports, or their enjoyment of life, it's important to get an evaluation from a mental health professional. If your teen does, in fact, have a clinical anxiety disorder, there are many treatment options available today.



You downloaded this guide because you know something has to change. The stress and tension that comes from worrying about a teen with anxiety is overwhelming for the parent and the teen. The ultimate goal is to help your student grow and become a successful, confident human being, managing their anxiety daily and crushing their goals.



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