



Great Lakes (HHS Region 5)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

RECOGNIZING ANXIETY IN YOUTH

Fact Sheet

Anxiety is a common experience - everyone feels anxious from time to time. Usually, these feelings are quite adaptive and keep us safe and performing well. However, when feelings of fear and worry persist over long periods, are exaggerated, or occur in the absence of actual threat, anxiety can be considered problematic.

The Facts on Anxiety in Youth

- **1 in 4 teenagers between the ages of 13 and 18 struggles with anxiety that severely impact their daily lives**
- Anxiety disorders affect approximately 6-10% of youth. It is one of the most common mental health disorders.
- Anxiety disorders frequently originate during childhood or adolescences.



Noticing Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety

- Attendance concerns
- Separation issues
- Social issues- extreme shyness around peers
- Difficult speaking in groups or in class
- Refusal and avoidance
- Performance or test not matching ability
- Tantrums
- Reoccurring physical symptoms without medical explanations can include headaches, dizziness, sweating, body or muscle aches, nausea and upset stomach, excessive fatigue, change in diet and unexplained illness
- Withdrawing and avoidance
- Sleep disturbance

www.mhttcnetwork.org/greatlakes

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RECOGNIZING ANXIETY IN YOUTH

Frequently Asked Questions

What behaviors might my student or youth exhibit if they are struggling with anxiety?

Youth may express their anxiety by crying or throwing tantrums, and it may be very difficult for them to calm down. Some youth may seek constant approval or reassurance from others. Youth may describe feeling physical symptoms, like headaches, stomachaches, racing heartbeat, or difficulty breathing.

How can I support a student with anxiety in my classroom?

Some ways we can assist students with anxiety or other mental health challenge in the classroom is by incorporating mindfulness/breathing techniques in the classroom, create a space where kids can express their anxiety (corner of the room with cozy chair, books, fidget toys). Include Social Emotional Learning techniques in the lesson plans.

How might the changes this school year brings might impact my students?

The dilemma teachers face this year in a virtual environment is they likely know who is struggling most with mental health challenges such as mental health challenges, poverty, and other difficulties, and yet virtually they have to treat everyone more or less equal. It is very important to focus on the emotional side of learning. This means we need to be mindful to include social emotional learning into the classroom. We want to continue to prioritize Social Emotional Learning (SEL) both in the classroom and at home. A vast majority or research suggest that students perform better academically when they're taught how to control their emotions and how to develop traits like empathy, determination, collaborative spirit and the ability to navigate conflicts.

Who might be available in my school or community to help my student or youth with their anxiety?

Most schools have a school social worker who will be available for students. Usually the school social worker focuses on helping the youth with academic related challenges.



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Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the practice of focusing on the present moment while calmly acknowledging feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations.

Why Mindfulness matters

Practicing mindfulness helps by:

- **Improving grades—students who practice mindfulness before tests perform better**
- Reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress
- Improving quality of sleep
- increasing overall well-being



How to Practice Mindfulness

- **Breathing Exercises**
 - Sit comfortable with both feet on the floor. Close your eyes and take deep breaths. Count to four while you inhale and count down from four while you exhale. Do this until you feel calm.
- **Body Scan**
 - Sit somewhere quiet and without distractions. Take a deep breath and, starting at your feet, consciously relax every muscle in your body. Try to focus only on your breath and how it feels when your muscles start to relax.
- **Stairway Exercise**
 - Imagine you are standing at the top of a staircase with ten steps. With each breath, visualize yourself walking down the stairs, becoming more relaxed with each step.
- **Empty Room Exercise**
 - Imagine that you are in an empty room. Notice how you feel. Now imagine adding people, objects, decorations until you have filled it to your satisfaction. Pay attention to how satisfied, happy, and safe you feel.

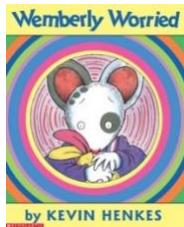


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Resources to Use with Youth

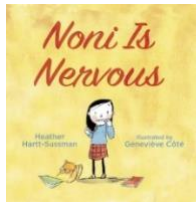
Books for Youth with Anxiety

[Wemberly Worried](#) by Kevin Henkes
(Pre-K–2)



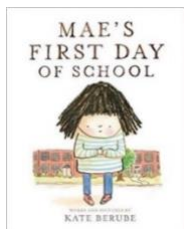
Wemberly is a mouse who worries about everything, but her biggest fear is the first day of school. Kids will relate to Wemberly's fears and learn with her as she overcomes them.

[Noni Is Nervous](#) by Heather Hartt-Sussman
(Pre-K–2)



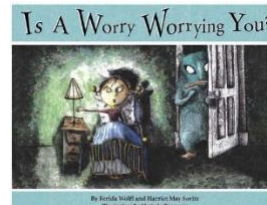
Noni is nervous about lots of things, but she is particularly anxious about her first day of school. This book about managing fears will help children who are contemplating a new experience.

[Mae's First Day of School](#) by Kate Berube
(Pre-K–2)



As Mae's first day of school approaches, her anxiety builds, but then she meets Rosie and Ms. Pearl, who are equally nervous. This reassuring narrative shows kids the power of expressing fears and conquering them with support from others.

[Is a Worry Worrying You?](#) by Ferida Wolff and Harriet May Savit
(Pre-K–2)



Different hypothetical situations invite kids to think about creative ways to solve worrying problems and talk to kids about how to rethink reactions to fear.

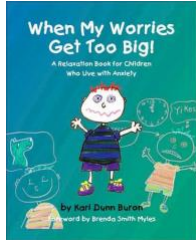
[First Day Jitters](#) by Julie Danneberg
(Pre-K–2)



Mr. Hartwell tries to convince a nervous Sarah to come out from under her covers and attend her first day of school. When she overcomes her fear and arrives at school, readers realize that Sarah Jane Hartwell is the new teacher. Kids will appreciate the joke and be reassured that they are not alone in their first-day jitters.



When My Worries Get Too Big: A Relaxation Book for Children Who Live with Anxiety by Kari Dunn Buron (K–3)



Although this workbook was developed to help children on the autism spectrum recognize and handle anxious emotions, it is appropriate for any young child who experiences anxiety.

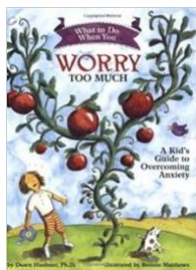
Black Dog by Levi Pinfold (Grades 1–4)



When a huge dog appears outside the Hope family’s house, they’re all terrified except for Small, the youngest, who chases the rapidly shrinking dog until

her courage has shrunk the dog to a normal, not scary size. This book will remind students that facing fears can help minimize them.

What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid’s Guide to Overcoming Anxiety by Dawn Huebner (Grades 1–6)



Engaging, encouraging, and easy to follow, this book helps kids develop actionable ways to manage anxiety and will empower them to work toward change.

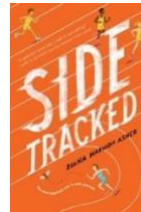
Stanley Will Probably Be Fine

by Sally J. Pla (Grades 3–6)



Sixth grader Stanley struggles with anxiety, which prevents him from making friends, trying new things, and participating in a comics trivia scavenger hunt. Whether they suffer anxiety themselves or not, readers will cheer for Stanley and will come away with some coping strategies for dealing with their own stresses.

Sidetracked by Diana Harmon Asher (Grades 4–7)



With debilitating phobias of everything from hard-boiled eggs to gargoyles, Joseph struggles to make friends at school. But when his seventh-grade teacher compels him to join the school track team, he makes an unlikely friend and finds himself off the sidelines for the first time.

What to Do When You’re Scared and Worried: A Guide for Kids

by James J. Crist (Grades 4–7)



This checklist helps kids narrow down what they are anxious about and know that they are not alone in their feelings.



Anxiety Sucks: A Teen Survival

Guide by Natasha Daniels

(Grades 7 and up)



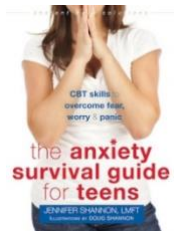
Written by a therapist who has firsthand experience with anxiety, this is a great book for teens to help them understand the underlying causes of their anxiety and work on practical steps

they can take to manage it.

The Anxiety Survival Guide for Teens: CBT Skills to Overcome Fear, Worry, and Panic

by Jennifer Shannon

(Grades 7 and up)



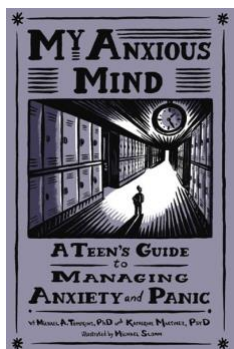
This easy-to-read book offers practical strategies to help teens overcome all kinds of anxiety-inducing scenarios by recognizing and silencing the “monkey mind,” or the primitive, instinctual part of the brain.

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My Anxious Mind: A Teen's Guide to Managing Anxiety and Panic

by Michael A. Tompkins and Katherine

Martinez (Grades 7 and up)



Beginning with relaxation and moving through more complex strategies, each step in this book builds a layered approach to managing anxiety. The final chapters stress the importance of

proper nutrition, exercise, sleep, and the possible need for medication.



Mindfulness Apps for Youth

Calm



Calm is a mindfulness app that helps with sleep, meditation, and relaxation.

Worry Time



Worry Time app helps to connect feeling of worry to designated periods, reducing worry or generalized anxiety, improving self-reflection and problem-solving skills.

Breathe



The Breathe app guides you through a series of deep breaths, and it reminds you to take time to breathe every day.

Headspace



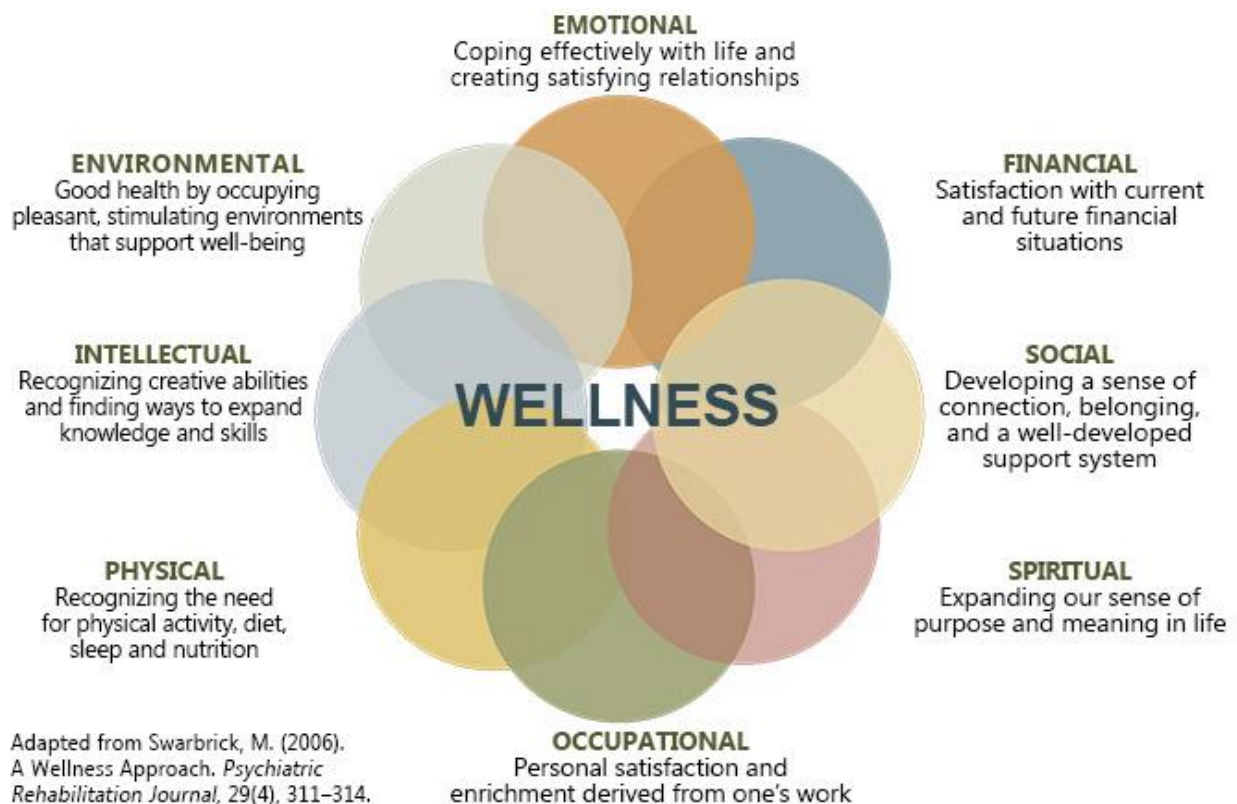
Headspace takes a clinical approach to the many benefits of mindfulness. With hundreds of meditation options, you can hone your skills with gentleness and clarity, reducing your anxiety and stress levels in just a few days.



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Self-Care Action Plan

Self-care is the practice of taking action to preserve or improve one's own health. According to the Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA), there are 8 areas that we can take action to preserve or improve our health. When working with youth, consider these 8 areas when devising strategies to cope with anxiety.





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Supporting Youth with Symptoms of Anxiety

How to help	
Reduce triggers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide consistent and predictable arrival routines• Develop a plan for study time• Provide 15-minute warning before moving onto the next activity
Remind them they don't have to be perfect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Perfectionism drives feelings of worry and anxiety. Remind youth that they don't have to be perfect• Model a growth mindset-mistakes are a part of learning and can be seen as opportunities!
Offer healthy outlets	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exercise, eat regular meals, get proper sleep• Spend time doing something they like• Reinforce social-emotional well-being skills like problem-solving, decision-making, and conflict resolution
Empathize	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let the youth express their feelings, sometimes all we need is to hear our thoughts out loud to realize that they are not as overwhelming as they feel in our head.
Stay calm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staying calm can help people feel safe• Regulate your own feelings of distress and model calmness
Find relaxing activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Build in time for mindfulness/contemplation, self-regulation, and/or stress reduction techniques
Seek Professional help	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore professional options including seeing a therapist