

Signs of Anxiety in Young Children

Physical Signs

- Frequently complains of headaches or stomachaches, even though there's no medical reason for them.
- Refuses to eat snacks or lunch at daycare or school.
- Won't use restrooms except at home.
- Constantly tenses his muscles.
- Can become restless, fidgety, hyperactive or distracted (even though he doesn't necessarily have ADHD).
- Starts to shake or sweat in intimidating situations.
- Has trouble falling or staying asleep.

Emotional Signs

- Cries often.
- Acts extremely sensitive.
- Becomes grouchy or angry without any clear reason.
- Is afraid of making even minor mistakes.
- Has extreme test anxiety.
- Has panic attacks (or is afraid of having panic attacks).
- Has phobias (about bees, dogs, etc.) and exaggerated fears (about things like natural disasters, etc.).
- Has obsessive thoughts or compulsive behaviors (finger tapping, hand washing, etc.).
- Is afraid people will find out about his learning and attention issues (more so than other kids with the same issues).
- Worries about things that are far in the future (for example, a third grader might worry about starting middle school).
- Is worried or afraid during drop-offs (at daycare, school, relatives' homes, etc.).
- Has frequent nightmares about losing a parent or loved one.
- Gets distracted from playing by his worries and fears.
- Is starting to have meltdowns or tantrums.

Behavioral Signs

- Asks "what if?" constantly. ("What if an earthquake happened?")
- Avoids participating during circle time or other class activities.
- Remains silent or preoccupied when he's expected to work with others.
- Refuses to go to school.
- Stays inside, alone, at lunch or recess.
- Refuses to speak to peers or strangers in stores, restaurants, etc.
- Avoids social situations with peers after school or on weekends (extracurricular activities, birthday parties, etc.).
- Becomes emotional or angry when separating from parents or loved ones.
- Constantly seeks approval from parents, teachers and friends.
- Says "I can't do it!" without a real reason.