



A guide for parents and caregivers to support youth

# Coping During COVID: ANXIETY

## Let's face it, it's hard not to be on edge right now.

We're all anxious. Worried about our health and our families (is that cough just a cough or...), about the future, about politics, about school, about dealing with what comes next. And that's not to mention the regular day-to-day stuff: *Did that sound stupid? Do I look okay? Will I pass this test?*

Some anxiety is a normal, natural part of being alive. But when anxiety starts interfering with your ability to do the things you need to do, prompts you to avoid a lot of things that most people enjoy, keeps you from activities that used to be fun for you, or seems to come out of nowhere and won't stop, it might be time to get some help.



Blue Shield of California and the Child Mind Institute are teaming up to provide resources and share the latest research on youth mental health as part of Blue Shield of California's BlueSky youth mental health initiative.

**IF YOU ARE IN CRISIS OR CONSIDERING SUICIDE, HELP IS AVAILABLE RIGHT NOW.** Call 911 immediately if you're concerned that you or a friend are unsafe, may be in danger of self-harm, or may be suicidal or overdosing. Tell responders as many details as possible so they can be prepared when they arrive.

**TWO FREE, 24-HR,  
ANONYMOUS HOTLINES**

Crisis Text Line:  
**text UROK to 741741**

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:  
**call 1-800-273-8255**



*It's totally normal for people to have anxiety and it can absolutely be managed. It seems really scary to ask for help, but it's one of the best things you can do for yourself.*

CAROLINE, AGE 16



## Signs your worry could be more than ordinary anxiety:

- ✓ **It's unrealistic.** You worry that every phone call might be someone telling you your parents have died, even though they're healthy and safe at home.
- ✓ **It's out of proportion.** Your friend didn't text you back and that quickly spirals into assuming she's angry at you, even if there's no reason for her to be.
- ✓ **It makes you overly self-conscious.** You feel like everyone is looking at (and judging) you, and you constantly worry that other people think you're weird.
- ✓ **It's unwanted and uncontrollable.** You know you're not sick but you're having intrusive thoughts about dying or being unable to breathe.
- ✓ **Once it starts, it doesn't go away.** You had a fight with someone you love weeks ago but you can't stop thinking about it and obsessively worrying that they're still mad.
- ✓ **It makes you avoid things you once loved.** You can't seem to shake the fear that you're unwanted at social gatherings, so you don't go, or you can't enjoy taking walks because you're afraid of being exposed to the virus, so you completely stop going out.

## Tips for managing your anxiety:

- 💡 **Be smart about what you're taking in online:** Media, social and otherwise, can be a big source of anxiety, especially right now. Being thoughtful about who you follow, what you read and watch, and how often you're "doomscrolling" (that is, reading endless bad news) can help. Remember, being informed is good. Swimming in stress is not. Stick with accounts, channels and shows that bring you joy, not ones that bring you down.
- 🗣️ **Talk about it:** Anxiety thrives in silence. If you feel yourself spiraling, try reaching out to a friend or family member. Talking out worries can help you calm down and gain perspective.
- 😊 **Practice mindfulness:** Taking deep breaths, noticing what you see or hear in the present moment, paying attention to how your body is feeling — do whatever helps you stay focused and grounded in the present.
- 🔍 **Find a healthy routine:** The pandemic blew up most of our old routines, but if you're feeling anxious this is a great time to start a new one. It could be as simple as making a plan to exercise, scheduling time outside into your day, or deciding to go to bed at the same time each night. Looking for ways to be flexible and start a new routine can help you feel less anxious and more productive.

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*[An] aspect that resonates with me is the idea of creating a routine. Committing to exercise and being outside is something that I have tried to get myself to do... and it has been one of the most helpful things I have done.*

SOPHIE, AGE 20



## Kinds of anxiety

Here are some of the most common types of anxiety:

- ✓ **Social anxiety:** You feel self-conscious to the point of distraction. You feel so terrified of embarrassing yourself that routine interactions with other people become incredibly stressful.
- ✓ **Generalized anxiety:** You're worried about everything, all the time, and your worries feel out of control. Will you fail out of school? Could you have cancer? Is your boyfriend sick of you? It seems random and you may not have evidence to back up the worries, but you can't talk yourself out of them.
- ✓ **Specific phobias:** You have excessive fear of specific things, like dogs or insects or vomiting.
- ✓ **Panic:** You experience sudden symptoms like shortness of breath, dizziness, nausea and sweating, which can feel like you're having a heart attack. Some people experience an intense need to run away, and they avoid similar situations in the future for fear of having another attack. This is what people mean when they talk about "panic attacks" or "anxiety attacks."

Anxiety may come in different flavors, but the common theme is that it makes your life so much harder than it should be and limits the experiences you're able to have. You become someone who "doesn't": doesn't speak up during class (online or not), doesn't reach out, and doesn't know how to fix what's wrong.



*Although you might feel alone [with anxiety], everybody is scared of something. Sometimes worries can get big, but there are always people there to help you, people who really do understand. There is hope for managing anxiety, don't give up.*

LILY, AGE 14



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