



Helping Children Cope with Anxiety

In our society, anxiety is an important issue that parents need to be aware of, as children and teens now face numerous issues that cause them worry. At times, these worries can become difficult to manage and may interfere with a healthy childhood. Anxiety can affect children and teens in alarming ways and can have an impact on nearly every facet of their lives, be it their health, friendships, schoolwork, or family relationships. Young people in our society need our help to learn how to cope with worry, uncertainty, and fear.



Martin Smith, LMFT
Clinical Director

Anxiety can be particularly difficult to manage as kids move from one developmental stage to the next. Parents can help by remembering that this is what many kids will deal with as they age—sometimes simultaneously:

- **Health changes:** Changing bodies and body images, choices about substances.
- **Social demands:** Friendship drama, social media, invitations, dating.
- **School demands:** Adjusting to middle school then high school, increasing workload, pressures of AP and Honors classes, choosing a thoughtful next step after high school, applying to college, and balancing academics with sports and activities that require increasingly more time during the week.
- **Family life:** Balancing rules with freedom and independence, maintaining communication among members, loss of a loved one, financial stress, divorce, conflict in the family.

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

- Persistent worry or fear.
- Perseverative thoughts, or thoughts that “spin out of control” and don’t stop. Can’t stop thinking about particular stressors, even if relatively minor.
- Desire to be perfect and extreme discomfort with making mistakes.

WHAT CAN IT LOOK LIKE?

- Panic, racing heartbeat, shortness of breath, tight chest, light-headedness, difficulty breathing, fear of dying.
- Unexplained aches and pains and headaches.
- Muscle tension, clenched jaw, tight shoulders.
- Upset stomach or lack of appetite.
- Difficulty falling asleep and/or staying asleep.

HOW TO HELP

- Stay curious about what your child is going through. Approach his or her worries with an open mind and an attitude of wanting to understand what is happening. *(continued on back)*



WHAT DO WE DO?

We work every day to strengthen lives.

(continued)

- Listen and be present. Avoid the temptation to try to “fix” your child’s worry right away.
- Create structure and routine in your home. A predictable home environment supports a sense of security and predictability. This can help alleviate the feeling of being out of control that often comes with anxiety. If creating structure in the home is a challenge, try to rely on clubs, mentors, sports teams, school, and extended family and friends to add structure.
- Encourage age-appropriate independence. Send the message that it is ok to take healthy risks, and that failure is an opportunity to learn.
- Hold kids accountable. Clear rules and expectations add to a sense of predictability. Choose the rules that are most important and stick to them.
- Discourage perfection.
- Encourage healthy eating. (Avoid too much sugar.)
- Get to know your child. He or she will change dramatically during the evolution to adolescence.
- Get enough sleep.
- Limit screen time.

REMEMBER, YOU ARE THE MODEL —————○

To the best of your ability, model how to cope with stress by managing your own anxiety and worry. How you live your life will have the biggest influence on your child—far more than any words you say. Help your child learn how to relax by showing him or her how. Provide guidance through your daily actions for how to create a healthy routine by getting enough sleep, eating healthy food, creating time for fun and for calm, and spending time with friends.

We are here to help. If you would like to pursue counseling for yourself or your child, be in touch. Call us at 860.521.8035. We take insurance and have evening and Saturday hours.



Gabe Garcia and Jon Merritt

OUR WEST HARTFORD TEEN CENTER HAS A NEW NAME: THE BASE!

Our Teen Center Leadership Group has renamed the Center to reflect both its location in the basement of the Elmwood Community Center and the feeling teens have that the Center is their “home base.”

Any West Hartford resident in grades 9-12 is welcome to drop in, and admission is free. THE BASE is open Monday and Friday 2:30-5:00 p.m. and Wednesday 1:00-3:30 p.m.

TEEN NIGHTS

Special Teen Nights will be held from 7:00-10:00 p.m. on the following dates: March 23, April 27, May 18, and June 8.