

## Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

No human being can go thru life without experiencing some worry or anxiety, yet imagine experiencing nothing else. That is life for children and teens with Generalize Anxiety Disorder (GAD). GAD is one in a group of anxiety disorders that is the most common form of mental illness. It affects females approximately two times more than males. GAD is characterized by excessive and often, unrealistic worry about anything and everything, and it interferes with daily life. It can be caused by family history, individual temperament, and stressful life events. Positively, no matter the cause, GAD is treatable.

### What to Look for:

In GAD, anxiety occurs for more days than not over the course of months negatively impacting a child's functioning within the home, school, and community milieus. Symptoms include:

- excessive worry about day to day activities
- always asking "what if"
- restlessness
- difficulty sleeping
- constant fatigue
- irritability
- difficulty concentrating
- physical complaints
- perfectionism
- self-criticism: wondering if they are good enough
- low interest in new activities for fear of failure
- need for frequent reassurance and approval

### The Components of Individual Therapy:

For children and teens with GAD, their first thought always involves the "worst" outcome. This is a frightening way to live for both the child and their family. The most common form of treatment is individual cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and it involves the following:

- Education: To understand the disorder and to be better able to recognize the anxiety
- Physical Strategies: To learn to physically decrease stress thru measures such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation
- Cognitive Strategies: To recognize the negative thoughts and replace them with more realistic and appropriate thoughts
- Behavioral Strategies: Utilizing learned skills within real life situations that trigger anxiety

### Additional Treatment Options:

In addition to individual therapy, other treatment options are instrumental in managing and decreasing the anxiety.

- Psychiatric Services: To utilize psychotropic medication to decrease symptoms
- Family Therapy: To help family members create an understanding, supportive, and nurturing environment to facilitate change
- Group Therapy: To meet with other children and teens experiencing GAD in order to decrease the stigma of the disorder
- School Services: To minimize the negative affects of symptoms on academic progress

### Top Ten Parenting Strategies:

1. Alter your expectations, recognizing that your child will need more preparation, time, and encouragement to achieve what may come easily, such as even attending a birthday party, to a child without GAD.
2. Break down worrying tasks into smaller, more manageable components, allowing your child to complete one small step at a time.
3. Act out or role-play possible anxiety provoking situations with your child.
4. Don't be afraid to use praise.
5. Let your child know that it is OK to worry and help them talk thru their feelings.
6. Role model appropriate handling of worries. Talk it out. Relax. Think more positively.
7. Use humor to help your child laugh away unrealistic or absurd worries, yet don't laugh at your child.
8. Suppress the impulse to rescue your child and rather help them thru the anxiety.
9. Talk with your child, at an age appropriate level, about stressful events such as economic difficulties or divorce. Hiding information will only make your child worry more.
10. Seek professional help as soon as possible if your child's anxiety is interfering with their enjoyment of life and life's activities.

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