

The following material is adapted from *Worried No More: Help and Hope for Anxious Children* by Aureen P. Wagner, Ph.D. This excerpt is available free of charge to parents, school personnel and health care professionals. This excerpt may be reproduced and distributed as long as it is in its entirety, and Dr. Aureen Wagner is given credit for the material. This excerpt may not be adapted or modified without specific permission from Dr. Aureen Wagner.

The information and techniques offered in this excerpt should not be used as a replacement for guidance, consultation, assessment or treatment by a qualified mental health professional.

Excessive Worry/Generalized Anxiety

Are you a worrier? Do you worry about anything and everything? Do people tell you to stop worrying so much? Is a loved one asking for reassurance about the same things, over and over? Is your child worried about things beyond her years?

Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) is the most common anxiety disorder among adolescents. It involves uncontrollable worry or rumination over day-to-day events, both trivial and major, with disproportionate fears of catastrophic consequences. The worry is often accompanied by physical tension, feeling on edge, stomach discomfort and sleep disturbance. Children with GAD are the “worrywarts” who carry the weight of the world on their shoulders. “*But what if...?*” pervades the thoughts of these children and is echoed in their repeated seeking of reassurance from adults. Past conversations, actions, family matters, friendships, school performance, health, the weather, what to wear tomorrow and a host of other issues, none too trivial to worry about, saturate the minds of children with GAD. Their worries are not confined to their own lives but may extend to the world beyond to social and global concerns such as poverty, nuclear war, terrorism, the end of the world and universal peace.

Signs and symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- Unrealistic fears over many routine events
- Uncontrollable, unstoppable worry
- Irritability, tension, nausea, aches and pains, poor concentration
- Difficulty sleeping, fatigue
- Perfectionism
- Frequent reassurance and approval seeking
- Significant interference with daily life activities

Children with GAD are often perfectionistic. They fear the disastrous consequences of making mistakes, and have an unwarranted sense of responsibility for preventing bad things from happening. For instance, 12-year-old Emily cannot seem to stop the worrisome thoughts that enter her mind, no matter how hard she tries. She stares at her open books and does no work because she is preoccupied with, “*What if it rains today?*”

Copyright © Aureen Pinto Wagner, Ph.D. 2002

Contact: Permissions@Lighthouse-Press.com or (585) 594-0311 for permission to adapt.

For more information and to order, visit www.Lighthouse-Press.com or call toll-free 1-888-749-8768

Will there be a flood like there was in Milltown when the river overflowed? Will we have to leave our homes for safety? My little sister is at home—what if she gets trapped in the house? When will the rain stop? Perhaps it won't rain—those clouds are drifting away. Is there going to be enough rain this year? Will the farmers' crops be ruined? Will we have a water shortage?"

Indications of GAD in school

GAD may be nervous, easily upset, tense, cautious and generally unable to relax or enjoy themselves in school. They express worries and doubts about numerous issues ranging from the trivial to the critical, and may seek repeated reassurance pertaining to their fears. They may appear burdened and “old beyond their years.” Due to a strong drive for perfection, children with GAD are often very conscientious and hardworking. Their perfectionism is often to their disadvantage, because they are rarely convinced that their work is satisfactory. Concern about getting everything right consumes them. As a result, they may spend hours erasing, checking and rechecking assignments, and seeking reassurance about the quality of their work from parents and teachers.

Copyright © Aureen Pinto Wagner, Ph.D. 2002

Contact: Permissions@Lighthouse-Press.com or (585) 594-0311 for permission to adapt.

For more information and to order, visit www.Lighthouse-Press.com or call toll-free 1-888-749-8768