



HEDINGHAM SCHOOL  
AND SIXTH FORM

# A Parent's Guide Depression & Anxiety



**More than 60,000 young people  
aged 11–16 are depressed and have anxiety**

*The following may be signs that your teenager's mental health is being affected by depression:*

**Irritability, angry, grumpiness, hostility or prone to angry outbursts.**

**Withdrawing from family and friends. They may also start hanging out with a different crowd.**

**Appears to be worried or feeling low a lot of the time.**

**Nothing seems much fun for them. They have lost interest in former hobbies or social activities.**

**Appears to be scared for no reason.**

**Unexplained aches and pains such as headaches or stomach aches.**

**Sensitive to criticism, rejection, and failure (a particular problem for 'over-achievers').**

**Regularly self-harming.**

**Has talked about death or has taken an overdose.**

**Weight loss or gain.**

**Change in sleeping patterns eg insomnia or sleeping for longer.**

**Loss of energy, feeling fatigued, sluggish, and physically drained.**

**Difficulty concentrating, making decisions, or remembering things.**

**Reckless behaviour such as substance abuse, compulsive gambling, reckless driving, or dangerous sports.**

## **What is Anxiety?**

Anxiety is a word used to describe feelings of unease, worry and fear. It can make a person feel emotionally and physically unwell.

Becoming anxious is a normal human experience but if feelings of anxiety are very strong or last for a long time, it can be overwhelming.

## **Fight or Flight?**

Like other animals, human beings have evolved ways to help us protect ourselves from dangerous, life-threatening situations. When a person feels under threat, their body releases hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol which help physically prepare the person to either fight the danger or run away from it. These hormones can:

**Make the person feel more alert so you can act faster.**

**Make the person's heart beat faster to carry blood quickly to where it is needed most.**

Then when the danger has passed, the person's body releases other hormones to help your muscles relax which may cause you to shake. This is commonly called

the 'fight or flight' response – it's something that happens automatically in our bodies and we have no control over it.

In modern society, we don't usually face situations where we need to physically fight or flee from danger, but our biological response to feeling threatened is the same.

## **What Causes Anxiety?**

It is hard to know why some people experience anxiety. Some people just worry more than others, it could just be part of their personality. .

## **How Can You Help Manage Your Child's Anxiety?**

A common – and natural – response to anxiety is to avoid what triggers your child's fears. Addressing them may make your child feel more anxious at first. However, through talking to them about what may trigger their anxiety may lead us to discovering how to control it.

Talk about times of the day, different social situations and the pressure of social media. Look at their school timetable with them. Are there any adjustments the school could make? Listen to their views and remind them that you are there to listen even if they do not know why they become anxious.

## **Try breathing exercises with them**

This may seem an awkward activity to do the first time. However, if you both buy into it, they can really work.

Gently breath in through your nose and out through your mouth, keeping the pace slow and regular. Slowly tense then relax all the muscles in your body starting at your toes and working up to your head. Afterwards, just take some time to be still and focus on how your body feels.

## **Try shifting your child's focus**

Get out for walks with your child. Watch a funny movie. Tell them to unplug and disconnect from social media. Have unplugged days and encourage them to take their phone out of their bedroom at night.

## **Listening to Music**

Some music today is very aggressive. This may affect their mind-set. Share some of the calming classics from your generation of music. Listening to calm music can relax your child. Try some 'chill out music' on YouTube.

## **Try Reassuring Your Child**

We all have an inner voice. We all talk to ourselves throughout the day. Talk to your child about their self-talk. Tell them that the symptoms they experience are actually caused by anxiety – it is not really dangerous and it will pass. This can help them feel calmer and less fearful of future attacks. Talk to them about the conversations they have in their heads. Are they positive? It can take time to change a script but by changing self talk can change the way they are feeling for the better.

## Physical Exercise

Physical exercise can help you manage anxiety and panic attacks. Going for a walk or a run can help your child get some time to think things over away from the stresses of the day.

## Keep a Diary

Buy your child a *Worry Journal*. Each time they get anxious, they can spot patterns in what triggers these experiences for them. They can then discuss with you and think about how they can deal with these situations in the future.

They may also keep a note of when they manage their anxiety successfully. This might help them feel more in control of the anxiety you feel.

## Eating a Healthy Diet

They may find it easier to relax if they avoid stimulants such as coffee. A healthy diet will make them feel physically better.

## Where to get help

If you are worried about your teenager's mental health, you should seek help immediately from their GP.

*Additionally, you can also get advice and support from:*

**Young Minds:**

[youngminds.org.uk](https://www.youngminds.org.uk)

Parent Helpline – 0808 802 5544

**Mind – The Mental Health Charity:**

[www.mind.org.uk](https://www.mind.org.uk)

0300 123 3393

*Try downloading these apps:*

### **The free Get Connected app Headspace**

Mindfulness techniques have benefits for mood, attention and general coping skills for the ups and downs of life. This simple app gives you ten short meditations, four brief videos explaining what meditation is and a series of facts and questions.

Keep track of how many of the meditations you have listened to and try ten minutes a day for ten days. This website is good too –

[www.getsomeheadspace.com](https://www.getsomeheadspace.com)

### **MindShift**

This is a good app if you are feeling anxious. It will explain what anxiety is and some helpful strategies to try and tackle your anxiety.

### **Calm**

This is another free app which is based around meditation.

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