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How do I help my child to cope with anxiety?

All children experience anxiety and fears that they eventually outgrow some time or another. If your child is anxious to such an extent that it affects his everyday functioning among his friends, at home or at school, you should find help.

Determine the type of anxiety your child may be experiencing:

Separation Anxiety

Children develop a fear of being separated from their parents around the age of 8 to 12 months and outgrow this fear around 24 to 30 months. If the child's anxiety to be separated from his parents continues, we then talk of separation anxiety disorder. It may be that your child cries every morning before school and saying good bye at the school becomes an unpleasant experience for you and your child. Your child may even respond with severe anxiety at home if he or she suddenly cannot see you. Separation anxiety can be so severe that panic attacks and fainting may occur. Sleep habits may be affected because your child knows that to sleep literally means to be separated from you as parent. Separation anxiety can take the form of many unrealistic fears, hyper sensitivity, nightmares, lack of self-awareness and confidence. Your child may even be shy, submissive, and tearful and appear to be worried easily.

Avoidance Anxiety

Fear of strangers is a normal part of your infant's development. Your child should outgrow this fear at around two and a half years of age. If your child feels comfortable and acts kindly toward family members he or she regularly sees, but tend to avoid other family members less frequently seen, or tend to avoid relatives and especially strangers, we can talk about avoidance anxiety. Avoidance anxiety can cause your child to become isolated because fear wouldn't permit him or her to reach out and make friends. Children usually deal with avoidance anxiety by withdrawing from everyone. Adolescents with avoidance anxiety usually find it hard to act assertively because they feel depressed, self-conscious and alone.

Excessive-anxiety disorder

When your child is excessively or unrealistically concerned about various aspects such as examinations to be written, the fact that people might not accept him, that she is not competent enough to obtain certain achievements, injuries that might be sustained, what other people will think of his behaviour, etc. we can talk about excessive anxiety disorder. These children constantly doubt their own abilities and continuously seek the approval of others. Any situation can trigger excessive anxiety disorder in this child. He or she usually handles anxiety through emotional response which can include symptoms such as abdominal pain, dizziness, headache, shortness of breath, nausea, a lump in the throat, nervousness and sleep disorders (which seem to have no medical causes).

Do you or your child need help urgently?

Have you as parent tried everything but nothing seems to help decrease your child's anxiety levels? There are several ways in which psychologists can treat these anxiety disorders and help you and your child.

Medication can accomplish a lot, but is not necessarily the only solution. Many children can be helped without administering any medication.

The psychologist can develop a parent guidance plan that is specifically tailored for the needs of your family, as well as your child's anxiety needs. Parents sometimes unconsciously acquire certain behavioral patterns in an effort to deal with their child's anxiety, but these patterns may in fact aggravate the anxiety and cause you as a parent to feel more inadequate.

Play therapy can be used to teach your child new coping mechanisms, which will help him to identify the causes of his anxiety; and problem solving skills to handle his anxiety.