

# ANXIETY DISORDER

COULD MY PARENT HAVE AN





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## WHERE?

In Print : [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Online : [TeenMentalHealth.org](https://www.teenmentalhealth.org)

# ANXIETY DISORDER IN TEENAGERS

Having a parent with an Anxiety Disorder can be frightening, frustrating, and stressful. When someone you care about has a mental illness, you can feel helpless and wonder if it's your fault. You are not to blame. There is nothing you could have done to cause your parent's Anxiety Disorder. Although it may feel like everything is out of your control, try not to lose hope. Anxiety Disorders are very treatable and there are people who can help you and your parent recover. You are not alone!

This book will help you understand more about Anxiety Disorders and what you can do to cope with your parent's illness.



# FACTS ABOUT ANXIETY DISORDERS

## NORMAL VS. ABNORMAL ANXIETY

It is perfectly normal to feel anxious sometimes. It's an important emotion to feel, because it motivates us to succeed and lets us know when we're in danger. A little bit of anxiety is a good thing and can actually make you more successful (for example, a little bit of anxiety about an exam makes you study harder, which usually results in a better grade). Too much anxiety, however, can affect your judgment and your ability to make even simple decisions.

Although there are times when feeling really anxious is totally normal and is associated with things that are dangerous (e.g., walking on the roof of a 10-story building), some people's bodies send them mixed signals, making them think that they are in danger when they're not (e.g., looking out the window of the 10th story in a building). When this anxiety is so strong and persistent that it prevents the person from being able to live a normal life, it's considered an Anxiety Disorder. Although Anxiety Disorders are distressing and problematic, they are also one of the most common and most treatable mental disorders. Anxiety Disorders do require treatment, just like any other illness; it is not something that your parent can just "snap out of." It is a medical condition, not a weakness or a choice.

## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT ANXIETY DISORDERS?

- ◆ Anxiety Disorders are the most common of all mental disorders. [Canadian Mental Health Association. (2009). "Anxiety Disorders". CMHA: Ottawa.]
- ◆ Anxiety Disorders affect about 12% of the population, causing mild to severe problems in day to day life. Public Health Agency of Canada. (2002). [A Report on Mental Illnesses in Canada. PHAC: Ottawa.]
- ◆ Anxiety Disorders are more common in women than men. [Canadian Mental Health Association. (2009). "Anxiety Disorders". CMHA: Ottawa.]
- ◆ Anxiety Disorders affect children, as well as adults. [Canadian Mental Health Association. (2009). "Anxiety Disorders". CMHA: Ottawa.]
- ◆ Anxiety Disorders are illnesses. They can be diagnosed and they can be treated. [Canadian Mental Health Association. (2009). "Anxiety Disorders". CMHA: Ottawa.]

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

It's really important that someone with an Anxiety Disorder gets treatment as soon as possible. Without treatment, Anxiety Disorders can get much worse over time.

# HOW DO YOU KNOW IF SOMEONE HAS AN ANXIETY DISORDER?

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Anxiety Disorders are diagnosed by a mental health professional (e.g., a doctor, psychologist, or clinical nurse practitioner with training in mental health) when someone has a number of specific symptoms. There are different types of Anxiety Disorders and each type requires different criteria in order to be diagnosed.

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## 1 Social Anxiety Disorder

A person with Social Anxiety Disorder has an intense fear of social situations where they could be judged or feel embarrassed. His or her fear is much greater than what would be expected given the actual danger of the situation. This can cause him or her to avoid everyday social situations, like going to work, going shopping, using a public bathroom, or driving his or her child to school. Someone with Social Anxiety Disorder often knows that other people don't feel the same way. This can make him or her feel really alone, like no one else understands, leading to further isolation and sometimes feelings of depression. For more information, check out: [youtu.be/KitHQUWrA7s](https://youtu.be/KitHQUWrA7s)

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## 2 Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

A person with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder has experienced a severely traumatic event in the past (e.g., war, natural disaster, rape, assault, witnessing a murder) and continues to re-experience the event (e.g., through memories, flashbacks, and/or nightmares). People with PTSD will often experience intense anxiety and physical distress in reaction to things in their environment that remind them of the traumatic event. This anxiety is so distressing that the person may avoid places and situations that remind him or her of the event. For a diagnosis of PTSD, these symptoms need to last for at least one month. Most people exposed to a traumatic event will not develop PTSD. We will not be addressing PTSD in this book because it has so many differences from the other Anxiety Disorders. More information on PTSD can be found at: [nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml](https://nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml)

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## 3 Specific Phobias

A person with a Specific Phobia has an intense fear of a specific object or situation (e.g., snakes, heights, blood, elevators). When someone with a Specific Phobia encounters whatever they are afraid of, they get extremely anxious and may have a panic attack. His or her fear is out of proportion to the actual danger of the situation and people with Specific Phobias often will avoid situations where their phobia may emerge. Specific Phobias only need treatment if they interfere with the person's ability to live his or her daily life. If the Phobia is not something that the person regularly encounters, he or she may be able to go without treatment.

## 4 Panic Disorder

A person with Panic Disorder experiences many intense uncontrollable panic attacks out of the blue, worries frequently about having other panic attacks, and avoids going places because he or she is concerned about having another panic attack.

A panic attack is a sudden feeling of intense fear. The person may also have a racing heart; sweating, chills, or hot flashes; trembling or shaking; a feeling of choking or not being able to breathe; chest pain; nausea; dizziness; numbness or tingling; a feeling like he or she is outside of his or her own body; and a fear that he or she is going to lose control, go crazy, or even die. Although these feelings are really frightening, they are only at their worst for about ten minutes (although it can feel much longer).

Part of what can make these attacks so frightening is that because they come out of nowhere, the person can never tell when one is coming. This can cause people with Panic Disorder to be in constant fear of having another panic attack. They may even develop another disorder called Agoraphobia, which is when people avoid situations that are hard to escape from (e.g., elevators, buses, crowds) because they are afraid that they will have another panic attack. For more information, check out: [youtu.be/R3S\\_XYaEPUs](https://youtu.be/R3S_XYaEPUs)

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## 5 Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

A person with Generalized Anxiety Disorder has excessive anxiety or worry that lasts for at least 6 months. Unlike the other Anxiety Disorders mentioned here, the anxiety experienced by someone with GAD is not restricted to a certain type of situation (e.g., anxiety about social situations in Social Anxiety Disorder). Some of the symptoms of GAD include difficulty concentrating and remembering; shaky and sweaty hands; nausea and stomach discomfort; racing heart and chest pains; exhaustion; backache; headache; difficulty relaxing or sleeping; and irritability.

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## 6 Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

A person with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder has recurring, persistent unwanted thoughts or images (i.e., obsessions) that cause him or her intense anxiety. Many people with OCD also have compulsions, which are ritual-like behaviours (e.g., washing your hands) that the person does to reduce his or her anxiety. If these compulsions are not performed in response to the obsessive thoughts, the person often believes that something really bad will happen. Often, compulsions are performed excessively and they usually have very little to do with what they are believed to prevent.

For someone with OCD, these obsessions and compulsions aren't just a passing phase. The excessive amount of time consumed by these obsessive thoughts and compulsive actions interferes with the person's ability to live his or her life (e.g., missing a lot of work because they're so busy performing compulsions, like repeatedly checking to make sure they locked the front door or washing their hands every few minutes). This can be really distressing. We will not be addressing OCD in this book because it has so many differences from the other Anxiety Disorders and is actually no longer classified as an Anxiety Disorder. More information on OCD can be found at: [cmha.ca/mental\\_health/obsessive-compulsive-disorder](https://cmha.ca/mental_health/obsessive-compulsive-disorder) and [youtu.be/ua9zr16jC1M](https://youtu.be/ua9zr16jC1M)

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## WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Anxiety Disorders have multiple genetic and environmental causes; there is no one specific cause. They are not caused by the usual stresses of everyday life. Some medical conditions (e.g., thyroid disease) can mimic an Anxiety Disorder, and some medications can also cause anxiety-like symptoms.

# CO-OCCURRING DISORDERS

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It's not uncommon for someone with an Anxiety Disorder to also have other mental health problems or mental disorders. When Anxiety Disorders are not treated, the symptoms can be overwhelming; causing the person to feel helpless, out of control, and think that it is safer to isolate him- or herself from social situations. This may increase the chance that he or she will develop significant depressive symptoms or even Depression.

Substance abuse may develop as a way for the person to cope with the symptoms of anxiety. Alcohol or drug use (including smoking cigarettes) may help the person to relax and numb his or her feelings but there are several serious problems with using this coping strategy. First, it's only a short-term solution; when the effects of the substance wear off, the anxiety remains (and may be worse). Second, consistently using drugs and alcohol to avoid anxious emotions may lead to addiction in some people. With continued use of a substance, the person will need more and more of the alcohol or drugs to get the same relief, putting him or her at increased risk for addiction and increasing his or her chance of overdose or other kinds of harm. See page 23 for more information on how to recognize the signs of alcohol poisoning or a drug overdose.



# TREATING ANXIETY DISORDERS

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Anxiety Disorders are very treatable but it takes time and work. Your parent won't get better overnight. There is no set time for how long treatment will last, but most treatments take at least 12 weeks to see noticeable improvements, so it's important to be patient and supportive. Your parent may need to be in treatment for a long time to prevent relapse, although they may not need to go to treatment as often. A relapse is when an illness comes back after it has been effectively treated.

Well-established treatments for Anxiety Disorders include some types of psychotherapies (i.e., talking therapies), as well as some kinds of medicines. Often a combination of psychotherapy and medication will be prescribed together.

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## TYPE OF TREATMENT

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### 1 Medication

Medications often help lessen symptoms by helping your parent's brain function better.

Medicines known as Serotonin Specific Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) are the most commonly used, and benzodiazepines are also sometimes used. Medications usually take 4-6 weeks to start working, although it may take longer to find out which medication works best for your parent. For certain disorders (e.g., Specific Phobias), medication may only be required when your parent is in the distressing situation (e.g., when about to board a plane if he or she has a Specific Phobia of flying).

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### 2 Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is talk therapy that can be done one-on-one (just your parent and the therapist) or in a group (with other adults who also have similar anxiety). It also works to help your parent's brain function better. Some treatments used in psychotherapy include:

- ◆ **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT):** CBT helps people learn how to overcome their fears. It includes several components, including Cognitive Restructuring (e.g., changing the way your parent thinks about his or her fears) and Exposure (e.g., gradually exposing your parent to his or her fears while keeping him or her safe and teaching him or her effective strategies for coping with fear).
  - ◆ **Psychoeducation:** This is usually done in a group and is helpful in teaching people to recognize their symptoms so they can seek treatment when needed and help prevent relapses.
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For important information on how your parent can get the best treatment, check out:

[teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/evidence-based-medicine](https://teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/evidence-based-medicine)

[teenmentalhealth.org/images/resources/communicating\\_with\\_healthcare\\_providers\\_person\\_version.pdf](https://teenmentalhealth.org/images/resources/communicating_with_healthcare_providers_person_version.pdf)

# WHAT YOU CAN DO?

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Start by putting yourself first. Do things that you enjoy and that help you cope with stress. When you look after yourself, it makes it easier to deal with the challenges of your parent's Anxiety Disorder. Don't forget that you're the kid in this relationship - it's not your responsibility to look after your parent. Putting yourself first does not mean that you're abandoning your parent or that you don't love him or her. Here are some ways that you can help your parent, without making his or her Anxiety Disorder your responsibility:

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## 1 Educate yourself about the illness.

Understanding what an Anxiety Disorder is and how it affects your parent will help you feel less frustrated and more supportive. Page 28 has a list of helpful websites that can be trusted to learn more information about Anxiety Disorders.

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## 2 Talk to someone.

Talking to other family members about your parent's Anxiety Disorder can be a relief because they often understand what you're going through. Just remember that not all people will have the same experience as you and not everyone is comfortable talking about mental illness. If you can't find support within your family, it's okay to talk to a trusted friend. Try to respect your parent's privacy (and consider asking your parent how he or she feels about you sharing that he or she has a mental illness) but remember that you have nothing to be ashamed of. Some people may be judgmental or unkind. This is usually because they don't understand Anxiety Disorders or what it's like to have a family member who has an Anxiety Disorder. Your parent's illness is not a reflection of you and does not make your family less than any other family. You can choose to react negatively to these people; you can choose to ignore the things they say; or you can choose to stand up to them and increase their awareness of mental illness. It's up to you. As important as it is to try to increase people's understanding of mental illness, not everyone is willing to listen. Pick and choose your battles and try to confide only in people you trust. There's no shame in just ignoring someone's negative comments if it doesn't seem worth your energy.

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## 3 Be prepared for emergencies.

It's tempting to pretend that everything is fine but it's so important for you to be prepared in case something goes wrong. Have a plan about what to do and where to go, as well as a list of emergency contacts, just in case. Use the tear out pages at the back of this book to write down your emergency contacts.

## **4 Learn how to communicate.**

Try to avoid arguments and accusations when you get frustrated. Page 12 has some tips for communicating with your parents.

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## **5 Let your parent know you care.**

It can be really frustrating and upsetting when your parent has an Anxiety Disorder. It's easy to focus only on the negative, especially when your parent is feeling negative. Remember that having an Anxiety Disorder skews the way your parent sees the world and can make things seem worse than they really are. Try not to let his or her negative thoughts and comments affect your own thoughts and behaviours. Remind your parent that you care and that you are trying to help him or her remember that things aren't all bad.

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## **6 Be patient and don't take it personally.**

Anxiety affects the way your parent sees the world. He or she may not want to do the things he or she used to like to do and it may be hard for your parent to attend or participate in your school events or games. Although it's difficult, try not to take it personally. Be patient with your parent when you can and recognize that the Anxiety Disorder is making him or her act this way. It's not a reflection of how he or she feels about you.

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## **7 Keep in mind quality, not quantity.**

Sometimes it's better to spend shorter periods of time with your parent doing something enjoyable when he or she is feeling good, rather than giving up lots of your time trying to care for him or her. It's okay to set boundaries; it doesn't make you a bad kid.

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## **8 Understand your feelings.**

Become familiar with how your parent's illness affects you. Do you worry too much or feel neglected? Talking to a counselor, or a trusted friend or family member can help you sort through your thoughts. Keeping a journal of your feelings can also help you put things in perspective and understand yourself better.

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## **9 Accept what you can't control.**

You can't control your parent's behaviour or the fact that he or she has an Anxiety Disorder. People can only control their own thoughts, feelings, and actions. Trying to change your parent is frustrating and futile. Focus on the things you can control (like your reactions to your parent's behaviour) and try to let the other things go.

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## **10 Appreciate the fun times.**

Remember that your parent's symptoms may come and go. Take advantage of the good times and have fun with your parents. Try not to hold a grudge because of how they acted when they were experiencing anxiety. It's important to have fun together when you can, because having good times to remember will help get you through the difficult times.

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## **11 Do what you love.**

Doing things you love to do can take your mind off problems with your family and remind you of the good things in your life.



# TALKING TO YOUR PARENT

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When your parent has an Anxiety Disorder, it can feel like you're walking on eggshells around him or her. It can be hard to find the right thing to say or to figure out how to tell your parent what's on your mind. Here are a few tips to help you out:

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- 1 Be respectful and polite.** This can be a challenge if your parent is feeling especially anxious or has missed out on something that he or she promised you they would do. Try taking a deep breath and remember that the Anxiety Disorder is making him or her act this way and you don't have to join the negativity.

**2 Think of your parent as a person and talk to them the way you would want someone to talk to you.** It's easy to think of our parents only as parents or only as someone with a mental illness. They're more than either of those roles and treating them as such goes a long way.

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**3 Avoid blaming.** Even if your parent was at fault, blaming them for whatever has happened will only make them defensive and less likely to listen. Use "I" statements whenever you can. They communicate your message without causing the other person to feel as defensive. For example, instead of saying "You didn't come to my soccer game again," say "I was hurt when I realized that you weren't at my soccer game." This puts the emphasis on how it made you feel, instead of what your parent did wrong.

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**4 Express your feelings.** Even though your parent has an Anxiety Disorder, he or she is still your parent. Your feelings matter just as much as his or her feelings. Tell your parent when you're upset, stressed out, scared, and even happy. Expressing those feelings will help improve your mood and it's important that your parent is aware of how you're feeling.

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**5 Choose a suitable time and place to talk to your parent if the topic is sensitive.** If you have something important to discuss, make sure that you have some privacy. The middle of the grocery store is probably not a great spot for an intimate or emotional conversation. Try to approach your parent at times when they are generally calm or relaxed. It will make it easier for both of you. Avoid having a serious conversation with your parent if he or she is feeling sick or using alcohol/drugs.

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**6 Speak with a trusted adult first.** If you have to discuss something serious with your parent, whether it's about you or about their Anxiety Disorder, it can help to speak with a trusted adult first. This can mean another family member, a family friend, or a counselor. You can run things by the trusted adult as a trial run and they can even accompany you to talk to your parent, if you feel that's appropriate and helpful.

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**7 Be prepared for denial and negativity.** Your parent may not be ready or willing to admit that he or she has a problem. This denial could be because he or she is trying to protect you or it could be that your parent doesn't want to believe that his or her anxiety is that serious.

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**8 If you are not comfortable speaking to your parent face-to-face, writing a letter can be a good alternative.** A letter allows you to express how you feel without your emotions confusing you. It also gives your parent the opportunity to read it on their own time. Giving them some time to process what you needed to say allows them to be less defensive than they may be if they were confronted in person. A good idea when writing a letter is to put it away for a day when you've finished, and then read it again to make sure you've said what you really want to say.

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It is not your job to take care of your parent. This information is meant to help you better understand your parent's illness so you can know what to expect and be better prepared to cope. Your job is to take care of you and do your part in trying to have a good relationship with your parent.

# QUESTION & ANSWER



## Q Did I cause my parent's Anxiety Disorder?

**A** No, absolutely not. Nothing you could do would cause your parent's Anxiety Disorder. An Anxiety Disorder is a medical illness of the brain, just like diabetes is a medical illness of the pancreas.

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## Q Am I betraying my parent if I talk about them?

**A** No, it's important for you to talk about how your parent's Anxiety Disorder is affecting you. Just make sure that the person you talk to is someone that you trust (and if possible, someone that your parent also trusts). Remember that you have nothing to be ashamed of.

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## Q Does my parent even like me?

**A** Sometimes people with mental illness don't have the ability to put themselves in another person's shoes and realize how their words and actions affect other people. Anxiety can be really overwhelming and can make it difficult for your parent to see beyond his or her own fears. Remember that even though your parent has an Anxiety Disorder, it is not okay for him or her to say rude or hurtful things to you. Although it can be really tough, try not to take what your parent says personally. If conversations become very negative, do what you can to remove yourself from the situation.

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## Q Will I get Anxiety Disorder too?

**A** You get your genes from your biological parents, and although your genes contribute to Anxiety Disorders, that does not mean that you will get the disorder. This means that although it's possible that you will develop an Anxiety Disorder, there's also a possibility that you won't. There are many things you can do to stay healthy and perhaps even decrease your risk of developing an Anxiety Disorder. Look after yourself, eat healthy, get plenty of sleep, and learn and use positive coping skills (see page 17-19). Practicing healthy behaviours and coping positively with stress is good for you!



# DEALING WITH YOUR EMOTIONS

# GUILT

When someone you love has an Anxiety Disorder, it's not unusual to experience guilt about feeling:

- ◆ Happy
- ◆ Carefree
- ◆ Angry with your parent
- ◆ Like you don't want to spend time with your parent
- ◆ Like you can't make your parent better

Although it's totally normal to feel guilty, remember that your parent's illness is not your fault. You haven't done anything to cause his or her Anxiety Disorder and you have every right to feel and express happiness, anger, sadness, fear, or any other emotion. Try to remind yourself that you can't control or change your parent's emotions, thoughts, or behaviour. He or she has to do that on his or her own. Be caring and thoughtful, but put yourself first. Just because anxiety is trying to control your parent's life, doesn't mean you have to let it control yours.

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# ANGER

Anger is an important emotion. It's totally okay to feel angry at times. Rather than feeling guilty about your anger, try to focus on ways that you can better manage it. You can learn to better understand what your anger means to you and you can even learn how to be more in charge of your anger. Effective anger management takes practice. Here are some tips that may help:

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## 1 Burn off some steam.

Exercise is a great way to manage your anger. Go for a run, try yoga, take a kickboxing class – whatever works best for you. Working out helps your body “release” emotions, plus you get the benefits of exercise.

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## 2 Breathe deeply.

Take a minute and try the box breathing exercise below. Taking deep breaths slows your heart rate and helps you calm down.

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## 3 Learn to problem solve.

Figuring out what exactly is making you angry can make a huge difference in how you feel. Often, what we think we're angry about and what we're actually angry about are not the same thing. Later on, when you have some distance from the situation, think about the point when you got angry, what happened, and what thoughts were going through your head. Understanding the problem goes a long way towards finding a good solution.

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## 4 Give yourself a break.

If you feel yourself getting angry, walk away from the situation for a little while, if you can. This works in a similar way as counting to ten, giving you time to calm down and think rationally about how to deal with the situation that is making you angry.

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## 5 Count to ten.

It sounds cliché but it can help. Taking a pause before you respond helps your body and your mind calm down and you can then think more rationally about how to react.

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## 6 Express your feelings.

Sometimes, telling someone why you are angry can help you feel better. Instead of being aggressive, try to calmly and assertively express your feelings. When you're calm, it's easier for people to listen to what you are actually saying, instead of only reacting to your anger.

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If you've tried all of these tips and are still having a hard time managing your anger, it is a good idea to talk to a counselor. For information on how and where to find support, see page 27.

# DEALING WITH YOUR STRESS

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Having a parent with an Anxiety Disorder can be really stressful and that stress can show itself in many ways:

## 1 **Physical symptoms.**

Headache; neck ache; indigestion; stomach ache; sweaty palms; racing heart; irregular sleeping patterns.

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## 2 **Emotional symptoms.**

Crying; anger; loneliness; forgetfulness; diminished sense of humour; irritability; hopelessness; unhappiness; indecisiveness; sensitivity; anxiety

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## 3 **Behavioural symptoms.**

Drinking, smoking or using drugs; needing to be in control; withdrawal or avoidance; acting aggressively; feeling restless; grinding teeth; eating poorly; having nightmares.

Although a little bit of stress is healthy, the stress of having a parent with an Anxiety Disorder can at times feel overwhelming. The coping strategies below can help you stay calm and prevent the stress from taking over your life. If after a little practice, these strategies don't seem to be helping, it's a good idea to talk to a counselor. See page 27 for information on how to find support.

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## COPING STRATEGIES

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### 1 **Exercise.**

Daily physical activity improves your health and mood, and helps you get rid of stress. Even something as simple as going for a walk can help.

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### 2 **Eat healthy.**

Eating a balanced diet gives your body the fuel it needs to help combat stress. Try not to skip meals, eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, and go easy on the junk food.

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### 3 **Limit caffeine.**

Caffeine can make your heart race, which can make you feel worse.

### 4 **Sleep.**

Getting 8-9 hours of sleep each night will help you feel better the next day. If you have trouble sleeping, try the Sleep tips on next page.

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### 5 **Daily relaxation time.**

Take time each day to relax. Read a book, watch a movie, play a game, listen to music – whatever helps you relax. Also learn and use the Box Breathing exercise on the next page.

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### 6 **Build healthy relationships.**

It's important to have a good support network of people you trust.

## 7 **Manage your time.**

Learn how to schedule and prioritize your projects and other responsibilities — it will help you feel more in control, more productive, and less overwhelmed. Use a timetable organizer and check it out every morning to help you plan your day.

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## 8 **Acknowledge your feelings.**

It's okay to feel angry or upset once in a while. You don't have to bottle up your feelings. Try talking to the people in your support network. Sharing your feelings with someone else can feel like a weight is lifted off your chest.

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## 9 **Go outside.**

Staying inside all the time can be really draining. Getting outside and enjoying the sun and fresh air can improve your mood and remind you that things are not as bleak as they sometimes appear. Try to link this with exercise if you can, even a brisk walk outdoors may help.

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## 10 **Stay away from alcohol and drugs.**

Although you may feel better in the short-term, alcohol and drugs will not resolve your stress. They'll only give you a false sense of confidence and may make your problems worse in the long run. This includes cigarettes!

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## 11 **Be realistic.**

Anxiety can make your parent interpret things as much worse than they actually are. Remind yourself that anxiety skews your parent's perspective and things may not be as bad as your parent believes them to be.

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## 12 **Accept what you can't change.**

Not being able to change your parent's behaviour can be really frustrating. It's important to remember that the only thing you can control is your own behaviour. Try not to dwell on the things you can't change and focus on the things you can (e.g., your reactions to other people's behaviour).

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# BOX BREATHING

If possible, sit and close your eyes. If not, just focus on your breathing.

- ◆ Inhale your breath (preferably through your nose) for 4 seconds.
- ◆ Hold your breath for 4 more seconds. You're not trying to deprive yourself of air; you're just giving the air a few seconds to fill your lungs.
- ◆ Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.
- ◆ Pause for 4 seconds (without speaking) before breathing in again.

Repeat this process as many times as necessary. Even 30 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel calmer and more in control.

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# SLEEP TIPS

- ◆ Go to sleep and wake up within 30 minutes of the same time every day.
- ◆ Follow a regular nightly routine before you go to bed. A series of steps that you follow every night cues your body that it's time to fall asleep.
- ◆ Don't read, do homework, or text your friends from your bed. This teaches your body that when you're in bed, you should be sleeping.
- ◆ Avoid electronic screens (TV, computer, phone, tablet, etc.) for at least one hour before bed, and try not to bring them into your bedroom.

For more information about sleep, check out: [teenmentalhealth.org/understanding-mental-health/sleep](https://teenmentalhealth.org/understanding-mental-health/sleep)





# FAMILY RULES

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You might have unspoken “rules” in your family. It’s important to be aware of these hidden “rules” because sometimes they may be unhealthy. Here are some rules that are worth breaking:

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**1 Don’t trust.** When you’re frequently disappointed by broken promises, eventually you learn not to trust what people say to you. Sometimes you don’t trust other people at all.

**Break it!** We make our assumptions about the world based on our experiences – that can make it easy to not trust anyone else when you come from a family that constantly breaks your trust. Not everyone will disappoint you. There are lots of honest and trustworthy people in the world. Give someone a chance to be there for you when you need it.

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**2 Don’t feel.** When you’re constantly disappointed and hurt by someone you love, you learn to shut off your emotions so that other people can’t hurt you the same way.

**Break it!** Although it’s tempting to sometimes not feel at all, emotions are an essential part of living a fulfilling and rewarding life. Don’t let your parent’s illness stop you from living the full life you deserve.

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**3 Don’t talk.** When a lot of negative things happen in a family, you can learn not to talk about your problems because it’s uncomfortable.

**Break it!** It may be uncomfortable at first, but it’s so important to talk about what’s going on in your family. Chances are – someone else feels the way you do. Sharing your feelings with each other can help to release stress and starts you on the path toward resolving family issues. You can’t solve a problem if no one will admit it exists.

# SUBSTANCE ABUSE

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Sometimes people with Anxiety Disorders turn to drugs or alcohol to try to control their symptoms. This usually only helps for a very short period of time, as their symptoms reappear when the substance wears off. It also can be quite dangerous as some people may build up tolerance when they use alcohol and drugs often. This means that they need more and more of the substance to get the same effect. If someone is frequently using drugs or alcohol to cope with anxiety, they are at risk for substance use problems (also called alcohol or drug addiction). This includes cigarettes! Addiction can cause family problems, social problems, financial problems, and health problems, including:

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- ◆ Neglecting, hurting, and losing family and friends because they spend so much time using or trying to obtain the substance.
- ◆ Engaging in moody, unstable, or violent behaviour, often accompanied by anger management problems.
- ◆ Trouble keeping a job because they show up late, are hung over, or even use the substance at work.
- ◆ Spending a lot of money on the substance and sometimes failing to pay necessary bills and expenses (e.g., electricity, groceries).
- ◆ Behaving in dangerous or risky ways. People with addictions can go to great lengths to get a hold of the substance and may put themselves or others in danger.
- ◆ Incurring a number of health problems, including problems with the stomach, heart, liver, and central nervous system.



# SIGNS

## OF DRUG OVERDOSE & ALCOHOL POISONING

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### SIGNS OF DRUG OVERDOSE

- ◆ Loss of consciousness
  - ◆ Chest pain
  - ◆ Heavy sweating
  - ◆ Delusions/hallucinations
  - ◆ Faster breathing
  - ◆ Seizures or uncontrollable twitching
  - ◆ Fever
  - ◆ Racing or irregular heartbeat
  - ◆ Cold or pale skin
- 

### SIGNS OF ALCOHOL POISONING

- ◆ Loss of Consciousness
  - ◆ Slow or irregular heart beat
  - ◆ Vomiting
  - ◆ Seizure
  - ◆ Low body temperature
  - ◆ Pale or bluish skin
- 

### CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY

Someone with alcohol poisoning or a drug overdose may get brain damage or die. It is essential that you call for help immediately if you notice any of the signs listed above.





# GETTING SUPPORT

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Surrounding yourself with a good support system of friends, relatives, neighbours, and other people you trust is really helpful. A good support system will:

- ◆ understand the challenges that having a parent with a mental disorder creates for you
  - ◆ listen to you when you need someone to talk to
  - ◆ notice when you're not acting/feeling like yourself
  - ◆ give you honest and helpful advice when you need it
  - ◆ encourage you
  - ◆ help you cope when you're having a rough time
  - ◆ be there for you when you need them
  - ◆ remind you that you're not alone
  - ◆ hang out with you
- 

## **1 Find a safe environment.**

If you feel unsafe at home - it's okay to go to a friend's house. Just make sure that a trusted adult knows where you are. Don't run away and put yourself in danger.

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## **2 Join a support group for families.**

Many communities have support groups for mental illness where you can talk openly about what you are going through. Some communities have groups that are specifically for family members. If there are no local groups, there are also online groups for families affected by mental illness.

## **3 Talk to a counselor.**

If you have a school counselor, it may be helpful to talk to them. They can often provide information on Anxiety Disorders or tell you about other local resources or support groups for families.

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## **4 Know emergency contacts.**

If your parent gets abusive or out of control, it's important to know the phone numbers of trusted people you can call for help.

# EMERGENCY CONTACT

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NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

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## VIOLENCE:

If your parent becomes violent or if you are unsure about your safety or the safety of others, you need to act. Call 911. If violence is occurring, it is important that you get help from a counselor, police officer, or doctor. **DO NOT WAIT!** The sooner the issue is addressed, the better the outcome.

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## MAKE A ULYSSES AGREEMENT

A Ulysses agreement is like a safety plan for your family. The purpose of this agreement is to make sure that you and your siblings will be taken care of if your parent's illness gets to the point that your parent is not able to take healthy control of his/her life. It's a good idea to sit down with your entire family and come up with a list of warning signs that your parent's illness may be worsening and what you should do if that happens. The agreement should also include who you should contact and a safe place you could go if your parent is unwell. It would also be a good idea for your family to include trusted relatives or close family friends when creating this agreement, so that they know what could happen and how to provide support if necessary. There is a sample Ulysses agreement in the back of this book for you to use.



# INFO

These are places you can find more information about mental health/mental disorders and get help:

## 1 **Family Doctor.**

Talk to your family doctor about your concerns. Your doctor can answer questions you may have and may be able to connect you with a good psychologist, counselor, and/or support group.

## 2 **Emergency.**

If you or your parent are feeling suicidal or are in crisis, go to your local hospital's emergency room immediately.

## 3 **School Counselor or Nurse.**

Your school counselor or nurse may have helpful resources for you, including books, pamphlets, and contacts in the community.

## 4 **Kids Help Phone.**

The Kids Help Phone has counselors who answer phone calls and online questions from young people 24/7. You can reach them at 1-800-668-6868 or at [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

## 5 **Health Boards.**

Many communities have a health board with information on different support groups and other resources. They are often located in community centres, malls, and grocery stores.

## 6 **Phonebook.**

The yellow pages have lists of local support groups, counselors, and youth health centres, some of which may be helpful for you.

## 7 **Library.**

Check your local community or school library for books to help you understand more about Anxiety Disorders.

## 8 **Internet.**

The internet has loads of information about mental illness; just know that not all of it is accurate. In fact, the information on some websites is more wrong than right. The next page has a list of helpful websites that can be trusted.

## TALK TO A COUNSELOR OR FAMILY DOCTOR

Sometimes you may need to talk to someone who is experienced in helping teens, like a counselor, psychologist, or doctor. Don't be afraid to ask for this if you need it. Realizing you need more help and looking for it is a sign of strength, not weakness. A counselor or doctor can help you:

- ◆ Understand more about your parent's mental illness
- ◆ Understand and express your emotions in a positive way
- ◆ Learn to cope in healthy ways
- ◆ Make positive changes in your own life
- ◆ Build healthy relationships
- ◆ Set limits and protect yourself

Sometimes it helps to make a list of questions before visiting a counselor or doctor. Remember, what you say will remain confidential unless you are in a situation where harm can happen to you. Discuss with your doctor or counselor how they will keep your discussions in confidence.



# HELPFUL WEBSITES

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Teen Mental Health: [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org)

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre: [www.keltymentalhealth.ca](http://www.keltymentalhealth.ca)

National Institute of Mental Health: [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

Canadian Mental Health Association: [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

Mood Disorders Society of Canada: [www.mooddisorderscanada.ca](http://www.mooddisorderscanada.ca)

Mood Disorders Society of Canada: [www.mooddisorderscanada.ca](http://www.mooddisorderscanada.ca)

Mental Health Foundation: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada/Association Canadienne des Troubles Anxieux:  
[www.anxietycanada.ca](http://www.anxietycanada.ca)

Anxiety Disorders Association of America: [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

# WRITE ABOUT YOU

Writing in a journal can be a really good way to express your feelings. Reading over what you've written later may help you make sense of your feelings and you might even feel better. Feel free to use the questions below if you're having trouble getting started.

I still have questions about \_\_\_\_\_

I'm concerned my parent will \_\_\_\_\_

I'm worried I will \_\_\_\_\_

I'm going to share my feelings with \_\_\_\_\_

My friends will help me \_\_\_\_\_

I'm going to take care of myself by \_\_\_\_\_

Things that make me feel better include \_\_\_\_\_

When I am scared, I will \_\_\_\_\_

I can trust \_\_\_\_\_

Things I like about myself include \_\_\_\_\_

I will stay connected to my family by \_\_\_\_\_

What I love about my family is \_\_\_\_\_

I get frustrated when \_\_\_\_\_



# EMERGENCY CONTACT LIST

My parent's doctor's name: \_\_\_\_\_

My parent's doctor's phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Trusted adult/relative #1: \_\_\_\_\_

Trusted adult/relative's phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Trusted adult/relative #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Trusted adult/relative's phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Police phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Crisis hotline: \_\_\_\_\_

Closest hospital phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

If I need to leave and go to a safe environment, I will go: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Medication my parent is on: \_\_\_\_\_

**IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT YOUR SAFETY OR THE  
SAFETY OF SOMEONE ELSE, CALL 911!**



# ULYSSES

# AGREEMENT

NAMES OF PEOPLE AWARE OF THIS AGREEMENT:

Name			
Signature			
Contact Info			

PARENT'S MEDICAL CONDITION:

Diagnosis			
Symptoms			
Medications (name, dose)			



IF PARENT IS UNWELL, CHILDREN WILL BE TEMPORARILY TAKEN CARE OF BY:

Name			
Relation			
Contact Info			

SPECIFIC NEEDS OF CHILDREN (dates of births, health card number, medical issues):

SPECIFIC CARE CONTACTS FOR CHILDREN INCLUDE:

	Name	Contact Info
Family Doctor		
Dentist		
School		
Friend		

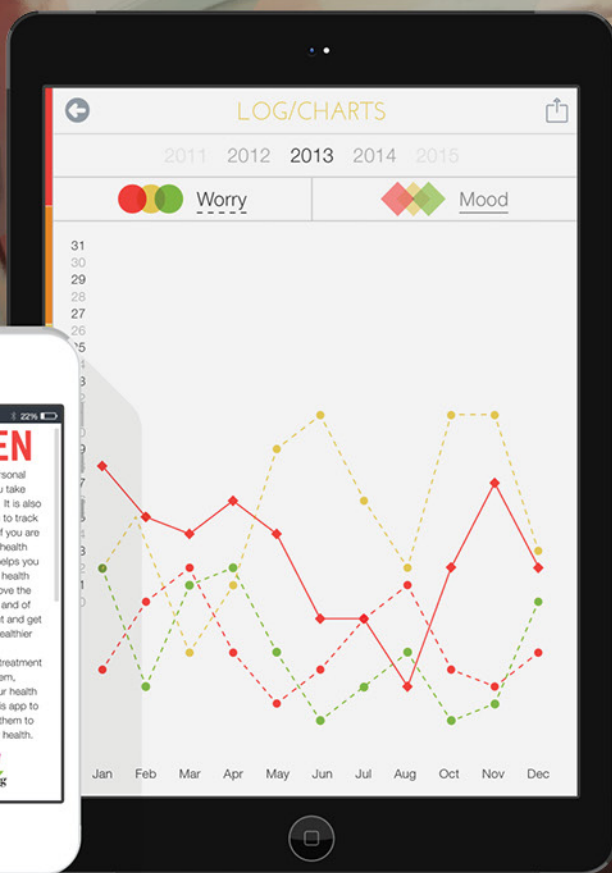
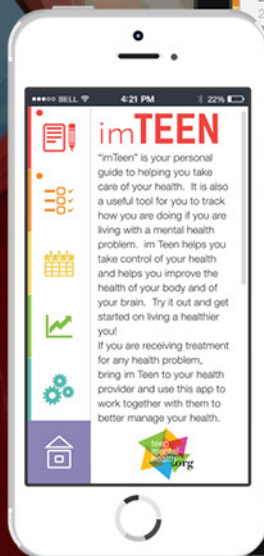


# imTEEN

Taking charge of your health



- ASSESSMENT
- CHECKLIST
- CALENDAR
- VISUAL REPORTS



# TRANSITIONS



amazon.com

Available on the  
App Store

Available on the  
iBookstore

Available on Amazon.com and the Apple iBookStore. The App is free for download at the Apple App Store & online: [teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/transitions](http://teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/transitions)



# FAMILY PACK

better mental health for you & your family

Support yourself and your family members in better understanding mental disorders and how to deal with them. If you have a mental disorder, are supporting a family member with one or are interested in how you can support a friend and their family, the Family Pack can help.







ANXIETY DISORDER

DEPRESSION

EATING DISORDER

SCHIZOPHRENIA

DRUG & ALCOHOL ADDICTION

BIPOLAR DISORDER

