

## What do children worry about? : A fact sheet for Teachers and Parents

“Childhood stress can be caused by any situation that requires adaptation or change. Such situations often produce anxiety. Stress may be evoked by positive changes such as starting a new activity, but it is most commonly linked with changes such as illness or death in the family” (National Institute of Health). Worrying in children, when not controlled, can lead to anxiety disorders, depression and other mental conditions that may affect their mental and physical health in future years.

### Warning signals for parents and teachers:

Children present with different signs and symptoms when they are worried over time. The physical symptoms include headaches, upset stomach or vague stomach pain, sleep disturbance, nightmares, bedwetting, decreased appetite, stuttering. Common emotional symptoms in a worrying child are anxiety, restlessness, fears, clinging, anger, crying, whining, aggression, emotional disturbance, stubbornness, unwillingness to participate in family or school activities. Often, symptoms go away on their own, but concern should increase if the child worries about something for more than two weeks. If the child worries for more than two to three months, seek professional help.

### What are common some of the common worries among children?

- Doing homework, being late for school, changing schools, not getting good grades.
- Health problems or becoming sick
- Being smaller or much larger than other children.
- Being left out of a group, not getting along well with teachers, not being good enough at sports.
- Personal harm from other children, family or others.
- Separation from the family.
- A few may worry about war, money, disasters, and dying.

### Facts:

- Worrying is a common phenomenon in normal children aged 8 – 13 years.
- Between 5 and 10 children in every 100 children have anxiety problems.
- Stress among children is estimated to have increased 45% over the past 30 years.
- The most frequent worry in children involves their parents, grades and peers
- The most intense worries of children are about war, money and disasters.
- One in four children worry that they do not spend enough time with their parents primarily because parents are too busy working.
- Children’s worries can sometimes be associated with anxiety.

### What can teachers do?

Make classrooms more conducive to appropriate expression. Be aware of children’s feelings and use a gentle tone. Observe shy, timid and quiet children in the class and be sympathetic when addressing such children. Allow children to express fears and concern without inhibition and let them know that they are not the only ones. Try to provide a vent for common childhood worries through classroom activities involving stories, humor, games and art. Discuss common issues of children around the world. Focus on improving problem-solving and coping skills. Allow children to mingle with other kids in a safe environment. Work to prevent bullying in schools.

## **What can parents do?**

Listen and talk to your children. Pay attention to their physical and emotional needs. Focus on their strengths and reinforce them. Try to be a role model by not worrying excessively in front of children. Encourage questions, expression of concerns and worries. Reinforce self-esteem and self worth by making kids feel wanted and loved. Invite your child's friends and classmates to your home and know who your child spends time with at school and other places. Be aware of situations in the home environment that could be upsetting to children. Do not punish kids in an abusive manner. Buy books, games, videos that are not stressful to children. Lean and be an example of healthy coping to your children. Let children make choices and have some control of their life. Research shows that the stress response is better in people who learn to gain control over multiple life situations. Prepare you children when there is going to be a major change in the family which could affect them. For example, moving, illness, death of loved one etc. This will reduce the impact of the situation on them. Do not hesitate to seek professional help when children worry about something for months and signs of stress do not decrease or disappear.

## **What can children do?**

Talk to your parents about your problems. Tell your parents or someone you love and trust what worries you. Talk to your teacher about your worries at school. Play and be with children who accept you and respect you. Complete your homework on time. Do not keep your worries to yourselves. Relax and learn to breathe when you are worried. Pursue your hobby when you are worried about something. Focus your mind on pleasant things. Learn to respect yourself and others at home and school.

### **Resources:**

#### **Resources for children:**

[www.kidshealth.com](http://www.kidshealth.com)

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/Publicat/NIMHgad.pdf>

<http://www.kidshealth.org/kid/feeling/emotion/afraid.html>

#### **Resources for teachers:**

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info/mhgu/newmhgu14.htm>

<http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/anxious.htm>

<http://www.nea.org/crisis/>

<http://www.healthteacher.com/lessonguides/>

#### **Resources for parents:**

<http://www.mentalhealth.org/child>

<http://www.mhcs.health.nsw.gov.au/health-public-affairs/mhcs/publications/6420.html>

<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/info/mhgu/newmhgu14.htm>

<http://kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/feelings/stress.html>

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/HealthInformation/depchildmenu.cfm>

<http://www.mentalhealth.org/publications/allpubs/Ca-0022/default.asp>

<http://www.vh.org/pediatric/patient/pediatrics/cqqa/anxiety.html>

**Reference:** National Institute of Health, Medical Encyclopedia.

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/002059.htm>