



Newsletter 002/2020

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# ANXIETY IN SCHOOL CHILDREN

Causes, Cures and How to build Eagerness for school, following Covid-19 Lockdown



by Kgomotso Modise on May 15, 2020

### What is an ANXIETY DISORDER?

An anxiety disorder is a mental health disorder that is characterized by feelings of worry and fear that are strong enough to cause changes in a child's behavior, sleep, eating, and mood. It is usually self-diagnosable and can be cured naturally or through the help of a medical professional in extreme cases.

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### Types of Anxiety Disorders in school going children:

**Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)**

**Separation anxiety disorder (SAD)**

**Social phobia (social anxiety disorder)**

**Selective mutism (SM)**

**Specific phobia**



## GENERAL ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD)

Kids with GAD worry over things that most kids worry about, like homework, tests, or making mistakes. But with GAD, kids worry more, and more often, about these things. Kids with GAD also worry over things parents might not expect, for example, they might worry about recess, lunchtime, birthday parties, playtime with friends, or riding the school bus. Kids with GAD may also worry about war, weather, or the future. Or about loved ones, safety, illness, or getting hurt.

With GAD, there is almost always a worry in a kid's mind. GAD makes it hard for kids to relax and have fun, eat well, or fall asleep at night. They may miss many days of school because worry makes them feel sick, afraid, or tired.

Some kids with GAD keep worries to themselves. Others talk about their worries with a parent or teacher. They might ask over and over whether something they worry about will happen. But it's hard for them to feel OK, no matter what a parent says

## SEPARATION ANXIETY DISORDER (SAD)

It's normal for babies and very young kids to feel anxious the first time they are apart from their parents. But when kids don't outgrow the fear of being apart from a parent, it's called [separation anxiety disorder](#). Even as they get older, kids with SAD feel very anxious about being away from their parents or away from home. They

may miss many days of school. They may say they feel too sick or upset to go. They may cling to a parent, cry, or refuse to go to school, sleepovers, playdates, or other activities without their parent.

## SOCIAL PHOBIA (SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER)

With [social phobia](#), kids feel too afraid of what others will think or say. They are always afraid they might do or say something embarrassing. They worry they might sound or look weird. They don't like to be the center of attention. They don't want others to notice them, so they might avoid raising their hand in class. If they get called on in class, they may freeze or panic and can't answer. With social phobia, a class presentation or a group activity with classmates can cause extreme fear.

Social phobia can cause kids and teens to avoid school or friends. They may feel sick or tired before or during school. They may complain of other body sensations that go with anxiety too. For example, they may feel their heart racing or feel short of breath. They may feel jumpy and feel they can't sit still. They may feel their face get hot or blush. They may feel shaky or lightheaded.

## SELECTIVE MUTISM

This extreme form of social phobia causes kids to be so afraid they don't talk. Kids and teens with SM *can* talk. And they do talk at home or with their closest people. But they refuse to talk at all at school, with friends, or in other places where they have this fear.

## SPECIFIC PHOBIA

It's normal for young kids to feel scared of the dark, monsters, big animals, or loud noises like thunder or fireworks. Most of the time, when kids feel afraid, adults can help them feel safe and calm again. But a [phobia](#) is a more intense, more extreme, and longer lasting fear of a specific thing. With a phobia, a child dreads the thing they fear and tries to avoid it. If they are near what they fear, they feel terrified and are hard to comfort.

With a specific phobia, kids may have an extreme fear of things like animals, spiders, needles or shots, blood, throwing up, thunderstorms, people in costumes, or the dark. A phobia causes kids to avoid going places where they think they might see the thing they fear. For example, a kid with a phobia of dogs may not go to a friend's house, to a park, or to a party because dogs might be there.

# WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY DISORDERS?

Several things play a role in causing the overactive "fight or flight" that happens with anxiety disorders:

**Genetics.** A child who has a family member with an anxiety disorder is more likely to have one too. Kids may inherit genes that make them prone to anxiety.

**Brain chemistry.** Genes help direct the way brain chemicals (called neurotransmitters) work. If specific brain chemicals are in short supply, or not working well, it can cause anxiety.

**Life situations.** Things that happen in a child's life can be stressful and difficult to cope with. Loss, serious illness, death of a loved one, violence, or abuse can lead some kids to become anxious.

**Learned behaviors.** Growing up in a family where others are fearful or anxious also can "teach" a child to be afraid too.

## NATURAL CURES FOR ANXIETY DISORDERS

Here are things you can do at home to help your child manage his or her anxiety disorder:

- Pay attention to your child's feelings.
  - Stay calm when your child becomes anxious about a situation or event.
  - Recognize and praise small accomplishments.
  - Don't punish mistakes or lack of progress.
  - Be flexible, but try to maintain a normal daily routine.
  - Modify expectations during stressful periods.
  - Plan for transitions (For example, allow extra time in the morning if getting to school is difficult).
- If your child suffers from severe anxiety a medical professional might have to get involved, in South Africa there are records of 3,460 outpatient mental health facilities, 80 day treatment facilities, 41 community-based psychiatric inpatient units, 63 community residential facilities and 23 mental hospitals.



# BUILDING EAGERNESS FOR BACK TO SCHOOL:

## 1. MAKE A HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AT HOME

More often people want to create a healthy learning/study environment but feel that it is not possible due to the lack of funds or even the lack of space within their homes. In 2019 it was found that 49.2% of the adult population within South Africa was living below the upper-bound poverty line, that is almost half of the adult population!

So how does one create a proper study atmosphere when most homes are faced with the reality of too little space?

### 1.1 REMOVE DISTRACTIONS

- Electronic equipment such as cellphones, laptops, tablets and other gadgets that may pose a distraction at study time need to be removed from the area of study.
- Junk/messy foods and drinks.
- People (if you find yourself in a house that has too many people within it, and there is no option of having your own room, then the next best option is to study either outside(garden), library, after care, or you can even seek permission from certain schools/preschools if you can use one of their classrooms or section of the school to study.

### 1.2 ADD ESSENTIAL STUDY ITEMS

- ✓ A desk and study chair is essential but not everyone has the luxury to have these two items in their homes. An alternative can be a cardboard lap desk (designs can be found on apps such as Pinterest or on Google) and some stacked pillows to sit on, the pillows can be placed in a manner of comfort.
- ✓ A computer (if necessary for study/research). It is important to note that most smartphones have taken over the work of computers in the year 2020.
- ✓ Textbooks/ e-Reader (with relevant books loaded).
- ✓ Notebooks
- ✓ Index Cards
- ✓ Writing utensils (the more pens and pencils, the better)
- ✓ Paper Pad/"Sticky Notes" for distracting thoughts, whilst studying or learning a child/yourself may have distracting thoughts. Encourage writing these thoughts down and focusing back on the work.
- ✓ Calculators or other subject specific tools
- ✓ Good lighting, investing in a rechargeable light is the best way to go especially in our beautiful country that sometimes leaves us in the dark.

### 1.3 OPTIONAL ITEMS

- Paper Calendar (to note all the important tasks for the month, week or day ahead)
- Tea, water and healthy snacks (nuts, bananas, granola bars, carrots, dried fruit etc)
- Study music and headphones.

## 2. STEPS TO BUILD SCHOOL EAGERNESS AFTER LOCKDOWN

The whole of South Africa is currently on lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic but that definitely doesn't mean that schools will not open soon, so how do you promote eagerness in yourself/your child for the continuation of the 2020 academic year.


1. Have “pretend” activities based on subjects (e.g. make a play on mathematical statistics or make a video of yourself explaining a certain topic. For younger kids they can have paper dolls explaining a certain shape or letter, or they can read one or two pages from their favorite story book each day and make a short “play”.
2. Play educational games, there's a wide variety of different games that can be played physically or even electronically on cellphones/tablets/computers that promote fun and education at the same time. Who doesn't love a competitive game of Scrabble?
3. By encouraging healthy living at home through the combination of a healthy, balanced and varied diet with regular physical activity such as yoga, walking, jogging etc
4. Obtaining a tutor for the subjects that you/your child frequently struggle with, will result in positive improvement in school work and this encourages students to stay in school.

Read more about obtaining a tutor by clicking on the below link or going to [www.mstutors.co.za](http://www.mstutors.co.za)

[READ MORE ON OUR WEBSITE](#)



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### References:

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