

Anxiety and Medication Management for children

What is anxiety?

There are various types of anxiety disorders that can be observed at various ages and stages of a child's life. Many parents believe that their child will grow out of their anxiety and that simply waiting it out will help. Untreated anxiety in children can often lead to more serious avoidance behavior problems later in life. Untreated anxiety can also increase depressive symptoms for children as they are unable to cope with their anxious stressors and do not find a sense of relief. Anxiety disorders are the most common childhood mental health disorder and is estimated to affect about 8% of all children and adolescents.

Anxiety disorders in children can many times be managed by therapy alone, but there are times that the addition of medication may be needed to help alleviate some of the symptoms. It has been shown that the combination of medication and evidenced based treatment interventions yields the most effective results. While medication does indeed help lessen the symptoms, using an evidence-based treatment model will help children learn coping skills that can be useful well into adulthood. Evidenced-based treatment interventions such as play therapy are an effective tool to help children learn about themselves while also learning techniques to help them cope with their symptoms. The goal of therapy when medication is needed is that children are weaned off of medications as soon and as safely as possible, while fostering the copings skills that will be utilized throughout their lives.

Types of anxiety disorders

- Generalized anxiety disorder
- Panic disorder
- Separation anxiety disorder
- Phobic disorders
- Adjustment disorder

When to seek help

When you, your child, or others who spend time with your child have voiced concerns or observations that may not be expected. Other reasons to seek treatment would be if your child is having difficulty coping with everyday changes, if they are tearful, clingy, or are having difficulty sleeping.

Anxiety Symptoms

- Excessive worries about anything from acceptance, to germs or illness, and even death
- Shyness – may intentionally avoid things other kids enjoy

Medication Management Website Information

- Physical complaints such as tummy aches, headaches
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating
- Excessive tearfulness
- Excessive clinginess

Medication options

Medication management for the treatment of anxiety has been shown to be effective with the use of a group of medications that also treat depression. Many times, both conditions co-exist which may make it difficult knowing which commenced first.

Typical medications that are used for treating anxiety disorders are Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) which work by increasing the levels of serotonin in the brain as well as Serotonin-Norepinephrine Reuptake Inhibitors (SNRIs) which increase both serotonin and norepinephrine in the brain. These are chemical messengers that improve the communication from one nerve cell to another.

Possible Side effects

- Sleep disturbances
- GI issues
- Skin rashes
- Headaches
- Mood changes
- Dizziness
- Suicidal thoughts
- Interactions with other medications

What happens without treatment

Delayed treatment can promote long-term difficulties that not only affects the child and their self-esteem, but impacts them socially, academically and influences the family dynamics. Unfortunately, the risk of not treating has a higher risk of engaging in risky behavior and even suicide.

Other focus areas to augment the treatment plan

- Healthy eating habits
- Daily physical activity
- Limiting screen time
- Adequate sleep hygiene
- Create positive opportunities – find their superpowers