

# TIPS FOR PARENTS: WHEN YOUR CHILD HAS DIFFICULTY WITH ANXIETY

## Look for Warning Signs

### *Physical Symptoms*

- Tightness in the chest, muscle tension, lump in the throat, excessive perspiration, chills
- Difficulty sleeping, easily fatigued, restlessness, shortness of breath
- Headaches, stomach-aches, diarrhea, heart pounding, dizziness, shakiness, blushing
- Biting finger nails, picking at skin

### *Avoidance Behaviors*

- Refusal to go to school, withdrawal and isolation from peers and family members
- Discomfort talking in front of the class or working in a group
- Discomfort going outside the house

### *Depressive Symptoms*

- Irregular patterns of mood (ups and downs), self-doubt, self-blame, feelings of hopelessness
- Difficulty concentrating, disorganization, decline in motivation and grades at school
- Irritability, loss of interest in everyday activities, loss of appetite, overeating, excessive crying

## Discuss with Your Child

### *Facts about Fear and Anxiety*

- Fear is an emotional response to a real or perceived imminent threat, whereas anxiety (or worry) is anticipation of a future threat.
- Fear and anxiety are normal to a degree; however, anxiety disorder is marked by persistent and excessive fear and anxiety that is debilitating.
- Common types of anxiety disorder:
  - Generalized anxiety disorder: generalized to multiple situations and places
  - Social anxiety disorder: specific to social interactions and scrutiny by others
  - Agoraphobia: specific to situations outside the home in open (or enclosed) spaces, crowds, public transportation, etc.
  - Panic disorder: presence of panic attacks (abrupt surges of intense fear accompanied by severe physical symptoms) and anxiety about the recurrence of attacks
- Anxiety disorders are typically treated with cognitive behavioral therapy and sometimes medication.

### *Children's Coping Strategies*

- Recognize that fear and anxiety are normal to a degree.
- Relaxation techniques:
  - Deep breathing
  - Mindfulness
  - Progressive muscle relaxation
- Address immediate stress in the child's life (e.g., school work, peer relations, bullying, college decisions) and in the family (e.g., divorce, birth of a sibling, financial stress).
- Keep in mind that anxiety disorders are treatable; relief is in sight!

## When Necessary, Get Professional Help

- From your child's pediatrician
- From a psychologist