



Understanding treatment for depression and/or anxiety: A Guide for Parents and Carers

What is anxiety?

Everyone experiences feelings of anxiety from time to time. It is a normal response to stress, loss, or a big challenge or change in our lives. Anxiety can feel unpleasant, but it's a helpful response that can motivate us to help focus our attention and improve our performance.

Anxiety becomes a problem when it:

- shows up when no big challenges are going on in your life
- stays and doesn't go away
- starts making it hard to do everyday things, like going to school or spending time with friends
- causes physical symptoms like trouble sleeping, racing heartbeat or panic attacks
- makes you feel overwhelmed and exhausted.

What is depression?

Depression is more than just feeling sad or upset. It's different from ordinary sadness, which usually passes with time or after doing something that helps you feel better. Depression is a serious condition that affects how you feel, think, and act most of the time.

Depression can:

- make you feel sad, tired, or irritable nearly every day
- make it hard to enjoy things you used to like
- make it hard to sleep
- make it hard to focus or make decisions
- affect your energy, concentration and motivation
- last for weeks or longer, even when you try things that usually help.





Medicine for depression and/or anxiety

It's important to remember that most of the time depression and/or anxiety won't need to be treated with medicine. But sometimes a GP, psychiatrist, paediatrician, or nurse practitioner will prescribe medicine as treatment.

About antidepressants

Antidepressants, especially a type called selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs) – such as fluoxetine – are the most common medicines used for depression/and or anxiety. Prescriptions can be sent to your phone as an e-script. You can learn more about antidepressants from Health Direct or Beyond Blue.

What to expect

Antidepressants usually take:

- 2–3 weeks to start working
- up to 8 weeks to reach full effect.

The doctor will usually start your young person on a low dose (sometimes $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of the full dose) and increase it slowly to try to avoid side effects.

While their body gets used to the medicine, they might notice side effects such as:

- Nausea (feeling sick in the stomach)
- Headaches
- Sleep issues
- Feeling agitated, annoyed, or dizzy

These side effects often improve after a few weeks but let your doctor or pharmacist know if your young person experiences any side effects. **They might recommend:**

- Taking the medicine at a certain time of day
- Taking it with food

Important things to remember

- Never stop taking medicine suddenly. Always check with your doctor first.
- Never share medicine with someone else, even if they have similar symptoms.
- Regular check-ins with the GP are important to track how things are going.

A note on safety

Getting the right treatment usually lowers the risk of harm in the long term. If you're worried about your young person's safety, call a crisis line, contact your doctor, or reach out to a trusted person.

There will be a health check before anything is prescribed. It's important that your young person is honest about their use of alcohol or other substances, as some medicines don't mix well with them. Medicine is usually combined with psychological therapies (like CBT) and lifestyle changes such as more physical activity, good sleep, making healthy food choices, and reducing the use of alcohol and other drugs.



What are psychological therapies?

Psychological therapies are often known as talking therapies. They can help young people change unhelpful thinking patterns, manage emotions, and cope better with life's challenges. They can be an effective treatment for depression and/or anxiety and help prevent them from returning.

Psychological therapies can be provided by:

- Psychologists
- GPs
- Mental health social workers
- Mental health occupational therapists
- Mental health nurses

Some therapies can also be done online through secure video sessions or digital therapy programs. Your GP can help you find a mental health clinician or online program that suits your young person.

Types of psychological therapies

- Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)
- Counselling
- Exposure Therapy
- Positive Psychology
- Mindfulness and Meditation
- Digital CBT and online therapy tools or apps

Finding the right fit

Not every therapy suits every young person. It may take some time to find what feels right. Therapy can be short-term, long-term, or ongoing, depending on individual needs. If you're concerned about cost or access, talk with your GP about options and ways to find a therapy that works for your young person.

A note about AI chatbots for mental health support

Chatbots can support mental health therapies, but there are no guidelines or regulations. This makes them a risk. Remember that Chatbots:

- aren't always accurate
- can't totally replace a trained mental health professional
- can't replace human connection, social support and professional therapy.



Getting the right treatment

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For support in a crisis:

- Emergency services **000**
- Beyond Blue 1300 224 636 www.beyondblue.org.au
- Lifeline Australia 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au
- 13YARN 13 92 76 www.13yarn.org.au
- Suicide Callback Service 1300 659 467 www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au

There are options for long-term support, such as:

- Family member
- School counsellor
- GP or other health professional

Support for parents and carers:

- Mental Health Carers Australia www.mentalhealthcarersaustralia.org.au

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