

# UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S ANXIETIES

## *in the time of COVID 19*

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*Creative minds have always been known to survive any kind of bad training*  
- Anna Freud

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***How does the child experience this pandemic situation?***

***What is the nature of his anxiety?***

***Does the child feel abandoned by teachers, friends and relatives?***

***Will he or she fall apart?***

***Does the child feel responsible for the distress?***

With so many different thoughts racing through the child's mind, he

may feel mentally exhausted. He may withdraw and be ashamed at being demanding.

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Traumatic situations create traumatic emotions. We do see a rise in anxiety issues many times manifested by physical symptoms like nervousness, sleep problems; eating problems; stomach pains etc. in both children and adults.

This is normal to some extent. Any event / change outside the normal realm of human experience which is distressing can create helplessness, anxiety or panic. Such a situation overwhelms children leaving them out of control and helpless. In today's situation, when the news is on for long periods of time, this continual exposure to what's going on in the city and in the world can create more panic and exhaust them mentally.

Based on age and levels of maturity, children face different degrees of anxieties, which cannot be avoided fully but certainly can be coped with better. It is important that parents and other adults in the family stay realistic. When children feel confused and anxious their ability to function and think creatively will be impaired. While a small baby does not understand words, the sense of feeling emotionally understood by someone else is essential for the growth of the baby's capacity for self-understanding. The mother's natural attitude towards and recognition of her baby being sad, happy, angry, curious, excited, jealous, interested or frightened is fundamental for the baby developing a capacity to tolerate and manage these feelings in later life and to know what these emotions are.




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It is for this reason that babies should not be protected from all the pains of ordinary experience; provided these are graded and not excessive, they are stimuli for mental and emotional growth. It is important that the baby's real feelings are acknowledged in some way, as this contributes to building up a sense of the self based in reality. If we are not understood or persistently misunderstood as we encounter life's ordinary difficulties, we are disadvantaged in the acquisition of that language which is essential for our emotional lives and our future mental health.

Sometimes crisis situation can bring out the best in people. Most children have a reasonably good capacity to bear frustration. Psychoanalytic studies show that when anxieties and concerns become excessive even in adults they regress into a more infantile state of mind. In this state responsibilities cannot be tolerated.

Children have various phantasies of being abandoned, of losing a dear one, of being harmed etc. and they find ways to deal with it on their own. They may deny their real feelings of anger and shame.



People need to be supported in their efforts to grow. The tiny baby is completely dependent on the mother to rescue him if he is overwhelmed. If the parents are encouraged and supported they can push the child towards discovering his own resources. This kind of reliability when appropriate to the age and capacity is all what children and adolescents need. Adolescents need adults who know when to step in either supportively or firmly when they are out of touch with their own limitations or with the dangers that they are courting or when they are experimenting with identifications and consequently not looking after themselves well enough. To do this the adults need to be able to withstand quite a lot of pressure.

When adolescents are wrestling with their extremes of feelings that threatens to overwhelm them they may fill those caring for them with anxiety, testing their strength and endurance. If the parents or teachers can hang on and



tolerate the pressures often this will enable the adolescent to accept responsibility for himself.

The capacity to grow and develop is not solely dependent on what the environment provides. Some children have the capacity to make the most out of little, which can sometimes help them overcome considerable developmental problems.

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