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## **An Overview of Anxiety Disorders and Examples of Children and Adults with Anxieties©**

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5-TR)*, categorizes anxiety disorders into several distinct types, each with its own set of criteria:

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD):** Characterized by excessive anxiety and worry – with distress – about various topics, events, or activities. Symptoms are persistent and often not restricted to specific situations, but are generalized to most situations, lasting for 6 months or more.

**Panic Disorder:** Involves recurrent unexpected panic attacks—an anxiety storm, a sudden period of intense fear or discomfort that peak within minutes. Panic disorder may include fear of future attacks and avoidance of situations in which the person anticipates a panic attack may occur. In panic, heart rate can be extremely high, breathing can be rapid to the point of it being difficult to catch your breath. May feel you are going crazy, may pass out, or may have a heart attack.

**Phobias, Specific Phobia:** Marked by intense fear or anxiety about a specific object or situation, such as heights, animals, snakes, or flying. The fear is out of proportion to the actual danger posed. Dozens of stimuli may evoke a phobic reaction. They all have Greek names, such as claustrophobia, fear of confined spaces. The most common? Speaking to an audience.

**Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia):** Characterized by significant anxiety and discomfort about being embarrassed, humiliated, rejected, or looked down on in social interactions. The anxiety is sufficient to cause avoidance of social situations.

**Agoraphobia:** Anxiety about being in places or situations from which rapid escape might be difficult (such as a Target store or the upper floors of a building) or help might not be

available in the event of having a panic attack or panic-like symptoms. The person may limit geographic area to a neighborhood or community and to be afraid to have a panic attack should they go outside of that area.

**Separation Anxiety Disorder:** Excessive fear or anxiety concerning separation from those to whom an individual is attached, beyond what is expected for the individual's developmental level. Children often imagine something terrible will happen to a parent or the parent may go out and never come back.

**Selective Mutism:** A consistent failure to speak in specific social situations where there is an expectation for speaking, despite speaking in other situations.

**Shy Bladder:** The inability to use a public toilet or any toilet where the person may be overheard using the toilet or even be known to be using the toilet.

### **Examples Across Different Ages**

For each of the DSM-5 anxiety disorders, examples across different age groups—adults, children, and adolescents—illustrate how anxiety can manifest uniquely across the lifespan.

#### **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)**

Adult Example: A 35-year-old constantly worries about job security, health, and the well-being of family members, even when there are no signs of trouble. This worry interferes with their ability to concentrate at work and relax at home. He thinks he will die young of a heart attack, so he is afraid to increase strain on his heart.

Child Example: A 10-year-old frequently feels nervous about various aspects of school, including grades, friendships, and safety, to the point of experiencing physical symptoms like stomachaches and headaches. This may lead to School Avoidance.

Adolescent Example: A 15-year-old obsesses over their social standing and academic performance, experiencing severe anxiety that disrupts sleep and extracurricular participation.

#### **Panic Disorder**

Adult Example: A 28-year-old experiences sudden episodes of intense fear that cause heart palpitations, sweating, and a fear of losing control or dying, leading to avoidance of

crowded places. He is apprehensive just considering an invitation or an appointment in a public building.

Child Example: An 11-year-old suddenly starts to feel extreme fear during school assemblies, fearing an embarrassing incident, which leads to panic attacks and refusal to attend school.

Adolescent Example: A 17-year-old develops intense fear of having a panic attack while driving, leading to avoidance of driving and significant distress about gaining independence.

Another common example is the fear of open spaces, such as driving out of town into open country. This is often associated with a fear of suddenly needing a toilet when none is easily available.

### **Phobias, Specific Phobia**

Adult Example: A 40-year-old has an overwhelming fear of flying, leading to avoidance of vacations or job opportunities that require air travel.

Child Example: A 7-year-old exhibits intense fear of dogs, even small and friendly ones, leading to avoidance of parks and friends' houses where dogs are present.

Adolescent Example: A 14-year-old experiences debilitating fear of heights, making it impossible to participate in family activities that involve elevated places. She can't go to see the doctor whose office is on an upper floor.

### **Social Anxiety Disorder**

Adult Example: A 30-year-old avoids social gatherings and presentations at work due to fear of being judged negatively by others, impacting career advancement.

Child Example: A 9-year-old is extremely anxious about speaking in front of the class, to the point of feigning illness to avoid school on presentation days.

Adolescent Example: A 16-year-old feels intense anxiety about attending school dances or parties, fearing embarrassing interactions, leading to social isolation.

### **Agoraphobia**

Adult Example: After experiencing a panic attack in a shopping mall, a 45-year-old becomes fearful of leaving home, worrying about experiencing another attack in public.

Child Example: A 12-year-old refuses to go to places where crowds gather, such as theaters or sports events, fearing they won't be able to escape or get help if needed.

Adolescent Example: A 19-year-old develops fear of using public transportation alone, severely limiting their ability to attend college or social events independently.

### **Separation Anxiety Disorder**

Adult Example: A 34-year-old experiences excessive worry about the safety of their spouse when they are apart, leading to frequent check-ins and reluctance to engage in separate activities.

Child Example: An 8-year-old experiences extreme homesickness and anxiety when away at camp, leading to calls home in the middle of the night and early return from camp.

Adolescent Example: A 13-year-old experiences severe distress about sleeping over at friends' houses, fearing something bad will happen to their family in their absence.

### **Selective Mutism**

Adult Example: Rare in adults but may manifest as extreme reluctance to speak in specific social settings, like meetings or presentations, despite being able to communicate in other contexts.

Child Example: A 6-year-old speaks freely at home but does not speak at all at school, even when asked direct questions by teachers or peers.

Adolescent Example: A 15-year-old can speak normally with close friends but is unable to speak when in larger groups or unfamiliar people, impacting social and academic participation.

Call us with your questions at 414-540-2170.