

Managing Anxiety for Teens

Using 3R's to Reduce Stress & Anxiety

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RECOGNIZE

2

RELAX

3

RE-THINK

RECOGNIZE: RECOGNIZE ANXIETY FOR WHAT IT IS. LEARN EARLY SIGNS. LABEL IT.

Common physical symptoms of anxiety include: a racing heart, shallow breathing, tightness in chest feeling like there is a lump in your throat, sweaty palms, tingling in hands, tight muscles & headaches. (See <https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/learning-to-recognize-when-im-anxious-body-reactions/>).

Behaviors might include the following: Change in appetite, Trouble falling asleep, Forgetfulness, Distractibility, Difficulty learning and focusing, Asking for frequent reassurance, Fear of being alone, Headaches, Stomachaches. Increased irritability, Anger or Moodiness.

Recognize early signs and symptoms. Pay attention to the physical signs when you are first starting to feel nervous. Your brain is trying to protect you sending signals to your body to react to threat or danger, starting the fight-flight-or freeze response. When there is no present danger-or a "false alarm" - tell yourself, this is anxiety. **This is the time to breathe and try to calm the body and notice thoughts.**

RELAX: LEARN RELAXATION STRATEGIES AND PRACTICE THESE DAILY WHEN CALM.

Diaphragmatic breathing, Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), Guided Imagery, Mindfulness all lower stress and reduce anxiety. These techniques counter anxiety and provide signals to the brain that there is "no danger" and therefore reduce anxiety and help increase calm and rational thinking.

Breathing that signals your body to relax has 2 *essential elements*: 1) Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth 2) Longer exhale. Breathe slowly and think about getting air low 4 seconds in, 5 seconds out thought the mouth. The way you breathe can influence how you *FEEL*, how you *THINK*, and how you *ACT*. (See <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheets/relaxation/adolescents>)

RE-THINK: NOTICE NEGATIVE AND UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS AND THINKING PATTERNS.

Thoughts can increase or decrease anxiety. Everyone has automatic anxious thoughts (worry) sometimes. Choose more helpful, balanced, and realistic "2nd" thoughts. Ask yourself, *what am I worried about now? What do I think will happen?* The more your mind focuses on worst-case scenarios and scary "what ifs", the more anxious you will feel. When we think about something scary our brain tells our body to prepare for threat by sending fight or flight signals. Use balanced coping statements and question the accuracy and helpfulness of worry. Take a balanced perspective. Review alternative outcomes.

Worry can be helpful when it motivates action. *Don't get stuck in worry.* Redirect thoughts to what is in your control. Limit worry that focuses on *hypothetical worries* (& highly unlikely or very negative outcomes) instead of *practical worries*. Take action steps with worry to do something in your control. (See also Anxiety Canada: <https://www.anxietycanada.com/articles/challenge-negative-thinking/>).