

Understanding Anxiety

Bentley Eskridge, PhD, LPC
Program Director, Child First



What is Anxiety?

Normal Worry

Temporary

Not Disruptive

Mild Impact

Manageable

Anxiety Disorder

Persistent

Interferes with daily
life

Significant Impact

Difficult to control



Common Worries for Development Stages

Infants	Toddlers	Preschoolers	Adolescents	Adults
Loud Noises	Seperation	Monsters	Peer Acceptance	Finances
Strangers	Animals	Imaginary Dangers	Future Concerns	Caring for Loved Ones
	Darkness	Darkness	Social Worries	Failure

Anxiety Response

- **Fight**
- **Flight**
- **Freeze**
- **Fawn**



Common Anxiety Diagnoses

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder**
- **Separation Anxiety Disorder**
- **Social Anxiety**
- **Trauma Related Anxiety**
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder**
- **Perinatal Anxiety**





Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- Excessive worry
- Difficulty controlling worry
- Multiple worry topics



Seperation Anxiety Disorder

- Extreme distress when seperated
- Fear something bad will happen to loved one
- Refusal to go to school/works/leave
- Physical complaints



Social Anxiety Disorder

- Fear of embarrassment
- Avoiding speaking
- Refuse group activities
- Avoiding eye contact
- Distress in social situations



Trauma Related Anxiety

- Anxiety symptoms related to experiencing or witnessing an environment that overwhelms someone's ability to cope



Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

- Unwanted distressing thoughts that are only relieved by performing specific acts



Anxiety Attacks

- Sudden episode of intense anxiety that is triggered by a perceived stressor



Perinatal Anxiety

- Onset during pregnancy through 1st year of child's life
- Does not resolve on its own with time

Parenting Anxiety

- Child Safety
- Confidence
- Independence
- Discipline
- Not repeating patterns/generational traumas



Behavioral Signs

- Avoidance
- Refusal
- Clinging
- Repeated Questions
- Excessive seeking reassurance
- Rigidity
- Meltdowns

- Catastrophizing
- Worst Case Thinking
- Negativity
- Overestimating Danger
- Underestimating ability



● ● ● Risk Factors

- Family History
- Temperment
- Trauma Exposure
- Chronic Stress
- Poverty
- Violence
- Medical Conditions
- Significant Life Changes



Protective Factors

- Secure Relationships
- Trust
- Autonomy
- Routines and Predictability
- Developing Problem Solving Skills
- Community Supports
- Positive Interactions



● ● ● Role of Home Visitors

- Observe
- Educate
- Support
- Screen when appropriate
- Refer and Connect



Screening V Diagnosis

Screening

Identifies possible concerns

Not diagnostic

Positive Screen does not mean a diagnosis

Diagnosis

Completed by a qualified clinician

Requires more information

Should lead to treatment

Ways to Assess

Observational

- Parent -Child Interactions
- Avoidance Patterns
- Emotional Regulation
- Seperation Responses

- Physical responses
- How they talk/speak
- Speech Patterns
- Sleeping patterns
- Restlessness/Fidgety



Ways to Assess

Common Anxiety Screeners

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 (GAD-7)
- Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS)



Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7 (GAD 7)

- 7 Questions based on the last 2 weeks
- Likert Scale ranging from 0–5
- Follow up Question
- Scores:
 - 5 Mild
 - 6–10 Moderate
 - 11–15 Severe

Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item (GAD-7) scale

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?	Not at all sure	Several days	Over half the days	Nearly every day
1. Feeling nervous, anxious, or on edge	0	1	2	3
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3
3. Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3
4. Trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3
5. Being so restless that it's hard to sit still	0	1	2	3
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3
7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3
Add the score for each column	+	+	+	
Total Score (add your column scores) =				

If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

- Not difficult at all _____
- Somewhat difficult _____
- Very difficult _____
- Extremely difficult _____

Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Scale (EPDS or Edinburgh)

- 10 Questions based on the last 7 days
- Frequency Scale
- Questions 1, 2, 4 are scored 0-3
- Questions 3, 5-10, are reverse scored
- Score of 13 or higher are considered significant
- Contextual Considerations

As you are pregnant or have recently had a baby, we would like to know how you are feeling. Please check the answer that comes closest to how you have felt **IN THE PAST 7 DAYS**, not just how you feel today.

Here is an example, already completed.

I have felt happy:

- ☐ Yes, all the time
- ☒ Yes, most of the time This would mean: "I have felt happy most of the time" during the past week.
- ☐ No, not very often Please complete the other questions in the same way.
- ☐ No, not at all

In the past 7 days:

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. I have been able to laugh and see the funny side of things | *6. Things have been getting on top of me |
| ☐ As much as I always could | ☐ Yes, most of the time I haven't been able to cope at all |
| ☐ Not quite so much now | ☐ Yes, sometimes I haven't been coping as well as usual |
| ☐ Definitely not so much now | ☐ No, most of the time I have coped quite well |
| ☐ Not at all | ☐ No, I have been coping as well as ever |
| 2. I have looked forward with enjoyment to things | *7. I have been so unhappy that I have had difficulty sleeping |
| ☐ As much as I ever did | ☐ Yes, most of the time |
| ☐ Rather less than I used to | ☐ Yes, sometimes |
| ☐ Definitely less than I used to | ☐ Not very often |
| ☐ Hardly at all | ☐ No, not at all |
| *3. I have blamed myself unnecessarily when things went wrong | *8. I have felt sad or miserable |
| ☐ Yes, most of the time | ☐ Yes, most of the time |
| ☐ Yes, some of the time | ☐ Yes, quite often |
| ☐ Not very often | ☐ Not very often |
| ☐ No, never | ☐ No, not at all |
| 4. I have been anxious or worried for no good reason | *9. I have been so unhappy that I have been crying |
| ☐ No, not at all | ☐ Yes, most of the time |
| ☐ Hardly ever | ☐ Yes, quite often |
| ☐ Yes, sometimes | ☐ Only occasionally |
| ☐ Yes, very often | ☐ No, never |
| *5. I have felt scared or panicky for no very good reason | *10. The thought of harming myself has occurred to me |
| ☐ Yes, quite a lot | ☐ Yes, quite often |
| ☐ Yes, sometimes | ☐ Sometimes |
| ☐ No, not much | ☐ Hardly ever |
| ☐ No, not at all | ☐ Never |



When To Refer

- Positive Screens
- Significant Impairment
- Symptoms of panic
- Self Harm Concerns



Case Presentation

Maria is a 29 year old mom with 2 children, Liam who is 6 months and Sofia who is 4. You've been working with Maria for about 7 months, however over the last month you noticed some changes in her behaviors.

She frequently expresses worry about the kids safety, even though there doesn't appear to be any risk. She shares that her sleeping has been disrupted because her "brain is going a million miles a minute thinking of all the ways the kids could get hurt". She has some trouble staying on topic during visits, is fidgety, and reports feeling overwhelmed. Maria's husband recently lost his job just after they moved to a new neighborhood. Additionally, Liam was just hospitalized for respiratory concerns and Sofia has just started a new preschool.

Maria often discusses that she comes from a "family of worriers", and that safety and vigilance are a parent's responsibilities to their children?

What Can Home Visitors Do?

- Build Trust
- Be Consistent and Predictable
- Being mindful of Culture
- Validate Experiences and Feelings
- Model
- Notice and Address triggers and patterns
- Praise

