



# Home Discussion Guide

According to **The National Council for Behavioral Health**®, Mental health can be hard to talk about, and sometimes it's hardest to talk about with the people we're closest to, like family members.

With the help of experts, below are some tips on anxiety support. Often, those who experience extreme anxiety feel ashamed and suffer in silence but the good news is there is hope. Anxiety disorders are highly treatable. Below are some common signs that kids struggling with anxiety may exhibit, as well as tips on how to respond. Review the facts and tips on anxiety and then as a family complete the discussion guide.

Content courtesy of the documentary *Angst*: **Angst**

## DID YOU KNOW...

**Fact:** Anxiety disorders are treatable.

**Fact:** The ability for the brain to change throughout one's life (Neuroplasticity) is real. You can change the way you think about something. You can rewire your brain to positivity.

**Fact:** Distraction allows your amygdala (fight-or-flight part of the brain) to take a break. It can be helpful to distract your mind and give yourself some space for a short period, but prolonged isolation can lead to avoidance of anxiety producing situations which reinforce the negative thought process.

## HOW TO HELP A FRIEND

Having supportive and understanding friends is an essential component to recovery

**Educate yourself** - Understanding what your friend is going through will help you better support them. It will also help alleviate frustrations that you may have about his or her behavior.

**Be supportive** - Encourage your friend when he or she is having a tough time and be empathetic to what he or she is going through. Be respectful but do not support avoidance of stressful situations.

**Don't try to change your friend** - Modify your expectations of how you want your friend to be and accept your friend for who he or she is.

**Communicate** - Be sure to listen with a nonjudgmental attitude. Help him or her find support. Sometimes it's hard to take the first step alone. Be supportive and encourage your friend to get appropriate help.

**Encourage** - Encourage your friend to confront stressful situations and support them through the experience, rather than avoiding anxiety-provoking situations. Avoidance can actually make the anxiety disorder worse.

**Be fun** - Sure it's good to have someone to talk to, but your friends need you to keep the fun going. Help make them laugh and relax.

*Tips powered by TeenMentalHealth.com*

## MANAGING YOUR ANXIETY

**Be Specific** - Address your stress inducing thoughts and label them concretely. Make a list at the end of each workday and evening (at home) with the labeled stressors and an action plan of completion. Even if the items of stress are not task oriented in nature, it is beneficial to label them and write them down (for example, "Concerned about my lack of interest in activities." Plan – find a friend and begin a conversation.) ("I am worried about an upcoming presentation." Plan – talk with a confidant or trusted individual about worry).

**Take a Break and Distract** - If you feel your thoughts becoming clustered and overly emotional, or the beginning stages of anxiety increasing, get up and move for 5-10 minutes. Take your thoughts and body to a new location or listen to music for a moment. Distracting your thoughts will allow your brain to function in an organized and efficient manner.

**Don't Isolate (for long)** - It can be helpful to distract your mind and give yourself some space for a short period, but prolonged isolation can lead to avoidance of anxiety producing situations, which reinforces the negative thought process. Face your fears, be it attending social situations or assertively stating your ideas when appropriate.

**Model Emotional Honesty and Reach Out** - Let your loved ones and others know if you are feeling stressed and create an environment where all emotions are labeled and acknowledged.

Visit [angstmovie.com](http://angstmovie.com) for more information including videos, articles and websites.

## DEFINITIONS & TIPS

**Anxiety is normal and natural**, occurring in children, teens and adults every day. Anxiety is generally defined as a fear that is future-oriented, while phobias are specific, exaggerated fears. Anxiety becomes problematic when it begins to interfere with everyday life.

There are three parts to anxiety: **What I think** (cognitions); **What I feel** (physical sensations); and **What I do** (behaviors).

A specific set of sensations occurs when we're anxious, including pounding heart, shortness of breath, dizziness, and sweating. This set of symptoms, called the **fight or flight** response, is designed to help us avoid danger. Helping teens understand these natural sensations in their bodies without overreacting, and showing them how quickly things can return to normal can help give them control over their feelings of anxiety.

**Facing fears** and anxiety can teach an individual that they are stronger than they think they are, that they can face something that they thought was insurmountable.

Excessively reassuring someone who is anxious that everything will be okay may backfire when trying to help them cope with anxiety. Instead, **empathize that it's natural to feel anxious**, and focus on helping them through their feelings so that they can successfully face their anxiety.

Fears, phobias, and anxieties can be successfully treated with **cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**, which helps teens change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This is a short-term (6-16 session) weekly type of therapy that teaches an individual to become his or her own therapist.

You can also help reduce anxiety through changing "self-talk", a part of CBT where people learn to **identify the thoughts** that they have that perpetuate their fears. Instead, try and identify what you're really worried about, and whether it's likely to happen.

**Praise and reward yourself** for facing tough situations. Be liberal with support if you know someone who is struggling with anxiety – even if the fear is irrational, it's difficult to face your fears. Any small step should be encouraged.

Finally, **take care of yourself!** If you're feeling anxious, make sure you're managing your base stress levels by exercising, eating right, and getting enough sleep. All those factors can impact anxiety levels.

*Provided by Regine Galanti, Ph.D. Director, Long Island Behavioral Psychology*

### **Types of Anxiety Disorders**

**Panic Disorder:** Include physical symptoms as well as fear of having another panic attack.

**Social Anxiety:** Avoiding social situations (i.e., public speaking).

**Specific Phobias:** Intense fear of specific objects (i.e., snakes).

**Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD):** Thoughts (obsessions) that tend to be unwanted and intrusive (i.e., maybe there are germs on my hands), and create anxiety, after which the individual engages in compulsions, or actions designed to reduce that anxiety (i.e., hand washing).

**Generalized Anxiety Disorder:** Excessive fear related to several things.

**PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder):** Exposure to an extremely traumatic event.

## Home Discussion Exercise

Having an initial conversation about mental health is hard, but with every uncomfortable conversation, we can address stigma, break down barriers and help those closest to us when they need it most.

### **The Power of Meaningful Conversation**

As a family, spend time to have an open & honest discussion about your own anxiety and/or perceptions. Discuss how the adults of the family / community can better support youth struggling with anxiety. Continue the conversation and do your best to listen to concerns and needs in a nonjudgmental way. **Only listen, do not offer solutions or attempt to 'fix' the situation.**

Z-Cares recommends viewing the documentary **Angst** to help initiate important conversations and put perspective while creating hope. The documentary will help initiate important conversations in your home. A full discussion Guide with added discussion exercises included for all audience members when your community hosts a screening of **Angst** through Z-Cares.

Contact the **Z-Cares Initiative** at <https://zcares.org/contact> to bring **Angst** to your community.