



## School Services

# School Guide for Students with Generalized Anxiety Disorder

### What is Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

**Generalized anxiety disorder** is a condition marked by six months or more of chronic, intense worry and stress for no obvious reason, or that is much more severe than anxiety most people have.

### What are the symptoms of Generalized Anxiety Disorder?

The most common signs are worrying too much, expecting the worst for no reason, and physical problems. These can include restlessness, muscle aches and pain, and fatigue. These problems have no medical cause, but are very real to the student. Anxiety can also cause irritability, sleeplessness, and difficulty with concentration.

### Treatment for Generalized Anxiety Disorder

There are treatments and services to help children with anxiety disorders, such as:

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy, where children learn to cope with fears and worries by changing the way they think and behave
- Relaxation skills
- Family therapy
- Parent training
- Medication

### How can Generalized Anxiety Disorder Affect School Performance?

Children with an anxiety disorder are at risk of poor academic functioning because of the following:

- Social withdrawal or isolation
- Poor relations with peers
- Lack of participation in learning opportunities or other activities
- School avoidance
- Poor self-esteem
- Behavioral impairment due to their high degree of stress
- Frequently missing class to seek medical attention from school nurse for real or imagined physical ailments
- Poor concentration

## How can schools assist students with Anxiety Disorder?

### Academic

- Start academic interventions right away by providing a Section 504 Plan
- Provide assessment to target academic needs and provide useful accommodations and modifications
- Allow extra time to complete class work or projects
- Assign a moderate work load that emphasizes quality vs. quantity to decrease school related stressors
- Provide the student with an organizational checklist for routine activities, materials needed and steps to follow
- Provide a structured learning environment with consistency in routine

### Social/ Emotional

- Provide opportunities for success to improve low self-esteem
- Reduce emphasis on competition which could lead to repeated failure
- Provide counseling to address psychological or social effects of condition as they arise on campus
- Behavior intervention plan can be useful to set goals for appropriate behavior
- Allow for the use of relaxation skills to cope with anxiety or fear
- Establish a support system – more than one adult on campus that the child can reach out to if necessary

For the child that is avoiding school, keep in mind that missing school reinforces anxiety rather than helps it. It is best to expect the child to remain in school all day unless an emergency arises. Mental health professionals may recommend a plan where the child returns to school for short periods of time, increasing exposure slowly over time. Working with the medical team and the child's parents in unity will bring about the most successful outcomes for the student.

### Resources

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)

Anxiety Disorders Association of America

[www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

National Institute of Mental Health

[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

<http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov>

[www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org)

[www.medicine.net](http://www.medicine.net)

### School Services Department

Children's Health<sup>SM</sup>

Dallas Campus: 214-456-7733

Plano Campus: 469-303-4418