

students with generalized anxiety disorder

What is generalized anxiety disorder?

Generalized Anxiety Disorder is a mental health condition marked by six months or more of persistent, intense worry or stress. This worry often occurs without a clear reason or is far more severe than typical anxiety. Children with generalized anxiety disorder may experience:

- Excessive worrying
- Expecting the worst without cause
- Restlessness
- Muscle aches and pain
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Difficulty sleeping
- Trouble concentrating

These symptoms are not caused by a medical condition, but they are very real and can significantly affect a student's daily life.

Treatment

Effective treatments and support services for children with generalized anxiety disorder include:

- Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to help children manage fears and worries by changing thought and behavior patterns
- Relaxation techniques
- Family therapy
- Parent training
- Medication when recommended by a healthcare provider

How can generalized anxiety disorder affect a student at school?

Children with generalized anxiety disorder may struggle in the following areas:

- **Academic:** school refusal or frequent absences, avoidance of learning activities or school events, difficulty focusing and paying attention
- **Social/Emotional:** social withdrawal and isolation, difficulty building peer relationships, low self-esteem, behavioral challenges caused by high stress levels
- **Physical:** frequent visits to the school nurse related to anxiety

How can schools support students with generalized anxiety disorder?

Academic

- Start academic interventions under **Section 504** or **IDEA** (Other Health Impairment).
- Allow **extra time** for assignments, projects, quizzes, and tests.
- Assign a **manageable workload** focused on **quality over quantity**.
- Use **organizational tools** such as checklists, planners, and visual schedules.
- Maintain a **structured and predictable classroom environment**.

Social and Emotional

- Create opportunities for **academic and social success** and highlight the student's strengths to build confidence.
- Limit **competitive activities** to reduce stress and prevent discouragement.
- Provide **counseling or emotional** support as needed.
- Implement **behavior intervention** plans when needed.
- Teach and allow the use of **relaxation strategies** to manage anxiety.
- Establish a support system with multiple **trusted adults** on campus.

For students avoiding school, it's important to understand that staying home can reinforce anxiety. Unless there is an emergency, students should be encouraged to attend school daily. Mental health professionals may recommend a gradual return to school, starting with short periods and increasing over time. Collaboration between the school, family, and medical team is key to helping the student succeed.

More Resources

- **American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry**
aacap.org
- **Anxiety & Depression Association of America**
adaa.org
- **National Institute of Mental Health**
nimh.nih.gov/
- **Nemours Kids Health**
kidshealth.org
- **Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**
samhsa.gov/

SCHOOL SERVICES

For more information, visit childrens.com/school-services

