

# Anxiety

## What does it feel like?

Kelly worries about everything under the sun; she's been that way for as long as she can remember. She worries that she may not do well on her tests at school; she worries that her dog, "Pepper" may get hit by a car, or that her friends will just stop calling her for no reason. Kelly spends most of her day worrying about things that may or may not happen. She has trouble sleeping because she worries so much. Matthew has a similar problem, but he tends to worry about one thing, germs! He is worried about getting sick and missing school or hanging out with friends. So, he washes his hands at least 100 times a day; he washes them so much that they are usually dry and cracked. On top of that he feels he must keep his room extremely clean. He often has little time to spend with his friends because he's so busy with dusting and vacuuming his room. He's tried to stop and his friends have asked him to stop and want to help him, but he can't seem to stop himself.



Kelly and Matthew are experiencing high levels of anxiety. Anxiety is a form of worrying; but worrying a lot can change your usual feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. People who have extreme anxiety may feel very strong fear, panic, uncomfortable in everyday situations, overwhelmed, have trouble eating, problems sleeping or have stomach aches. Feeling overly anxious or worried is nothing to feel ashamed about and should be taken seriously.

## Who gets anxiety?

People of all ages, races, cultures, and backgrounds can experience anxiety. Feeling worried or anxious about an upcoming test, school dance, date, or first day in a new school is common. Everyone feels anxious or worried sometimes, but when these feelings make it hard for the person to do their regular activities, such as concentrating in school, hanging out with friends, getting along with family members, eating, or sleeping then the person may have a serious problem with anxiety. If you are experiencing a lot of anxiety, it is important to pay attention to it and to not just ignore it.

The exact cause of anxiety problems is not known. People may have intense anxiety for different reasons such as:

- Heredity or brain chemistry- If someone in your family has problems with anxiety, you may have similar genes and be more likely experience greater amounts of anxiety. Some kinds of anxiety are biological meaning they may be caused by a decrease or increase in certain brain chemicals that may lead to anxiety.

- Personality- Some people tend to worry or think about things more than others. It seems like they have always been a “worrier” and it’s hard for them not to worry about things even when they try not to worry.
- Life Experiences- For example experiencing something difficult or traumatic like violence, death of a loved one, abuse, unexpected and/or unwanted separation from parents or other loved ones, negative experiences with peers, or an unpleasant experience with a specific thing (like heights or talking in front of a group of people) may lead to intense worry or anxiety.



### **What helps anxiety?**

If you think you or a friend is experiencing intense anxiety, it may help to tell someone who can help like a parent or an adult (like a relative, counselor, teacher, coach, or minister) you feel comfortable with. A counselor is a person who is trained to help people deal with anxiety; it is a good idea to talk with one at your school, in your community, or your medical provider (like a doctor or nurse). Friends are great to talk to and they are often helpful in a lot of situations, but for serious problems like intense anxiety, it is important that you talk with an adult. If you don’t feel comfortable talking to an adult by yourself, you might ask a friend to come with you for your first meeting.

### **Related Links:**

- [http://kidshealth.org/teen/your\\_mind/](http://kidshealth.org/teen/your_mind/)
- <http://www.girlshealth.gov>

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