

Developmental Disorders in Children

Anxiety Disorders



Child Assessment Service

Department of Health

The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

www.dhcas.gov.hk



01 What are Anxiety Disorders?



Anxiety or fear is a basic emotion and a normal part of life. Many people are afraid of certain things, or feel anxious when facing stressful situations. It is a normal reaction to stress and danger. In general, these anxiety problems will improve or disappear when children grow up. However, if children's fears and anxiety are becoming more serious, and last for a period of time, caution is necessary.



02 Anxiety Disorders commonly found in children:



Social anxiety

Children are afraid of interacting with strangers. They may become nervous or uneasy when they are expected to converse with others.



Separation anxiety

Children show excessive fear when separated from their parents or major caregiver.



Generalized anxiety

Children show excessive worries or negative thoughts about many things, such as academic performance, peer relationship or accidents.



Specific phobia

Children have extreme fear of specific objects or situations, such as animals, insects, darkness etc.



Selective mutism

Children consistently refuse to speak at specific social contexts (such as in school or social gatherings); but they can speak normally at home.



03 What causes Anxiety Disorders?

Anxiety disorders are not caused by a single factor, but an interplay among biological, psychological and environmental factors. Imaging studies have found atypical activities in specific brain regions. Genetic studies also revealed that anxiety disorders may run in families. If family members were found to have anxiety disorders, children may have a higher chance to have anxiety problems.



Children are born with different temperament. Some children feel anxious easily, are afraid of trying new things and often have negative thoughts. Life experience may also lead to anxiety problems, such as learning difficulties, peer bullying and family problems. In addition, parenting styles such as excessive soothing or over-protection may also reinforce children's anxiety and avoidance behaviour.



04 How do Anxiety Disorders affect children?

Anxiety disorders may affect different aspects of children, such as academic performance, social relationship and daily living. They are reluctant to make attempts, often react by avoidance coping, which may affect their participation and performance in school, and also their social life.



Anxiety may also cause psychosomatic illnesses, such as sweating, stomachache, muscle pain and palpitations. Sleep and appetite problems are also found in some children.





05 How to help children with Anxiety Disorders?

Choice of treatment depends on the type and severity of anxiety disorders. While psychotherapy is commonly used in the treatment of childhood anxiety, some older children or those with more severe symptoms may need medication as well. Parents play an important role in the treatment. Parents may help their children by finding the reason for their anxiety, avoiding excessive soothing or over-protection, and encouraging their children to overcome their fears gradually.

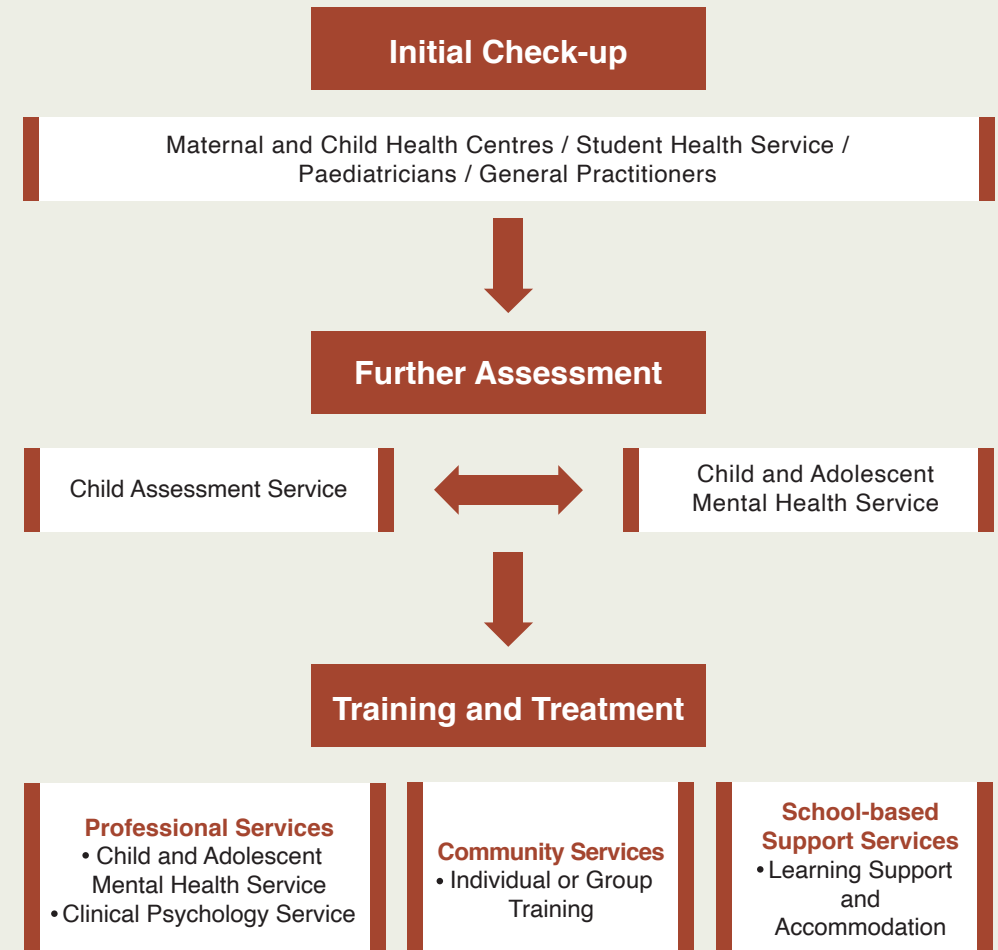


06 What is the outlook of children with Anxiety Disorders?

If children with prominent anxiety problems are left without treatment, the condition is likely to persist or exacerbate. In contrast, if children can receive timely and appropriate treatment, the prognosis is generally good.



Referral and Management





Related **Websites**

Education Bureau: Integrated Education and Special Education Information Online
<https://sense.edb.gov.hk/en/index.html>

United Christian Nethersole Community Health Service - Emotional Health & Counselling Centre
www.ucep.org.hk

Hospital Authority - CAMcom
www.ha.org.hk/CAMcom

Anxiety & Depression Association of America
www.adaa.org

Anxiety Canada - Anxiety in Children
www.anxietycanada.com/

National Health Service UK - Mental Health
<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>

Some of the websites only have Chinese version



FOR more
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