



The WHALE Study  
Family Newsletter  
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## Anxiety in Children

**My child is often worried. Is this normal?** The pandemic increased concerns for many people, including children. Many of these concerns are understandable and reactions are reasonable. Discomfort in unfamiliar situations is typical and children may take some time to adjust.

Age-appropriate concerns for your child ages 4-7 may include being alone, the dark or "monsters," dogs, bugs/animals, new places, and loud noises.

Some typical signs of anxiety including seeking reassurance or concern about going out are reasonable given the pandemic. Unless they're extreme. You may be concerned if your child seems *overly* clingy, unable to be soothed, difficulty sleeping, frequently complains about stomach pains or headaches, refuses to go to (safe) places or do activities they would otherwise enjoy, and if these reactions are interfering with school or relationships with family or friends. Some often misunderstood symptoms of anxiety include extra trouble focusing and seeking distractors, or [disruptive behavior](#) and explosive outbursts.

**How can I get help for my child?** If you're concerned about your child's behavior, you can start by talking with your pediatrician. If your child is in school (even virtually), they may have access to a school counselor. Some therapists specialize in working with children. A cognitive-behavioral therapist may help you and your child practice exposures to feared activities to show your child that situations are not as scary as they imagine, and how to manage their worries.

### What can I do at home?

**1. As silly as it may sound, avoid offering too much reassurance.** Do

validate their experience and emotions, but don't dwell on it. Excessive validation can increase their fear (there *is* something to worry about) or reinforce anxious responses (by giving them extra attention, and building dependence on those comforting words).

**2. Don't avoid activities because your child responds**

**anxiously.** Avoidance reinforces anxiety because they learn how to escape these fears. Instead, create opportunities for positive interactions with their fears. Facing feared situations with an empathetic caregiver can make all the difference and help them learn the situation is tolerable. For example, social anxiety may increase, especially in children who were new to social and peer interactions before the pandemic. Engaging in virtual or socially distanced interaction may help ease the inevitable transition to "normal communication."

**3. Reward your child for facing their fears and being brave!**

**4. Kids pay attention to how their caregivers respond to**

**anxiety and uncomfortable situations.** Here are some

[tips to avoid passing anxiety on to your children.](#)

Remember to be just as compassionate with yourself, as you are with your child(ren)!

Check out the page below for [tips on managing your child's anxiety and community resources!](#)

Click [here](#) to tell us what topics you want covered in future newsletters!



Please reach out if you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding The WHALE Study or the COVID-19 situation. Staff can be reached by call, text, or email: [whalestudy@unc.edu](mailto:whalestudy@unc.edu) | 919-914-0588

Find us on Twitter: [@circlelab\\_unc](#), Instagram: [circlelab\\_unc](#), and [Facebook!](#)

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## STUDY FINDINGS AND REMINDERS

Findings from what YOU reported in our weekly COVID surveys:

- Since the beginning of the pandemic, ratings of children's sadness have decreased, though a fair number of children are still experiencing anxiety
- Specifically, we found that parent's reports of their own anxiety and amount of time spent sheltering-in-place/quarantining are related to higher anxiety in children.
- To learn more about why this matters and what to do, please refer to **"What I can do at home?"** above

**\*\*Reminder:** Please refer your friends if they have a 4-6-year-old and you think they would be interested in participating in the WHALE study. For every eligible family that you refer to us, you will receive \$10!

## MANAGING YOUR CHILD'S ANXIETY + COMMUNITY RESOURCES (CLICK BLUE LINKS)

Resources addressing childhood anxiety:

- Click [here](#) and [here](#) to read about managing you and your child's anxiety and fears
- Click [here](#) for the Dos and Don'ts of having an anxious child
- Click [here](#) for information on how to help kids worried about "bad thoughts"
- Click [here](#) to read about how to detect childhood anxiety

Local Centers for Child and Family Services:

- Click [here](#) to learn more about Hope Services 4 U (Raleigh)
- Click [here](#) to learn more about the Center for Child and Family Health (Durham)

### HOUSING

- [Durham Continuum of Care \(CoC\)](#)
- Eviction Information
  - 216-965-5095
- [Durham Rescue Mission](#)
  - 919-688-9641
- [Orange County Partnership to End Homelessness](#)
- [Urban Ministries of Durham](#)
- [Durham County Social Services](#)
- [Orange County Social Services](#)
- [Wake County Social Services](#)

### FOOD & GROCERIES

- [Wake County Public Schools Free Meals](#)
- [Durham County Public Schools Free Meals](#)
- [Orange County Food Resources](#)
- [Chapel Hill/Carrboro Schools](#)
- [TABLE](#)
- [Food Bank of Central & Eastern North Carolina](#)
- [Wake County Food Resources](#)
- [No Kid Hungry NC](#) - Text FOODNC or COMIDA to 877-877 to receive information about 3 drive-thru or pickup sites with meals for kids closest to you

### HEALTH & SAFETY

- [Compass Center for Women and Families](#)
  - 919-929-7122
- [Durham Crisis Response Center](#)
  - 919-403-9425
- [InterAct Family Safety and Empowerment Center](#)
  - 919-828-7501
- [Orange County Rape Crisis Center](#)
  - 866-935-4783 (call) , 919-504-5211 (text)
- [Freedom House](#)
  - 919-967-8844 (Crisis Unit, Chapel Hill)
  - 1-877-967-8844 (Mobile Service)
- Suicide prevention lifeline: 1-800-272-TALK
- Hope4NC Helpline: 1-855-587-3463

### CHILDCARE

- [NC Hotline for Critical Workers Seeking Child Care Options](#)
- [Covid Childcare Co-op Creator](#)
- [Covid Urgent Childcare](#)
- [Child Care Services Association](#)

### LEARNING

- [Scholastics Learn at Home](#)
- [Khan Academy](#)
- [PBS Kids](#)
- [CDC Tips for Talking with Children about COVID-19](#)