



Understanding anxiety and related conditions in teens

Fear, anxiety, panic attacks, phobias, and OCD are terms that are often incorrectly used interchangeably. When parenting a teen, it's important to understand the correct definitions of each. If you notice symptoms of any of these, consult a professional such as a physician, counselor, or psychologist for diagnosis and treatment.

Fear is an emotional response to a real or perceived threat in the present moment. Fear is a survival mechanism, which signals danger, and activates a “fight or flight” reaction to secure safety.

A **phobia** is an extreme or irrational fear of a person, place or thing. Phobias can create crippling fear and panic, and often lead to avoidance of whatever or whomever prompts the intense fear. The most common phobia in teens is Social Phobia, an extreme fear of social rejection or humiliation.

Anxiety is an emotional response to stress and uncertainty around the anticipation of a future or potential threat. Because anxiety is future-focused, it can be prolonged and excessive.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a mental condition where intrusive and persistent negative thoughts, urges, images or worries activate repetitive thoughts or behaviors (compulsions) to reduce the distress of these obsessions.

A **panic attack** is a scary but non-life-threatening sudden occurrence of extreme fear that creates physical reactions in the absence of an apparent danger.

When to consult a professional

Chronic anxiety, panic attacks, phobias, and OCD symptoms should always be evaluated by a professional. Physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers, psychologists, and professional counselors can assess and diagnose anxiety and related mental health issues.

Do you need help supporting a teen with mental health challenges?

Visit [wellthy.com](https://www.wellthy.com) to create your Wellthy account, start a Care Project, and connect with a dedicated Care Coordinator. This expert can collaborate with you to identify programs, mental health providers, and more to aid in your teen's development.