

# ANXIETY DOES NOT ALWAYS LOOK THE SAME FOR ALL PEOPLE

Written By: Talin Yesaie



A big misconception about anxiety is that it only looks like avoidance of tasks or social situations, increase heart rate, crying or difficulty breathing. Depending on the person anxiety can look different. It can come up as ANGER due to the fact that the perception of danger, stress or opposition can trigger our stress response and that can come out as freeze, flight or fight. It is important to know where the distress is coming from because the response to a child who is in freeze mode versus fight mode would be different.



Other responses include a lack of FOCUS and AVOIDANCE of situations or people that cause them stress. Without knowing what the trigger is, it is easy to assume that your student may be lazy, but in truth it may be that their brain is preoccupied with the stress and anxiety of the thing they are trying to avoid so they in turn struggle with focus and task completion of other things that do not cause them distress.



Stress can also affect a person's eating or SLEEPING habits. Both trouble falling and staying asleep can be a result of stress so before you assume they are on their phones all night have a conversation with your child about their sleep routine to find out what happens when the lights are turned off and how much rest they are getting at night.



This can also come in the form of CHANDELIERING which is when they have a disproportionate response to a stressor that seems to come out of nowhere. They have pushed down their hurt and anxiety for so long that a small or unrelated event triggers the over the top response. Lastly anxiety can also show up as NEGATIVITY as they are more likely to have overall negative thoughts (i.e. of self-worth, ability, or importance) in order to manage their anxious feelings. Often these negative thoughts lead to self-deprecating thoughts that leads to low self-esteem and self-worth.



Anxiety can also be masked through DEFIANCE as they are trying to avoid a stressful situation by refusing to complete a task which in their mind is their way of controlling a situation they feel helpless in. Task avoidance can be defiance, but the important distinction is to figure out how the task, event or person they are avoiding affects their emotions. For example avoiding school assignments could be due to a lack of self-confidence or ability to complete the academic assignments and fear of the response from adults if they ask for help. The opposite of defiance is in the form of over planning. In order to manage emotions and feelings they can over plan things that do not require high levels of planning because focusing on the small details is easier to manage rather than completing the main task at hand.

*For further questions or support in identifying the root cause of your student's behavior, contact your child's individual therapist. They can help you distinguish the root cause of their behaviors and brainstorm strategies on what you can do at home to improve behaviors.*