

## **WHEN KIDS WORRY**

**“Worry is like a rocking chair; it gives you something to do, but it doesn’t get you anywhere.”** Erma Bombeck

It’s natural to worry when your kids are worried. Parents generally don’t like to see their kids in any state of distress. But some worry is normal and even healthy, and it’s best for parents to let their children learn from it. If, for instance, your daughter has a presentation in the morning and hasn’t prepared, it makes sense for her to be worried and that might compel her to take action. On the other hand, there are times when too much worry should raise a red flag. Talking with other parents can be a good way to get a sense of how “normal” your children’s worries are. In addition, the tips below can help you help your children learn how to cut down on pointless “rocking”.

### **For parents with children ages birth to 5:**

- ♥ Separation and stranger anxiety are normal for children in this age group and show a healthy attachment to their primary caregivers. When your children feel this kind of stress, assure them they are safe and/or you will come back for them.
- ♥ Children this young are only beginning to separate what’s real from what is not. Until they are able to do so they may be easily frightened by costumes, movies, and other types of “make believe”. It’s important to let them know they are safe.

### **For parents with children ages 6 – 9:**

- ♥ As children learn more about the world, they begin to fear real things. Fire drills, storms, illness, and other scary events might trigger intense reactions and emotions. Take their feelings seriously and talk with them about the remoteness of dangers like fires and lightening, and about how taking precautions keeps us safe. Resist the urge to brush off concerns that seem minor to you. Instead ask questions, listen attentively, reflect back what you hear your child saying, and offer insights.

### **For parents with children ages 10 – 15:**

- ♥ A big worry for older children and young adolescents has to do with their place in the world. Concerns about their intellect and physical appearance, as well as the number and type of friends they have, are all normal. You can help them by acknowledging these concerns but not getting caught up in them yourself.
- ♥ Learning about various physical and mental health concerns in school can cause temporarily exaggerated worries in children about illnesses and injuries. Be sure to continue to teach your children ways to take care of themselves and make wise choices.
- ♥ Keep in mind that much adolescent worry is about over-thinking “what if” scenarios. “What if I don’t get invited?” “What if something terrible happens?” Sometimes you can put a stop to this by simply asking “What would happen?” to get them thinking about consequences so they can see if actions can be taken, or that maybe things aren’t as bad as they seem.

### **For parents with children ages 16 – 18:**

- ♥ Sometimes teenagers have the opposite problem from too much worry; they can tend to think they are invincible. Continue to set boundaries and enforce consequences that are consistent with your family’s values and designed to protect your teen’s wellbeing.
- ♥ If your teenagers worry about a specific problem such as weight, acne, or an inability to concentrate, help them find solutions through the internet, books, personal contacts or talking with a professional such as a pediatrician.

### **For all parents:**

Worry that lasts for weeks or months at a time, causes your child a lot of suffering, shows up as physical symptoms, or otherwise interferes with day-to-day life may be a cause for concern. A relatively small percentage of young people are diagnosed and treated for what’s call *anxiety disorder*. One website for more information is [www.worrywisekids.org](http://www.worrywisekids.org).