

# What's normal? COVID-19 anxiety vs. anxiety disorders



## How do you know if your child is experiencing anxiety related to the COVID-19 pandemic or if he or she is developing an anxiety disorder?

### **Anxiety is a normal part of life.**

Everyone experiences some level of anxiety on a daily basis. When anxiety consistently interferes with a person's ability to function, enjoy life, or complete required activities, such as engaging in community outings or attending school, we consider it a potential issue.

### **Anxiety related to COVID-19 is very expected, as it is an extraordinary circumstance that is scary and unknown.**

Anxiety related to COVID-19 can be protective in that it promotes taking precautions and learning about ways to keep oneself safe. However, when that anxiety is so extreme that the child is unable to take any action, we become concerned.

**Take masks for example.** Do masks create anxiety? What if they make it harder to breathe? At this time, masks are so common that they should not create more anxiety.

In fact, masks can be presented in a way to reduce anxiety. For example, these masks help keep us safe. It is one of the key ways experts tell us we can keep ourselves and those around us safe.

- Focus on cute mask patterns, and find one that your child likes that he or she can choose.
- For young children, make games out of counting people with masks. How many people have on blue masks? Red masks? This makes it less scary.



**Children's Hospital**  
New Orleans  
LCMC Health



- For children who struggle with wearing the mask, practice at home for short periods of time, gradually increasing the time. Use rewards (verbal praise, small gifts such as stickers, for increasing time wearing a mask). For older children, explain the reason and give natural consequences for not wearing one (you can visit with your friend if you both wear a mask, but have to stay home if you do not).
- Practice deep breaths when the mask feels constricting. Go into a private, isolated room to take a moment to breathe if you feel an anxiety attack coming on.

**Again, if your child worries about getting sick, that is very normal.**

Processing all of the new actions we are taking to stay safe, like masks, handwashing, social distancing, avoiding indoor activities with others in close proximity, is a lot for kids to juggle.

Try to help children focus on the things your family is doing to stay safe, and frame them in a positive way.

Encourage your children to talk to family members when they feel worried; communication and clarification on certain topics surrounding the pandemic can help them stay calm, ease your child's nerves and reduce anxiety.

**If you are concerned about your child's anxiety, contact your pediatrician or seek guidance from a professional.**

## Tips to manage anxiety from the CDC

- Pause, breath, and notice how you feel.
- Take breaks from upsetting content on your phone and on tv.
- Take care of your body.
- Reach out and stay connected.
- Seek help if you feel overwhelmed and unsafe.

Visit [chnola.org/school-wellness](https://www.chnola.org/school-wellness) for additional COVID-19 resources for parents and kids.

