



Anxiety Disorders of Infancy and Childhood

Fact Sheet

Summer 2009

Condition Description

Anxiety Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood are formal mental health diagnoses given to an infant or toddler by a licensed mental health professional using the Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood: Revised Edition (DC:0-3R).

There are five different anxiety disorders, but all five diagnoses require the following. The anxiety or the fear experienced by the child:

- causes the child great stress;
- occurs during a number of everyday activities within a number of relationships;
- cannot be controlled at least some of the time;
- impedes the child's development or impairs the child/ family's functioning;
- persists for a period of time.¹

Impact on Learning and Development

If untreated, young children with anxiety disorders of infancy and early childhood may experience delays in development and demonstrate difficulties in their relationships with others. They may also demonstrate difficulties in later school achievement and develop behaviors that require juvenile corrections interventions.^{2,3}

Treatment Options

While the research surrounding effective treatment options to address this disorder is minimal, experts in the field recommend a combination of psychotherapy and parent education.⁴ Additionally, as with all

interventions targeted toward young children, consistent and frequent communication across all of the systems working with the child (the child's primary care givers, child care providers, primary health care providers, mental health providers, etc.), is essential for optimal success in treatment.⁵

References

- ¹ Zero to Three (2005). Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood: Revised Edition. Washington: ZERO TO THREE Press.
- ² Zigler, E., Taussig, C., & Black, K. (1992). Early childhood intervention: A promising preventative for juvenile delinquency. *American Psychologist*, 47(8), 997-1006.
- ³ President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. (2003). Goal 4: Early mental health screening, assessment and referral to services are common practice. *Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America*. 57-66.
- ⁴ Silverman, R. C., Lieberman, A. F., Pekarsky, J. H. (1997). Disorders of affect: Anxiety disorder. In A. Lieberman, S. Wieder & E. Fenichel (Eds.), *DC: 0-3 Case Book* (pp.47-59). Washington, D. C.: ZERO TO THREE.
- ⁵ Parlakian, P. and Seibel, N.L. (2002). *Building Strong Foundations, Practical Guidance for Promoting the Social-Emotional Development of Infants and Toddlers*. Washington: ZERO TO THREE Press.