



GLOBAL  
YOUTH CULTURE



# CRISIS MODE

3 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO HELP YOUR  
TEEN WITH **ANXIETY**

# RESEARCH IS KEY TO DISCOVERING THE STATE OF A GENERATION.



**Global Youth Culture** is a research study that covers the beliefs and behaviors of more than 8,300 digitally connected teenagers from 20 diverse nations. It shares insights into their views on identity, technology, personal struggles, and religious beliefs.

When reviewing the data, it became overwhelmingly clear that today's teens need help. Our research found that when asked about their experiences in the last three months, **66% reported high anxiety.**

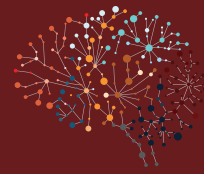
As a parent or caregiver, it can feel overwhelming to know that your child is struggling—but also know that you are not alone. We as the Church must take on this task of loving, helping, and discipling our teens right where they are. And we want to help you do that. In this guide, we present a three-part approach that will help you not only navigate mental health concerns but also connect with your teens through their struggle:

- 1. Be Familiar**
- 2. Take the Initiative**
- 3. Build Resilience**

Now, let's take a deep breath, invite God into this process, and get started.



# SECTION 1: BE FAMILIAR



Becoming familiar with common symptoms will equip you to help your teen recognize and label their symptoms. Labeling is an incredibly useful tool; in fact, one of the primary ways we cope with difficult experiences is to find words to describe them. As we understand what is happening, we are better able to cope.

Below we present a general overview of anxiety. A teen doesn't have to meet all the criteria for a diagnosis to be struggling—even just a few of these symptoms can be overwhelming. Use these criteria to help your teen find language for their experience so that you can then figure out how to navigate it well.

## ANXIETY

Anxiety comes in many different forms. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders describes anxiety as “apprehensive expectation,” and though many of us have experienced this from time to time, it can be difficult to describe.

Fear is the root emotion of anxiety. When our brains sense danger, our stress response is activated which sends us into fight or flight mode.

God made our bodies and brains, and appreciating our physical response to a situation is an important part of godly wisdom. When you encounter a bear in the woods, you don't have much time to rationally weigh out all the available options. Your danger-sensing brain takes over and sends your body immediately into action before you can waste time and get yourself killed. After the danger has passed, our parasympathetic nervous system kicks in and allows our bodies to return to a resting state—our whole brain comes back online, our heart rate slows, breathing becomes normal, and muscles relax.

Anxiety occurs when our stress response gets activated for long periods of time or never fully turns off. This constant on dumps high levels of cortisol into the body, trying to calm us down, but the message is never fully received in the lower parts of our brain which control the stress response. These constant high levels of both adrenaline and cortisol lead to the exhausting task of living on high alert. **Anxiety is your body being stuck on high alert, even when no actual danger is present.**



Often, we get stuck in our stress response because our brains cannot distinguish between threats to our physical safety and threats to our emotional and psychological well-being. This is why so many teens feel their relationship problems so deeply—being cut off or outcast from one’s peers is seen as an existential threat, and our brains treat this type of threat the same way they would handle an angry bull running toward us. The only problem is that the response to an angry bull is pretty easy to identify—RUN! How to survive rejection is much more nuanced.

People experience anxiety in a variety of ways. Some experience it through looping thoughts — the same words playing over and over again in their mind like a recording. Some experience it as an emotion—fear, apprehension, or a sense of dread. Others, and especially children and teens, experience anxiety physically. The physical symptoms of anxiety are many and can include feeling restless or on edge, being easily fatigued, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, difficulty falling or staying asleep, and stomach problems. Arguably, we all experience anxiety physically, but knowing that anxiety often affects us in all these ways can give us multiple ways to recognize it.

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## FIVE MAJOR ANXIETY DISORDERS

The current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders<sup>1</sup> includes five major anxiety disorders:

### **GENERALIZED ANXIETY DISORDER:**

Over-the-top anxiety or worry for more days than not for six months, and about various subjects or events.

**PANIC DISORDER:** Anxiety is focused on the fear of having a panic attack.

### **OBSESSIVE COMPULSIVE DISORDER:**

Either obsessive thoughts alone or accompanied by compulsive behaviors aimed at relieving or neutralizing the thoughts.

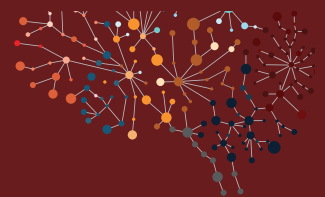
### **SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER:**

Fear centers around being embarrassed in public.

### **POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER:**

Always preceded by a traumatic event, and is usually accompanied by the hypervigilance of anxiety.

A teen may experience symptoms of anxiety that significantly interfere with everyday life, but not meet the criteria for an anxiety disorder.



# SECTION 2: TAKE THE INITIATIVE



Armed with all of this knowledge about **anxiety** – what do we do?



1. **MAKE THE FIRST MOVE.** Your teen needs you to make the first move. Though teens are likely to go to family about big, meaning-of-life questions, only **1 in 4 teens in our survey reported that they often talk to their parents about things that are important to them.** When teens are depressed or anxious, they often have difficulty asking for help. This means that you need to start the conversation.



2. **ASK GOOD QUESTIONS BASED ON OBSERVATIONS.** People tend to become defensive when they feel vulnerable, and teens are no different. We must ask questions out of compassion, not as though we are interrogators. One way to do this is to ask questions that arise out of your observations, “I’ve noticed you’ve been sleeping a whole lot lately. Have you been feeling ok?” Help your teen identify and label their own symptoms of depression and anxiety by noticing and commenting on them.



3. **OFFER GENEROUS EMPATHY.** Start the conversation with the assumption that your teen’s concerns are real. The quickest way to shut someone down is to ask them to share vulnerably and then to minimize their concerns.



4. **HELP THEM UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES.** Educate yourself so you can educate your teen. Help your teen understand what anxiety and depression look like—offer this information to help your teen evaluate their own experience, rather than telling your teen what they are experiencing.



# SECTION 3: BUILD RESILIENCE



Resilience is the ability to bounce back from adversity. We can help lower our teens' risks for mental illness and help them cope with it by encouraging healthy practices.

## **HELP ELIMINATE OR MINIMIZE STRESSORS.**

Teens are starting to have more control over their lives than they did as children, but they often need help in setting appropriate boundaries. Help your teen choose boundaries to set on things like social media and extracurricular activities. Help them identify which activities they do out of joy and which out of obligation or addiction, and empower them to say no when they need to.

## **INSTILL TRUTH.**

Encourage teens to read Scripture and to memorize verses or passages that are meaningful to them. Encourage them to get involved in Bible studies that help them study Scripture for themselves. Our research showed that **Christian teens who were reading Scripture and praying at least weekly struggled significantly less in nearly every area.** The data is a testament that God's Word has power.

## **HELP CHALLENGE THOUGHTS.**

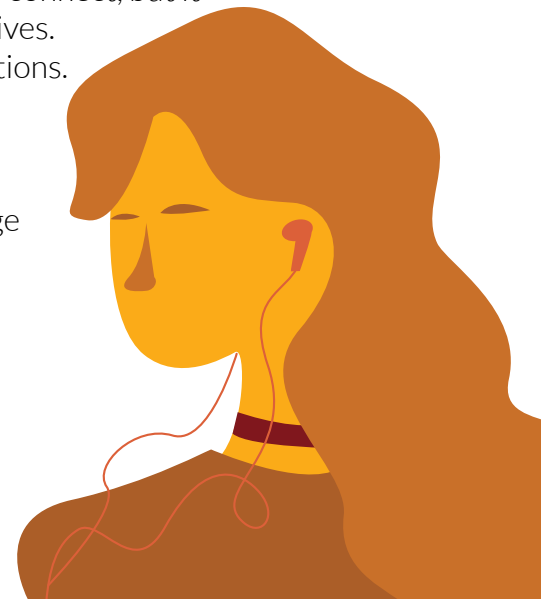
Sometimes, your teens may need help seeing the bigger picture. You can help them by educating yourself on typical thought distortions and helping your teen identify when they get stuck in crippling thinking. If you aren't familiar with types of thought distortions, a counselor can help.

## **CONNECT THEM WITH A THERAPIST.**

Sometimes, through perhaps no fault of our own, our teens can't hear it from us. That doesn't give us permission to stop trying to connect, but it can give us a push to involve other caring adults in their lives.

Many teens are more open to therapy than older generations.

If your teen is struggling, ask if they would like to see a counselor. Therapists have lots of tools for helping teens deal with depression. They are also really skilled at identifying thinking distortions and helping people change the way they interact with their own thoughts.



# RESOURCES



## RESOURCES:

- Murray, David (2020). Why is My Teenager Feeling Like This? A Guide for Helping Teens Through Anxiety and Depression. Wheaton, IL: Crossway.
- Moreland, J. P. (2019). Finding quiet: My story of overcoming anxiety and the practices that brought peace. Grand Rapids Michigan: Zondervan.
- Knabb, Joshua (2019). The Compassion-Based Workbook for Christian Clients: Finding Freedom from Shame and Negative Self-Judgments. New York, NY: Routledge.
- [Help Gen Z to Cope in a Fear-Driven World.](#)
- [Crisis Mode Full Report](#)

## ABOUT GLOBAL YOUTH CULTURE

*Global Youth Culture* presents the findings of a research study covering the beliefs and behaviors of +8,300 digitally connected teenagers from 20 diverse nations. This study from OneHope shows insights into their views on identity, technology, personal struggles, and religious beliefs. The data also specifically reveals their attitudes about God, Jesus, the Bible, and the Christian church. We believe this study is the most comprehensive of its kind in the world in terms of taking a deep look at the faith of teenagers globally. *Global Youth Culture* aims to equip the Church, leaders, and parents to understand today's connected generation. [globalyouthculture.net](http://globalyouthculture.net)

Global Youth Culture is an initiative of OneHope. Learn more about the ministry at [onehope.net](http://onehope.net)

