Anxiety Among Adolescents
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Adolescence presents challenges for both adolescents and parents. In addition to common occurrences such as increased academic responsibility and learning about romantic relationships, another difficulty experienced by some adolescents is the presence of an anxiety disorder. Research has shown that anxiety disorders are among the most common psychiatric disorders in adolescence. If left untreated, anxiety disorders are likely to be chronic and can lead to significant impairment in school and social arenas. Furthermore, anxiety disorders that occur in adolescence have been shown to be associated with increased vulnerability to substance abuse, depression, and other problems.

While it may be difficult to determine if adolescent fears are typical or are signs of an anxiety disorder, there are several considerations for parents to make when deciding whether to seek professional help. First, while all adolescents are likely to experience worry, those with anxiety disorders typically experience intense worry and fear to the point that these symptoms interfere with normal functioning. Additionally, adolescents with anxiety disorders are likely to display avoidance behaviors as a way to cope with anxiety. For example, an adolescent with Social Anxiety Disorder may avoid social situations to avoid potentially feeling embarrassed or criticized by peers. It is important that adolescents suspected of having an anxiety disorder are assessed by a qualified mental health professional.

There are available treatments for anxiety disorders that can be beneficial, one of which is known as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). Through CBT, the adolescent learns to deal with anxiety by modifying thoughts and behaviors. This approach is designed to help the adolescent examine anxiety, and develop more realistic and adaptive responses. The adolescent’s active participation in CBT usually leads to a substantial reduction in anxiety symptoms. The mental health professional may also provide education to parents in order to increase their knowledge of the adolescent’s specific anxiety symptoms and appropriate ways to cope with these symptoms. This can help facilitate treatment in the home, which is likely to strengthen treatment effects.

For additional information, please visit:

http://www.adaa.org/GettingHelp/FocusOn/Children&Adolescents.asp