

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My child has always been a worrier. I have heard TV commercials about “generalized anxiety disorder”. Could you tell me more about this condition?

ANSWER: Generalized Anxiety Disorder is the name for a condition of excessive worry or apprehension or fearful expectation that **occurs more days than not** over a time period of at least 6 months, focusing on a number of events or activities in the life of the individual. This anxiety is difficult to control and involves at least one of the following symptoms in children...three symptoms in adults:

1. Restlessness/edginess/feeling “keyed up”
2. Easily fatigued
3. Difficulty in concentrating/mind “going blank”
4. Irritability
5. Muscle tension
6. Sleep disturbances

The anxiety and/or physical symptoms cause “clinically significant” **distress or impairment in social, personal and/or other important areas of daily functioning**. Because this condition is “generalized”, it is not the function of panic disorder, an obsessive-compulsive disorder, a separation disorder, a sleep disorder, or a substance disorder. Nor is it due to a developmental disorder or a general medical condition such as hyperthyroidism. As you can see the criteria are well defined.

In children, the disorder manifests itself as anxieties about performance, competence, punctuality, catastrophic events etc. Often, children are anxious for no apparent or logical reason. They tend to be overly conforming and perfectionistic, often redoing tasks and seeking approval from peers and adults (These are compensatory behaviors, not symptoms.).

It is important that you **contact your pediatrician** if you have concerns and observe these symptoms. All struggles are **opportunities for great growth** as a family and as an individual. **Such disorders overflow into the faith-walk of the person**. God seems impotent and uncaring; his goodness and strength are called into question, often with devastating results. This is a time for you to draw close to your child in prayer, example, touch and time. Not all children who are “worriers” have a mental disorder, but parents must be wise and educated about the possibilities.

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