

Wellness

7 Signs Your Parent Has Anxiety, According To Experts



By Kathleen Ferraro
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And how you can help.



As you grow up, you tend to think of your parents as super-humans that can practically do anything. But as you enter adulthood, their realness becomes more and more apparent — they're only human, after all. When you begin to suspect that one is dealing with a mental health issue, knowing the signs your parent has anxiety can help you take steps to protect both your and their emotional wellbeing.

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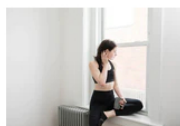
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The last year alone has been anxiety-provoking for many — your parents included. Whether pandemic worries have taken their toll or your parent has dealt with stress for a long time, it's common for you to think that your parent may have anxiety, says Dr. Tiago Reis Marques, a psychiatrist and CEO of Pasitheia Therapeutics. Nearly a third of American adults will have an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives, according to the National Institute of Mental Health. And it often includes mental and physical symptoms, which can affect both the lives of the person with the anxiety and the people around them.

"In certain people, anxiety becomes more permanent and it starts to be disproportional to reality and interfere with day-to-day life," he tells Bustle. "And children are sponges, so anxious behaviors can be learned and transmitted."

Anxiety looks different for everyone, he adds, so sometimes it can be hard to detect. To help, mental health experts explain seven signs your parent has anxiety, plus what you can do to offer support.

1. They Tell You

While they might not flat-out tell you they have anxiety, if your parent often describes themselves as stressed or worried, it can indicate anxiety, says Marques. Many people with the condition

experience rumination — repetitive negative thoughts — so constantly feeling anxious or getting excessively worried about relatively minor events could be a signal that your parent is coping with something greater than run-of-the-mill concerns.

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2. They're Overprotective

Overprotectiveness is another major sign that your parent has anxiety, says Dr. Indra Cidambi, MD, a psychiatrist and medical director of the Center for Network Therapy. Perhaps they're literally following you around to make sure you don't get injured, or maybe they try to prevent you from taking personal or professional risks so you don't experience failure. Either way, this behavior is often a parent's attempt to prevent their anxieties from becoming a reality, says Marques.

While this may annoy you in the moment, it can also have lasting implications on your mental health, adds Cidambi. "When reality catches up with these children and they face negative events in their life, they may find it more difficult to adapt and function optimally," she tells Bustle.

3. They're Controlling

Having a parent that's controlling is likewise a sign that they have anxiety, according to Cidambi. Making choices on behalf of the child or not allowing the child to make mistakes can all be a parent's attempt to prevent certain anxieties from coming true, she explains. This might mean your parent attempts to dictate what activities you participate in, decide who you spend time with, or try to micro-manage a project you do at home or work. And controlling behaviors like these can do more harm than help, says Cidambi. It can hinder your healthy independence, strain your relationships, and make you feel unhappy into adulthood.

4. Physical Symptoms

Anxiety also shows up in your body, says Marques. It can launch you into fight-or-flight mode, which is an automatic response to stress that floods your body with hormones that prepare you to take action to overcome a threat. Symptoms like shaking, sweating, difficulty breathing, tense muscles, pain, rashes, or fevers can all be signs of anxiety or an anxiety attack, and could be a major tip-off that your parent is dealing with the condition.

5. Trouble Sleeping

Poor sleep is another hallmark symptom of anxiety, according to Cidambi. So if your parent frequently complains of bad rest or seems chronically tired, it could be a sign that anxiety is keeping them up at night or messing with their sleep quality. Constantly living in the fight-or-flight response can also get in the way of solid shut-eye, since your body is keeping you on high alert, so see if they're frequently feeling fatigued.

6. Restlessness

Ever notice that your parent seems more on edge than usual? That could be a sign that they're

...not notice that your parent seems more on edge than usual. That could be a sign that they're dealing with anxiety, says Cidambi. Restlessness often manifests as an urge to physically move thanks to the fight-or-flight response, so behaviors like pacing or tapping feet or hands could be physical signs that your parent is feeling uneasy.

7. Irritability

Coping with the mental and physical symptoms can be tough, so it's no surprise that people can be more irritable when their anxiety is acting up, according to Marques. This might mean your parent is acting more explosive or unpredictable than usual, he explains. And irritability doesn't always manifest as a freak-out: It can appear through body language, like fast breathing or jittery movements.

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How To Cope

First and foremost, take care of your own mental health, says Cidambi. Research shows that the children of parents with anxiety are more likely to have it themselves thanks to genetics and/or learning anxious behaviors while growing up, says Marques. Self-care practices like regular exercise, meditation, good sleep, and seeing a therapist can all help you unlearn anxious patterns and help you cope with the impact of a parent with anxiety.

Not only will these self-care strategies benefit you, but it can model healthy behavior for your parent, says Marques. But don't try to be their therapist, he cautions. While open communication about your loved ones' mental wellbeing is healthy to a point, anxiety is a health condition and should be treated as such. He recommends gently prompting your parent to seek therapy or helping them find a health professional. "You must be aware that there is often a sense of shame or embarrassment on the part of a parent," he says. "Saying that you care and that it's OK for them to feel the way they're feeling is a good starting point."

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