

Find a Therapist (City or Zip)



Amy Morin

[What Mentally Strong People Don't Do](#)

ANXIETY

10 Reasons Teens Have So Much Anxiety Today

We've created an environment that fosters anxiety rather than resilience.

Posted Nov 03, 2017



52



Source: Fotolia

The *New York Times* recently published an article called, "[Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?](#)" The author chronicled several teens' battle with anxiety over the course of a few years.

The article questioned why we're seeing such a rise in anxiety among today's youth. As a psychotherapist, college lecturer, and author of [13 Things Mentally Strong Parents Don't Do](#), I agree that anxiety is a widespread issue among adolescents. It's the most common reason people of all ages enter my [therapy](#) office.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

Some young people are overachieving [perfectionists](#) with a crippling [fear](#) of failure. Others worry so much about what their peers think of them that they're unable to function.

Some have endured rough circumstances throughout their young lives. But others have stable families, supportive parents, and plenty of resources.

I suspect the rise in anxiety reflects several societal changes and cultural shifts we've seen over the past couple of decades. Here are the top 10 reasons:

1. Electronics offer an unhealthy escape.

Constant access to digital devices lets kids escape uncomfortable emotions like boredom, [loneliness](#), or sadness by immersing themselves in games when they are in the car or by chatting on social media when they are sent to their room.

And now we're seeing what happens when an entire generation has spent their childhoods avoiding discomfort. Their [electronics replaced opportunities to develop mental strength](#), and they didn't gain the coping skills they need to handle everyday challenges.

2. [Happiness](#) is all the [rage](#).

Happiness is emphasized so much in our culture that some parents think it's their job to make their kids happy all the time. When a child is sad, his parents cheer him up. Or when she's angry, they calm her down.

Kids grow up believing that if they don't feel happy around the clock, something must be wrong. That creates a lot of emotional turmoil. They don't understand that it's normal and healthy to feel sad, frustrated, guilty, disappointed, and angry sometimes, too.

3. Parents are giving unrealistic praise.

Saying things like, "You're the fastest runner on the team," or "You're the smartest kid in your grade," doesn't build [self-esteem](#). Instead, it puts pressure on kids to live up to those labels. That can lead to crippling fear of failure or rejection.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

4. Parents are getting caught up in the rat race.

Many parents have become like personal assistants to their [teenagers](#). They work hard to ensure their teens can compete. They hire tutors and private [sports](#) coaches and pay for expensive SAT prep courses. They make it their job to help their teens build transcripts that will impress a top school. And they send the message that their teen must excel at everything.

in order to land a coveted spot at such a college.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

OK

5. Kids aren't learning emotional skills.

We emphasize academic preparation and put little effort into teaching kids the *emotional* skills they need to succeed. In fact, a [national survey of first-year college students](#) revealed that 60 percent feel emotionally unprepared for college.

Knowing how to manage your time, combat stress, and take care of your feelings are key components to living a good life. Without healthy coping skills, it's no wonder teens are feeling anxious over everyday hassles.

6. Parents view themselves as protectors rather than guides.

Somewhere along the line, many parents began believing their role is to help kids grow up with as few emotional and physical scars as possible. They became so overprotective that their kids never practiced dealing with challenges on their own. Consequently, these kids have grown up to believe they're too fragile to cope with the realities of life.

7. Adults don't know to help kids face their fears the right way.

At one end of the spectrum, you'll find parents who push their kids too hard. They force their children to do things that terrify them. On the other end, you'll find parents who don't push kids at all. They let their kids opt out of anything that sounds anxiety-provoking.

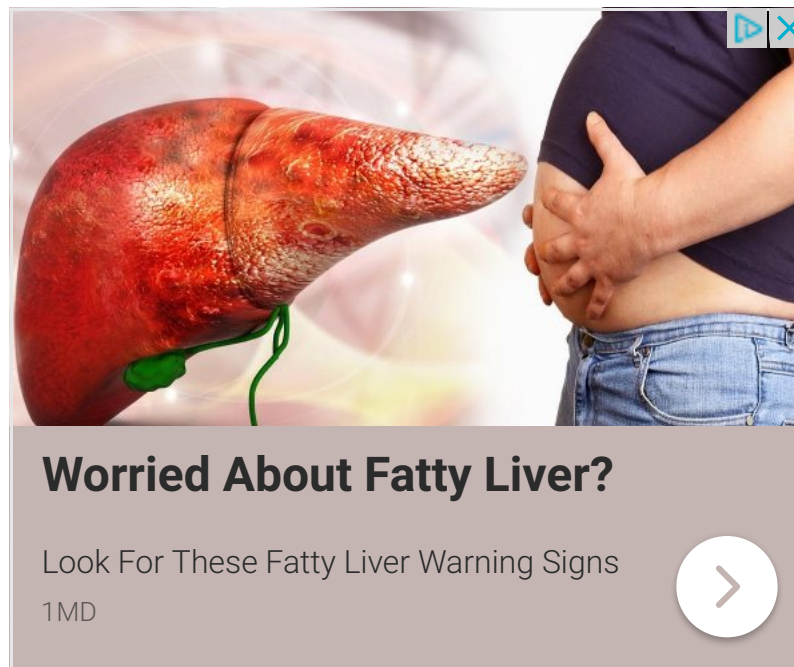
ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT

Exposure is the best way to conquer fear but only when it's done incrementally. Without practice, gentle nudging, and guidance, kids never gain confidence that they can face their fears head-on.

8. Parents are parenting out of guilt and fear.

Parenting stirs up uncomfortable emotions, like guilt and fear. But rather than let themselves feel those emotions, many parents are changing their parenting habits. So they don't let their kids out of their sight because it stirs up their anxiety; they feel so guilty saying no to their kids that they back down and give in. Consequently, they teach their kids that uncomfortable emotions are intolerable.

ARTICLE CONTINUES AFTER ADVERTISEMENT



The advertisement features a 3D anatomical illustration of a human liver on the left, which is reddish-brown and appears to have some yellowish deposits on its surface, indicating fatty liver disease. On the right, a person's hands are shown clutching their abdomen, suggesting discomfort or pain. The background is a soft, out-of-focus image of a person's midsection. Below the image, the text reads: "Worried About Fatty Liver? Look For These Fatty Liver Warning Signs 1MD". There is a right-pointing arrow icon in a white circle on the right side of the text block.

9. Kids aren't being given enough free time to play.

While organized sports and clubs play an important role in kids' lives, adults make and enforce the rules. Unstructured play teaches kids vital skills, like how to manage disagreements without an adult refereeing. And solitary play teaches kids to be alone with their thoughts and comfortable in their own skin.

10. Family hierarchies are out of whack.

Although kids give the impression that they'd like to be in charge, deep down they know they aren't capable of making good decisions. They want their parents to be leaders—even when there is dissension in the ranks. And when the hierarchy gets muddled—or even flipped upside down—their anxiety skyrockets.

How to Address the Anxiety Epidemic

We've created an environment that fosters anxiety in young people, rather than resilience. And while we can't prevent anxiety disorders—there's definitely a genetic component—we can do a better job [helping kids build the mental muscle they need to stay healthy](#).

Facebook image: solominvictor/Shutterstock



ADVERTISEMENT

About the Author



[Amy Morin, LCSW](#), is a licensed clinical social worker, psychotherapist, and the author of *13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do*.

Read Next

[Scrupulosity OCD Treatment Shouldn't Be a Hard Sell](#)

Why Social Media Takes a Toll on Everyone's Mental Health

The 1 Skill College Students Wish Their Parents Had Taught Them

4 Myths About OCD

Anxiety in Teens: How You Can Help

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and Secrecy

Mental Rituals in Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Fatal Attraction

Anxiety Essential Reads



[The Secret Reason Why You Can't Stop Worrying](#)



[Will You Know If Your Child Is Depressed?](#)

Find a Therapist

Get the help you need from a therapist near you—a FREE service from Psychology Today.

Cities:

[Atlanta, GA](#)

[Austin, TX](#)

[Baltimore, MD](#)

[Boston, MA](#)

[Brooklyn, NY](#)

[Charlotte, NC](#)

[Chicago, IL](#)

[Columbus, OH](#)

[Dallas, TX](#)

[Denver, CO](#)

[Detroit, MI](#)

[Houston, TX](#)

[Indianapolis, IN](#)

[Jacksonville, FL](#)

[Las Vegas, NV](#)

[Los Angeles, CA](#)

[Louisville, KY](#)

[Memphis, TN](#)

[Miami, FL](#)

[Milwaukee, WI](#)

[Minneapolis, MN](#)

[Nashville, TN](#)

[New York, NY](#)

[Oakland, CA](#)

[Omaha, NE](#)

[Philadelphia, PA](#)

[Phoenix, AZ](#)

[Pittsburgh, PA](#)

[Portland, OR](#)

[Raleigh, NC](#)

[Sacramento, CA](#)

[Saint Louis, MO](#)

[San Antonio, TX](#)

[San Diego, CA](#)

[San Francisco, CA](#)

[San Jose, CA](#)

[Seattle, WA](#)

[Tucson, AZ](#)

[Washington, DC](#)

Are you a Therapist?

[Get Listed Today](#)

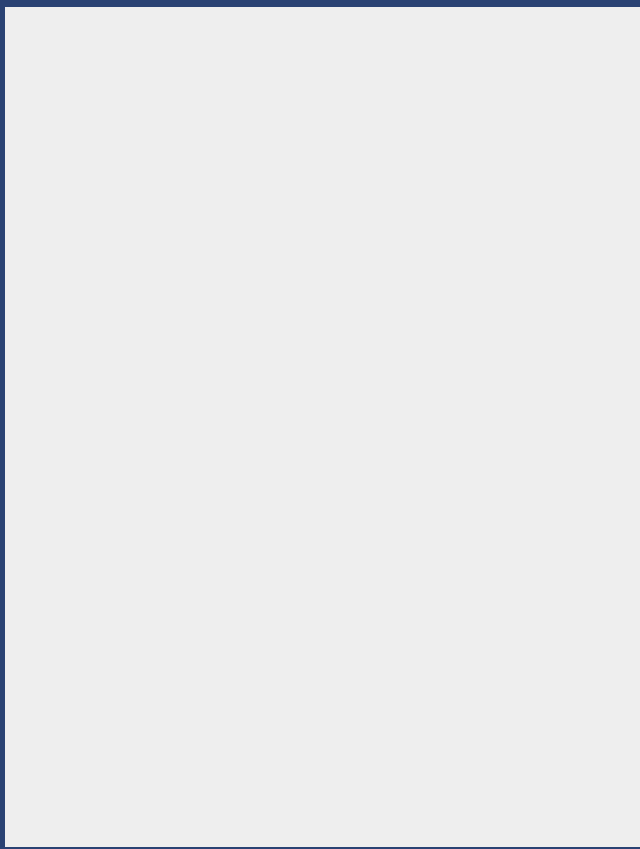
Worried About Fatty Liver?

Look For These Fatty Liver Warning Signs - 1MD



Psychology Today





[Subscribe Today!](#)

[About](#) [Privacy](#) [Terms](#)

 [United States](#) ▾

Psychology Today © 2019 Sussex Publishers, LLC