

What if my teenager is nervous about starting the Teen Anxiety Program?

If your teenager feels nervous about joining a group to talk about anxiety, that is completely normal! Most teens feel this way at first. Anxiety naturally tells us to avoid new or uncertain situations – especially social ones.

Anxiety treatment helps teens gently face situations their brain tells them to avoid. This is called *exposure*, and it helps the brain learn an important lesson: “*I can handle this.*” As teens practice facing fears step by step, they will begin to feel less nervous and more confident. In fact, most teens begin to enjoy participating quite quickly.

Simply attending the first group session is already a big and meaningful step. It’s the first victory in helping your teen take back control from anxiety.

If your teen is nervous about attending, here are some ways you can help:

1. Validate their feelings

Let your teen know it makes sense to feel nervous. Starting something new—especially with other teens—can feel uncomfortable. And it’s ok to show up while feeling nervous.

- Remind them that everyone there will be feeling nervous.
- You can share a time when you felt nervous trying something new (or that you feel nervous about joining the first parent group, too).
- Focus on listening and understanding, rather than convincing or lecturing.

2. Express your confidence in them

Tell your teen you know they can do hard things and that they will be able to do this, too.

- Combine validation and a statement about your belief in them. Try: “*I can tell you are nervous about speaking up during the group, and I know you can do it.*”
- Remind them of other times they impressed you with their bravery.
- Let them know you’re looking forward to celebrating their success with them.
- Treat attendance as the expected plan, while still being supportive.

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3. Help them know what to expect

Explain that the group is designed to help teens build confidence step by step. The program is run as a group because there are added benefits to knowing you're not alone and to overcoming shyness about being with other teens.

- The first session is meant to be easy and welcoming. The group leader knows everyone is nervous!
- No one is forced to share before they're ready. You also have the option to check in by typing in the chat and using emoji reactions as you're getting to know each other.
- Simply showing up and keeping an open mind is enough.
- Most teens feel MUCH more comfortable after session 1.

4. Focus on the first step - not the whole program

Teens often feel overwhelmed when they think about 8 weeks of group. Help them focus only on the first step.

- You might say, *"You don't have to decide about the whole group right now. Let's try the first session and see how it goes."*
- This makes the task feel smaller and more manageable.
- Let them know you'll want to hear all their opinions about it afterwards – the good and the bad.

5. Give them some control

Anxiety feels worse when teens feel forced. Offering choices can help them feel more in control.

- Let them choose where to sit, what name to use, or what to wear.
- Let them set up their virtual background and space in a comfortable way.
- Let them decide how much they want to talk at first.

6. Celebrate their courage

Facing anxiety takes real bravery. Consider planning something positive to recognize their effort after attending session 1, even if the victory feels small.

- This could be extra time for a favorite activity, a chosen outing, or a special treat.
- Offer several options and let your teen help choose what would feel rewarding to them.

7. Parents can still participate!

If your teen is not ready to attend right away, it is still very helpful for parents to attend. Parents learn tools that can support their teen in handling anxiety over time.

We are looking forward to meeting your family and supporting your teen as they build confidence and learn to face anxiety. Every step forward—especially the first one—is something to be proud of.