

Teens and Anxiety

Denizet-Lewis, Benoit. "Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety." *The New York Times Magazine*, 11 Oct. 2017.

Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?

Parents, therapists and schools are struggling to figure out whether helping anxious teenagers means protecting them or pushing them to face their fears.

By BENJAMIN DENIZET-LEWIS OCT. 11, 2017



[The New York Times Magazine](#) recently featured an article asking the question why so many teens seem to be as anxious as they are. The author cites the [National Institute of Mental Health](#) in describing anxiety as "the most common mental-health disorder in the United States" and reports that the [American College Health Association](#) found that 62% of undergraduate students felt "overwhelming anxiety" at some time in the previous year. Parents want to know: What's going on with our kids and what can we do about it?

The Times article goes on to distinguish between the anxiety we all have that functions as a warning system for danger and the overwhelming experience of fear many have that can interfere with daily living. The former is quite normal: When we perceive a threat, the body activates to provide sufficient resources (like, attention, focus and strength) needed to address the problem, then settles back down to rest once the danger has passed. The latter results when people get into the mental habits of over-estimating the dangerousness of situations and under-estimating their own ability to cope. This can contribute to situations where adolescents are "driving themselves crazy", [always scanning for threats](#) and trying to avoid anything that looks like it might be overwhelming. And that's where the author suggests social media and smartphones play a role.

Social media, like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat all provide anxious teenagers with limitless opportunities to compare themselves and their lives against their peers – or at least what their peers say their lives are. People are notorious for curating what they post, selecting only the perfect photo, showing the perfect moment and attaching the perfect comment. Even though many teens know (from their own experience) that what they see on other people's social media feeds isn't completely 'real', it does become the benchmark against what anxious teens try to compare themselves.

Smartphones and other tech also allow worried teens ample opportunity to avoid the direct interactions they fear even though it's direct experience with social interactions that actually teach teenagers how to manage socially.

This is an interesting [article](#) and worth reading. Parents and teens wanting to learn more about how to cope with anxiety and worry can [contact us here at Shift](#). We see more anxiety than any other clinical issue and teach [proven strategies](#) to help people cope with fear and worry.

[Dr. Ian Shulman](#)

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