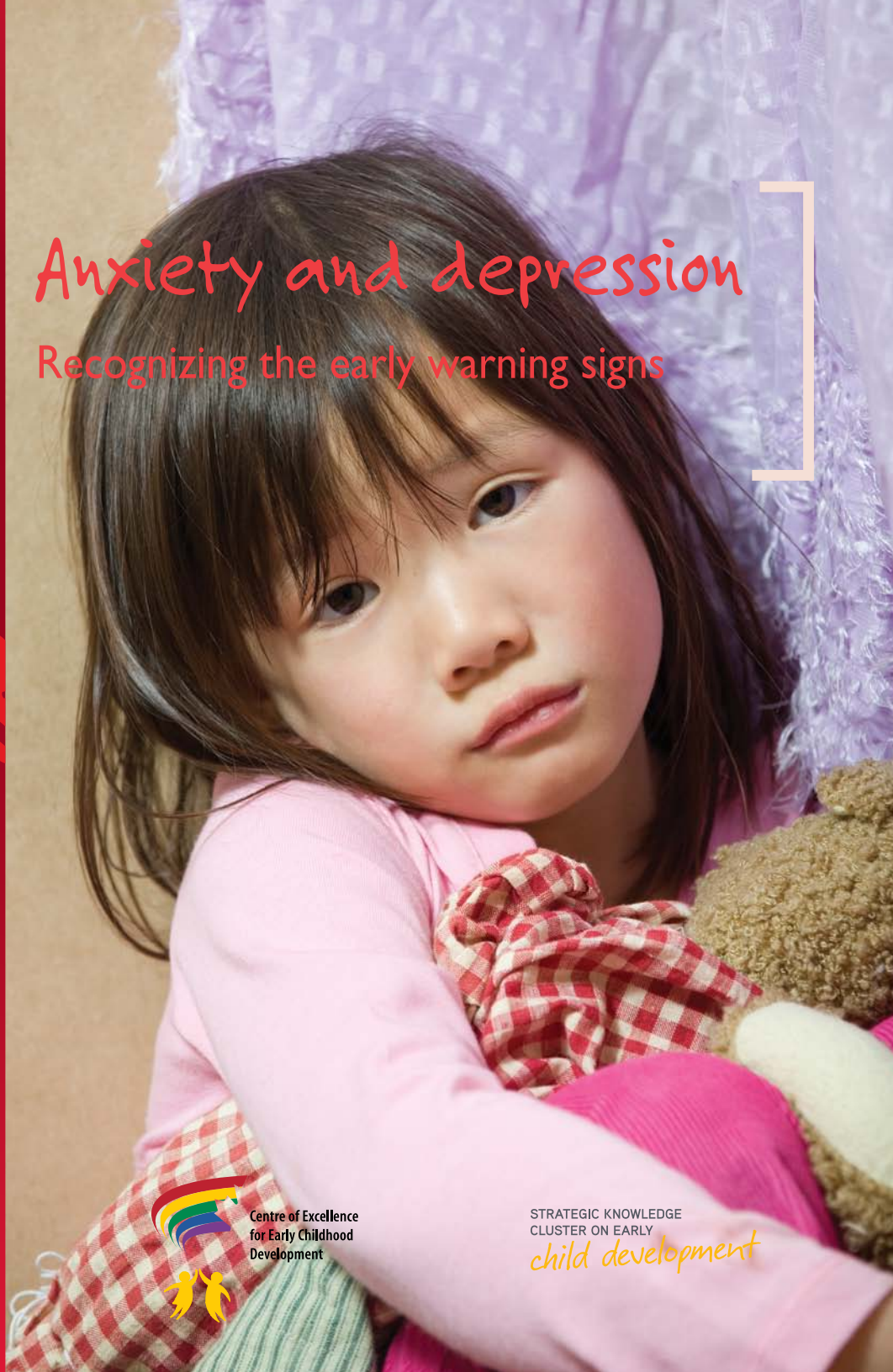


Eyes on



# Anxiety and depression

Recognizing the early warning signs



PARENTS



Centre of Excellence  
for Early Childhood  
Development

STRATEGIC KNOWLEDGE  
CLUSTER ON EARLY

*child development*




***“It is normal for young children to sometimes feel afraid, shy or sad.”***

## What do we know?

- It is normal for young children to sometimes feel afraid, shy or sad. However, for some children, these feelings last for a long time and can affect their development.
- Emotional problems like anxiety and depression often happen at the same time. Both can be described as feelings of inner emotional distress.
- It is more common for young children to have fears and anxieties than depression.
- It is hard to detect symptoms of anxiety and depression in young children (unlike aggression and hyperactivity). If anxiety and depression are not noticed and addressed in the early years, they can lead to mental health problems later in life. However, it is important to know that this only happens in a relatively small percent of children.
- The children who are most likely to have emotional problems later in life are those who are behaviourally inhibited.
- Toddlers and young children who are behaviourally inhibited appear very shy, tend to avoid social contacts and withdraw from unfamiliar situations.
- Children usually first show signs of emotional problems when around other children.
- Young children with anxiety and depression are often fearful, worried and nervous around other children. They rarely initiate contact and are at risk for being rejected or ignored by peers.
- However, a positive peer relationship, such as having a best friend, can help protect anxious and depressed children against the negative consequences of emotional problems.
- Children’s environment, including their parents’ behaviours, family conflicts and traumatic experiences, can also lead at risk children to develop anxiety and depression.
- Parents can help protect children from later emotional problems by showing supporting guidance, allowing children to explore their environment, and by providing warm, sensitive and consistent response and discipline.

### Paying attention to...

### What can be done?

- 
- ... early signs of emotional problems.
- Recognize changes in mood, energy level, sleep and appetite that affect how your child functions.
  - Look for excessive worrying, self-consciousness, and nervousness in your child.
  - When interacting with peers, notice whether your child has difficulty initiating contact with others.
  - Seek professional help if any of these problems concern you.
- 
- ... what you can do to help your child with his emotional problems.
- Let your child experience the natural challenges of life rather than shield him against them.
  - Use gentle discipline rather than harsh techniques (for example, yelling and slapping).
  - Adjust your parenting style to your child's personality.
  - Provide a sensitive, reliable and calm environment for your child.
  - Teach your child to recognize and challenge problematic thoughts.
  - Help your child learn to control how he reacts in new situations.
  - Encourage and help your child to make friends.
- 
- ... your own anxiety.
- Learn to recognize your own anxiety level.
  - Try not to let your child see you being fearful or avoiding new situations.
  - If you have a problem with anxiety or depression, seek professional help. This will help both you and your child.
- 
- ... available programs that help prevent or reduce emotional problems.
- Seek professional guidance when needed.
  - Use medication only as a last resort.
  - If your child experiences a trauma, enroll him in a program to prevent emotional problems.
  - Be aware that your child's traumatic experience can also be highly stressful for you.
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## Information

This information sheet is a publication of the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development (CEECD) and the Strategic Knowledge Cluster on Early Child Development (SKC-ECD). These organizations identify and summarize the best scientific work on early childhood development. They disseminate this knowledge to a variety of audiences in formats and languages adapted to their needs.

For a more in-depth understanding of anxiety and depression, consult our synthesis and experts' articles on this topic in the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, available free of charge at [www.child-encyclopedia.com](http://www.child-encyclopedia.com).

Several organizations financially support the CEECD and the SKC-ECD, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Université Laval, and private foundations. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policies of these organizations.

We are grateful to The Lawson Foundation and the Margaret & Wallace McCain Family Foundation for their financial contribution to produce this information sheet.

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In this document, the masculine form is used merely to simplify the text. No discrimination is intended.

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