



## **Best therapies for anxiety disorders in youth? CBT, Exposure, and Modeling top the list**

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Anxiety disorders represent the most common mental health disorder among both children and adolescents. They are also associated with numerous negative mental health outcomes, including the development of subsequent anxiety disorders, depression, substance misuse, and poor school performance. Fortunately for children, adolescents, families and communities, research has led to many effective talk therapies.

In a recent review of 111 studies for child and adolescent anxiety conducted by Charmaine Higa-McMillan, Sarah Francis, Leslie Rith-Najarian, and Bruce Chorpita, six treatments were identified as “well-established,” the best level of research support. Among these treatments, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) was most studied and is an appropriate first line treatment for youth with anxiety disorders. The most frequent ingredients of the top treatments include Exposure, Cognitive Restructuring, Relaxation, Psychoeducation, and Modeling. For example, Exposure involves direct or imagined experience with the feared object or situation and Cognitive Restructuring involves working with the youth to alter how they view events or situations, often by generating and practicing more realistic, alternative counter-thoughts. Several other treatments found support in studies that were not primarily CBT-based, reaching the second best level of support. These included Cultural Storytelling for Hispanic youth with subclinical anxiety and Hypnosis for test anxiety.

The review also sought to identify treatments with limited or no support for their use. For instance, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) has been tested and has failed to demonstrate significant improvement in anxiety among youth despite evidence that the approach works with adults with anxiety. Additionally, other treatments that focus on supportive listening or non-directive approaches only instead of directly addressing the client’s fears such as client centered therapy and relationship counseling, were also identified as lacking support.

**Source:** [Higa-McMillan, C. K., Francis, S. E., Rith-Najarian, L., & Chorpita, B. F. \(in press\). Evidence base update: 50 years of research on treatment for child and adolescent anxiety. \*Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology\*.](#)

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**RESOURCES:** For more information, interested readers can go to [www.effectivechildtherapy.com](http://www.effectivechildtherapy.com). The website offers free videos on a variety of child/adolescent therapy topics, including videos describing various evidence-based treatment approaches; there are videos for [parents](#) and [professionals](#).

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