

HIGH SCHOOL

ANXIETY



CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR SGLs

If there was ever a time anxiety would decide to make its grand appearance, it's during the high school years. Your high schoolers are dealing with a lot — they've got their futures to think about, as well as their current realities. They've got pressure from all sides, yet don't necessarily feel equipped to make sound decisions every time. Their brains are changing, their lives are changing, and all the transitions can feel quite overwhelming.

And while anxious feelings tend to disappear with each passed test or achieved milestone in some cases, sometimes, anxiety in high schoolers can be more serious. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, 38% of female teens have an anxiety disorder while 26% of male teens have an anxiety disorder.

Be their safe place (or find someone who can be).

Students, at this age, need an adult who understands their inner crisis. As their small group leader, you're in a unique position to be that for them. If you're not feeling up to the task or if you find it difficult to meaningfully connect with a student, bring another loving adult in to fill in the relational gap.

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WHAT TO SAY:

- *"So I've noticed that you've seemed a little anxious recently. Why don't we talk about it?"*
- *"How are your friends handling the tough things they're going through?"* (Sometimes, going about the conversation from a different angle will compel your student to share.)
- *"I want to encourage you to take a tiny step towards [the thing make them anxious.] No matter what happens, I'll be right beside you."*
- *"So I saw something on your social media, and I would love to talk to you about it because I care about you a whole lot!"* (Teenagers express themselves more freely online than in real life, and if they're writing dark messages there, this is a red flag.)
- *"I know how it feels to feel out of control. Something that I've found to help is taking deep breaths. Do you want to try to take some deep breaths together?"* (A lot of anxious feelings are exacerbated when you're not breathing properly.)

WHAT **NOT** TO SAY:

- *"This isn't as big of a deal as you're making it. You're getting older, and the older you get, the more things you'll face that can make you anxious."* (Don't dismiss their feelings.)
- *"Just calm down."* (This is dismissive. A better suggestion would be to take some deep breaths together.)
- *"Talk to me every time you start to feel like this."* (Resist the urge to keep pushing for a response. Sometimes, it's just not the right time.)

If your high schoolers exhibit symptoms of anxiety for more than a week or two, it's time to call in some outside help. Connect with their parents and encourage them to seek the guidance of a mental health professional.

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