

'Mayo Clinic anxiety coach' e-tool to help children with mental health concerns

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Anxiety disorders affect up to 20% of children, and according to recent Mayo Clinic research, there are several effective treatment options. The COVID-19 pandemic can intensify these and other mental health

conditions. But as most of the U.S. continues social distancing, access to mental health care is limited.

To address this urgent patient need, Mayo Clinic has launched an online resource, Mayo Clinic Anxiety Coach, so children and teens can work through treatment resources at home. The website contains two separate programs: Anxiety Coach to assist children and families dealing with [anxiety](#) disorders and [obsessive compulsive disorder](#), and the Family Stress Resource Center for children and families coping with upsetting changes, events or challenges in their lives.

A Mayo Clinic team worked with digital business consultancy The Nerder LLC to develop a tool that allows Mayo clinicians to remotely assist children and teens with stress and anxiety. The e-tool, accessible with an internet browser, can be paired with a live video group or individual counseling session. It incorporates content from Mayo's Pediatric Anxiety Disorders Clinic, and includes educational videos, interactive worksheets, the ability to individualize a treatment plan and downloadable forms to track progress.

"As a mental health community, we're all moving quickly to figure out how to provide additional resources to meet our patients' needs," says Stephen Whiteside, Ph.D., a Mayo Clinic psychologist. "Our team has wanted to build a unique mental health platform for quite a while, but when social distancing measures were enacted, we realized we needed to expedite the process."

While the tool was developed to address patient needs during the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Whiteside believes the resource will improve standard mental health practice, even after the pandemic subsides. He says the team also plans to build on the success of this tool to expand to other areas of mental health.

Dr. Whiteside says the team designed the Mayo Clinic Anxiety Coach e-tool to provide assistance for anxiety disorders and situational stress, such as isolating during a pandemic. The experiences are similar, but they are treated in different ways.

To introduce families to exposure therapy for [anxiety disorders](#), Anxiety Coach walks the families through understanding how avoidance maintains anxiety, learning the steps for facing one's fears, making a step-by-step treatment plan, and preparing to start exposure therapy. To help families cope with situational stress, the Family Stress Resource Center contains a variety of strategies for discussing stressful events, building resiliency, and managing conflict, with a section specific to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Patients interested in the e-tool should contact their Mayo Clinic provider to learn more.

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