

## Teenagers, Anxiety Can Be Your Friend

Think of it as a personal warning system that will help you notice when things are on the wrong track



By Lisa Damour

For many teenagers, anxiety is riding high these days.

A new report from the University of Michigan's C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health [found that one in three teen girls and one in five teen boys have experienced new or worsening anxiety](#) since March 2020.

And a year into the pandemic, there's certainly plenty to worry about. Maybe you're feeling nervous about catching or spreading Covid-19, or about returning to in-person school. You might be feeling tense about where things stand with your friends or perhaps you're on edge about something else altogether: your family, your schoolwork, your future, the health of the planet.

While I wish there were fewer reasons to be anxious right now, I do have good news for keeping yourself steady. Psychologists actually understand a lot about anxiety — both the mechanisms that drive it and interventions that get it under control — and what we know is quite reassuring. So if you're looking to feel more at ease, start by letting go of these common myths.

### Myth: I'd be better off if I never felt anxious.

Without question, anxiety feels bad — it's no fun to have a pounding heart, sweaty palms and tightness in your chest — and for that reason, it's easy to assume that it must be bad. But the discomfort of anxiety has a basic evolutionary function: to get us to tune into the fact that something's not right.

You can think of anxiety as the emotional equivalent of the physical pain response. If you accidentally touch a hot burner, the pain makes you pull your hand away. In the same way, if your friends want to take a Covid-safe outdoor event and move it into a cramped indoor space,

you *should* feel a surge of di f

the things we dread. If you've been doing school remotely this year and get nervous when you picture your return to in-