

## Hypervigilance

*Hyper-vigilant behaviour refers to a heightened state of sensitivity and alertness to our surroundings, often stemming from a perception of potential threats or dangers. Some common symptoms of hyper-vigilance include:*

1. Exaggerated startle response: Easily startled or frightened by sudden noises or movements, even if they are not actually threatening.
2. Constant scanning of the environment: Continually looking around and assessing the surroundings for potential dangers, even in familiar or safe settings.
3. Difficulty concentrating: Struggling to focus on tasks or conversations due to preoccupation with potential threats.
4. Increased anxiety and irritability: Feeling anxious, tense, or irritable, especially when exposed to unfamiliar or potentially threatening situations.
5. Sleep disturbances: Difficulty falling or staying asleep, often due to racing thoughts or a heightened sense of alertness.
6. Hypersensitivity to sensory stimuli: Being overly sensitive to sounds, smells, or visual cues that might signal danger, even if they are benign.
7. Emotional reactivity: Quick to react emotionally or defensively.
8. Seeing neutral situations as threatening: Misinterpreting non-threatening situations or interactions as potential dangers.

It is important to be aware of the signs of hyper-vigilance in young people. If you suspect a young person may be experiencing hyper-vigilance, the following might be helpful:

1. *Be observant:* Watch for signs of exaggerated startle responses, constant scanning of the environment, difficulty concentrating, increased anxiety, sleep disturbances, hypersensitivity to sensory stimuli, emotional reactivity, or perceiving neutral situations as threatening.
2. *Create a safe and supportive environment:* Foster a sense of security by establishing predictable routines, setting clear expectations, and maintaining open communication.

## HANDOUT B

3. *Be patient and understanding:* Recognise that a child displaying hyper-vigilant behaviour may struggle with focus, emotional regulation, or social interactions. Offer support and patience and avoid expressing frustration or impatience.
4. *Teach coping strategies:* Encourage the development of healthy coping skills, such as deep breathing exercises, mindfulness techniques, or positive self-talk, to help manage anxiety and promote emotional regulation. We look at some of these exercises in Chapter 11.
5. *Encourage open communication:* Create opportunities for the young person to express their feelings, concerns, or fears without judgment. Listen actively and validate their emotions, while providing reassurance and guidance as needed.
6. *Seek professional support:* If you are concerned about a child's hyper-vigilance and its impact on their well-being, consult with a mental health professional or school support counsellor for guidance on appropriate interventions and support.
7. *Educate yourself and others:* Learn about the possible causes of hyper-vigilance, such as trauma, anxiety disorders, or stress, and share this information with others to promote understanding and a collaborative approach to supporting the learner.

By being attentive to the signs of hyper-vigilance and offering appropriate support, educators, parents, and caregivers can help young learners build resilience and develop the skills needed to manage their emotions and thrive in challenging situations.

## REFERENCES

<https://patient.info>

<https://www.nhs.uk>