



Anxious Summers

Trayce Potter

Minister for Youth and Young Adult Engagement

With summer vacation comes a temporary break from morning routines: the frenzy of getting children up, bookbags and lunches packed, sticky syrup faces and hands wiped down, the dreaded drop off and pickup school lines, homework, missing uniforms, and all the daily struggles that come with school and children. During these summer months, parents may be able to catch a few extra moments of sleep and can temporarily turn off the myriad notifications and reminders from school apps and email. All is well so it seems. However, a recent conversation with my rising second grader and then an administrator at their school highlighted a different reality. With summer break comes transition—the ending of what has been consistent and familiar for nine months to embrace something altogether different in the fall. As excited as we are about our children's accomplishments and growth, we may miss the cues that they are having some fear about the upcoming change of grades. Children can feel anxious about their new teachers, the more challenging coursework and tests that lie ahead, and making new friends and finding their place in this new system, even if they are only moving up one grade. This is a lot for children who are still developing and learning how to make sense of everything around them.

The [CDC reports](#) that approximately 9.4% of children aged 3–17 were diagnosed with anxiety for the time period of 2016–2019, while 4.4% were diagnosed with depression. This translates to approximately 5.8 million and 2.7 million children, respectively. We also know that those numbers skyrocketed during and after Covid-19 and are only steadily rising as we monitor the long-lasting effects of isolation, social media consumption, the economy, the political climate, and other stressors in our world. These numbers highlight an important truth. Chances are, that on any given day, each of us has

encountered one of these children, even if we don't live with them. The child in Target who is hiding in the clothes (because they are overwhelmed by all the people);

The child at the restaurant who is having a meltdown (because they are overstimulated with all the noise);

The child at church who can't sit still (because they are used to movement in their Montessori classroom).

These are the children that show up in our churches that all too often are labeled as disruptive because they can't sit still, are disengaged because they are lost in their tablets and cellphones, or lazy because they aren't showing up on Sunday mornings.

So, how do we as parents and caregivers, clergy, volunteers, and just concerned people of faith offer support to the young people in our life? We must make space for grace and realize that our children have been through a lot, just as we have. One technique I use with my son when his anxiety is high is to use evidence-based facts to confront the overwhelming situation before him. If experience and facts point to a different reality, we can help steer him to see a different reality than the one in his head. Another technique we use throughout the year is scheduled downtime. It is easy to over-program and overcommit in this fast-paced society. So sometimes, we just say no. We make sure we have time to rest and just enjoy each other, our homes, and do nothing. Rest is a gift from God and more people should partake! A quick Google search will review all kinds of games and techniques to help children overcome anxious thoughts, but I encourage you to seek professional help through your child's pediatrician, trained mental health professionals, and school administration for more serious support, when needed.

As a parent and Director of the UCC National Office's [Love of Children program](#), I am passionate about highlighting the challenges and barriers that keep our children from living their most joyous and authentic lives. Over the coming months, we will be adding additional resources to help you navigate ministry with children and youth so both you and the young people in your lives feel seen and supported alike.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rev. Trayce Potter is the Minister for Children and Youth Engagement and the Director of Love of Children for the United Church of Christ.

LEARN ucc.org/justice

DONATE ucc.org/donate

ARCHIVE bit.ly/witness4justice

The United Church of Christ has more than 5,000 churches throughout the United States. Rooted in the Christian traditions of congregational governance and covenantal relationships, each UCC setting speaks only for itself and not on behalf of every UCC congregation. UCC members and churches are free to differ on important social issues, even as the UCC remains principally committed to unity in the midst of our diversity.

