

Ask the Expert – May 2020

Query 1

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| 5/31/2020 19:03:13 | Male | Age 9 to 13 | I am from class 7 A *****. Mam I am very good at studies and my writing is very beautiful but query is that I am trimming nails all the time and my concentration is not to study and I wake to 1 am of night. That my query please answer it. |
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Category: Mental Health

Query by: Student

Response: If we understand correctly, by ‘trimming your nails’ you are referring to nail biting. If that is the case, from your query it is unclear how frequent the behaviors is. Children nail bite due to a number of reasons, it may also be a stress coping mechanism that eventually becomes a habit. Some of the things that you can try to address this issue are given below.

- Try to understand your anxiety and how have you been dealing with it. Is there a recent change in the family, a move, death, fights in the house, a new class etc.? At times nail biting can be a sign of emotional or mental stress. It tends to show up in people who are nervous, anxious or feeling down. It's a way to cope with these feelings.
- It would be important to assess and manage anxiety that is part of daily life and can become especially pronounced after a recent stressful life event or sometimes even before an exam, meeting new people, a doctor's check-up. Anxiety can make us think negatively which in turn affects our decision making and concentration on tasks. Identify and minimize your unhelpful thoughts such as ‘I will be a failure, ‘I need to be the best’, ‘My parents, teachers and peers will be so disappointed in me’, ‘I am so dumb’ etc. as they just add to the anxiety. Replace these with helpful thoughts such as ‘I am going to try my best’, ‘I may not know a few things but will work to improve them’, ‘I don't have to be perfect in everything’. If it helps write down the helpful thoughts and say these out loud while standing in front of the mirror and looking at yourself.
- Try to identify physical and other activities that help you calm down and make them part of your daily routine. Anxiety often produces bodily symptoms such as sweating, erratic breathing, fast heartbeat, hinders our concentration on a particular task and sleep disturbance. Deep breathing and calming activities

reduce these bodily symptoms. Deep breathing before sleeping helps the body relax and may help you sleep

- Other than that, pursuing a pleasurable interest, talking to friends etc. can also help deal with the stress.
- Some measures can be taken to remind yourself to not start nail biting when anxious, sad, or even hungry. Chose a code word that will remind you of the nail biting. Ask a trusted adult or friend to remind you of the nailing biting by using the code word whenever they see you do it so that you become aware and can check that behavior.
- Keep your hands busy, with a fidget spinner or fidgeting with a pen. Think of alterative activities to do whenever you feel the urge to repeat the habit.
- Too much pressure to stop may actually worsen the habit as it increases the stress so try to make sure that you are not over worrying or preoccupied by this.

Best of luck!
