Understanding and Managing Anxiety

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Agenda

- Definition of Anxiety
- Understanding what anxiety is and how it manifests in children
- How to help children cope with anxious feelings
- Resources/Q & A (note cards)
What Anxiety is:
“A feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.”

Often times accompanied by:

*A feeling of lack of control over one’s environment

*A feeling that the amount of tasks to be completed are greater than the perceived ability to accomplish them

*A perception of danger
Prevalence/Statistics:

- Median age of onset 11
- Roughly half of children diagnosed with anxiety are between the ages of 14-21
- Anxiety is noted to be one of the most common mental health disorders, impacting 10% of children and 20% of adolescents
- Only 18% of these teens receive treatment.
What are our children worried most about?

Children are experiencing far more stress and anxiety than in previous generations

- Families issues/challenges/stressors
- Environmental dangers/Media exposure
- Digital World/Social Media
- Peer Relationships
- School performance
- Hormonal Changes

Children are especially vulnerable to these stressors since they have less control over their lives
What does Anxiety look like?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thoughts</th>
<th>Feelings</th>
<th>Behavior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thinking that danger is everywhere</td>
<td>Heart pounding</td>
<td>Avoiding situations, people, or things (e.g., flying, social situations, memories, body sensations)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking that a thing or situation is very dangerous when it is not</td>
<td>Numbness</td>
<td>Clinging to safe people or refusing to leave them</td>
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<td>Worrying way too much about bad things happening</td>
<td>Irritability or anger</td>
<td>Outbursts when faced with separation or feared situations</td>
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<td>Constant thoughts or images of bad things happening</td>
<td>Restlessness</td>
<td>Repetitive rituals</td>
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<td>Predicting negative outcomes</td>
<td>Sweaty</td>
<td>Checking things over and over again</td>
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<td>A lot of “what if” thoughts</td>
<td>Muscle tension</td>
<td>Seeking a lot of reassurance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thinking you can’t face your fear</td>
<td>Nausea or stomach aches</td>
<td>Depending on someone or something else to get you through difficult times</td>
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<td>Being overly critical of yourself or perfectionistic</td>
<td>Difficulty focusing or concentrating</td>
<td>Being unable to fall asleep or waking up frequently throughout the night</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Jumpiness</td>
<td>Over-preparing, rehearsing, or researching things in advance to prevent a bad outcome</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trouble breathing or feeling short of breath</td>
<td>Not letting anyone help you with things</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chest tightness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling like throat is closing up</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dizziness or lightheadedness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trembling or shaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Heart fluttering</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
What does Anxiety look like (cont’d):

1. Anger
   The perception of danger, stress or oppression is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.

2. Difficulty Sleeping
   In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.

3. Defiance
   Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child’s defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.

4. Chandeliering
   Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.

5. Lack of Focus
   Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.

6. Avoidance
   Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.

7. Negativity
   People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.

8. Overplanning
   Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.
Red Flag: Your child has been complaining of bad pains in her head and neck. You take her to the doctor to have her checked, but nothing seems to be wrong.

The Issue: When the mind is overwhelmed, it can affect the body. Complaints included body pain, tiredness, headaches and stomachaches.

Red Flag: She’s stopped wanting to go to her afterschool dance class. In fact, she’s stopped wanting to go anywhere after school and just wants to come home and stay.

The Issue: After a day at school, an overwhelmed tween may retreat to a place where she can avoid more challenges.

Red Flag: You asked what homework your son has and he says “none.” You find out two days later he had a math test and failed it.

The Issue: A tween can become so overwhelmed that the “check out.” He may lie to avoid facing the challenge.
Examples: Signs of stress in a Middle Schooler (cont’d)

**Red Flag:**
A teacher calls to say your child’s been unusually difficult. She’s on her phone in class, rummaging through her backpack. Anything but focusing.

**Red Flag:**
You ask your son if he’s started his English project. He flies back at you “Why can’t you leave me alone? I feel like a prisoner here!”

**The Issue:**
Stress can play out as fidgeting behavior. At home, you may notice she’s having trouble sleeping.

**The Issue:**
Anger, aggression, and emotional reactions are classic signs for a child who is overwhelmed. It might seem as though anything can set him off, but it’s a sign that there may be more going on.
When does Anxiety become disordered?

- Not all anxiety is bad
  - Fear has a protective function, in moderate amounts, it can improve performance (strength, speed, stamina, motivation)
  - Fear and Anxiety are different
  - Kids often feel nervous about an upcoming event – this is normal

- When the anxiety is strong, lasts a long time, and begins to impede your child from being able to perform daily activities, that is cause for concern.

- Treatment works!
  - Success rates for anxiety disorders with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) range from 60% to 90%
  - However, low utilization rates (18% compared with 79% for ADHD)
Protective Factors

- Attachment/Affection
- How we pay attention - mindfulness
- Positive thinking style
- Support networks (extended family, community and friendships)
- Health factors (sleep, daily physical activity, healthy eating)
Dr. Daniel Siegel co-author of *Parenting from the Inside Out* often refers to the four S’s of attachment in which a child feels *safe, soothed, seen, and secure.*

To form a secure attachment, it’s necessary for parents to create a compassionate environment and *to have the ability to regulate their own emotions and reactions.*

They're able to empathize with the child’s experience and *remain present* or “be there” for the child.

As adults, studies show that those who reported receiving more affection in childhood displayed less depression and anxiety are more compassionate overall.
Paying Attention

"MINDFULNESS MEANS PAYING ATTENTION IN A PARTICULAR WAY; ON PURPOSE, IN THE PRESENT MOMENT, AND NONJUDGMENTALLY."
- JON KABAT-ZINN

- Spending both quantity and quality time
- Paying attention means more than being physically present. It means learning how to:
  - listen to your kids
  - talk with them
  - respond to their actions.
- Good, quality attention will improve the quality of your family's life
- *We can train ourselves to slow down, to pause more, to give space for ‘being’ instead of always ‘doing’*
Identifying Negative Thinking Patterns

“THE GREATEST WEAPON AGAINST STRESS IS OUR ABILITY TO CHOOSE ONE THOUGHT OVER ANOTHER.”
- WILLIAM JAMES

Make a mountain out of a molehill

All-or-nothing thinking

“completely good” “completely bad”

Personalization “this is my fault”

Jumping to conclusion: Mind reading and fortune telling

Conclusions
Identifying Negative Thinking Patterns (cont’d)

Labeling and overgeneralizing

Mental filter: only paying attention to certain type of evidence.

Mental filtering

The tendency to focus on negative events while neglecting the positives.

Emotional reasoning: assuming that because we feel a certain way what we think must be true

- 'I feel bad, therefore it is bad.'
- 'I feel angry, therefore you deserve to be punished.'
- 'I feel scared, therefore this is a bad situation.'
- 'I feel jealous, therefore you're up to something.'
- 'I feel sick and shaky, my life is awful.'
5 Steps to Untwisting Your Thinking

- Step 1: Identify the problem situation
- Step 2: Identify the automatic thought
- Step 3: Decide if you are falling into a “thinking trap” /negative patterns
- Step 4: Ask yourself some tough questions:
  - 1. Is there another way to look at this?
  - 2. What would I tell a friend in this situation?
  - 3. How would (role model) handle this situation?
  - 4. What is the evidence for this thought being true?
  - 5. What is the evidence against this thought?
  - 6. Even if this is true, what is the worst thing that can happen?
  - 7. What is the most likely thing to happen?
  - 8. If my thought did come true, how would I cope?
  - 9. What steps can I take right now to respond in the best way possible to this situation? What help do I need?
  - 10. What would happen if I didn’t believe this anymore? How might things change for the better?
Develop a support network for your child

• Positive Friends
• Trusted Adults
• Mentors
• Community
• Family
Health Factors

- **MIND**
  - LEARNING NEW THINGS
  - Practicing Gratitude
  - RELAXATION
  - Mindfulness

- **BODY**
  - GETTING ENOUGH SLEEP
  - Eating Right
  - Exercising
  - Avoiding Substances
  - TAKING PRESCRIBED MEDICATIONS

- **SPIRIT**
  - Self Compassion
  - Doing Things for Others
  - Acts of Kindness

- **LESS**
  - Junk Food
  - Sitting
  - Late Nights
  - TV Watching
  - Frowning
  - Talking
  - Complaining
  - Negativity
  - Arguing
  - Worrying
  - Taking

- **MORE**
  - Real Food
  - Walking
  - Rest
  - Reading
  - Smiling
  - Listening
  - Encouraging
  - Gratitude
  - Understanding
  - Praying
  - Giving

- **HEALTHY LIVING**
  - REGULAR EXERCISE
  - EAT BETTER
  - FEEL GOOD
  - POSITIVE THINKING
Ground Yourself & Calm your Nervous System

- Prefrontal Cortex: Thinking/logic/what to do/evaluation.
- Hippocampus: Regulates memory and emotions.
- Amygdala: Turns on fight or flight, and stores memories of the event.

Everything is ok.

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Mindfulness allows us to interrupt automatic, reflexive fight, flight, or freeze reactions—reactions that can lead to anxiety, fear, foreboding, and worry.

- Focus on the present
- Non-judgement
- Being instead of doing

Allows your prefrontal cortex to calm your amygdala when it overreacts.
Breathing

According to the Mayo Clinic, practicing Square Breathing has been shown to calm the automatic nervous system (ANS); improve sleep; and reduce feelings of stress and anxiety.
Engage the Senses

“What do you...
- Hear
- Smell
- Touch
- See
- Taste

Create a Sensory Soothing Box
Color, draw, or paint

www.supercoloring.com
www.printmandala.com
Shift the Focus to Positivity

Positive Words/Affirmations:
- “I can” Statements
- “I am” Statements

Gratitude: students who participated in gratitude letter writing study demonstrated increased positive behavior, improved sleep, reduced stress, & increased ability to handle negative emotions such as guilt

Increase Communication about Anxiety

- Ask open-ended questions, without assumptions or judgement
- Ask “What do you need from me?”
- Let them know that you are open to talking and are willing to give them space and wait until they are ready to talk
- Come up with a plan for the anxious times
Letter Writing
builds hope & connection

• Write back and forth
• Validate feelings
• Offer encouragement
- Calm
- Headspace
- Relax Melodies
- Smiling Mind
- Mindshift
- Hear and Now
- Aura
- Colorfy
Happiness takes work!

10 SCIENTIFIC WAYS TO BE HAPPY

- Meditate
- Spend time with family
- Plan a trip
- Move closer to work
- Practice gratitude
- Go outside especially at dawn or dusk
- Help others 2 hours a week
- Sleep more
- Practice smiling
- Exercise at least 7 minutes a day
Questions?