

Helping Children Cope with Stress and Anxiety

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Anxiety vs. General Stress

Anxiety

- Persistent internal excessive worries that don't go away even in the absence of the stressor.
- Causes may be Biological, Environmental, or Individual.

General Stress

- Typically caused by an external trigger
- Mental and physical symptoms go away when the stressor is removed.
 - Short term stressors can include work deadlines or arguments with loved ones.
 - Long term stressors can include global pandemics, being unable to work, discrimination, chronic illness.

Both are emotional responses which cause many of the same mental and physical symptoms; irritability, anger, fatigue, or difficulty sleeping/insomnia.

Anxiety



- Experiencing occasional anxiety is a normal part of life.
- Nearly 1/3 of adolescents have had an anxiety disorder
- More than 8% of them experience severe impairment
- More than 19% of U.S. adults suffer from an anxiety disorder

National institute of mental health

Anxiety

- Moderate amounts of anxiety are adaptive; we act more effectively and cope with potentially dangerous situations
- However, people with anxiety disorders frequently have intense, excessive, and persistent worry and fear about everyday situations.
- Excessive, uncontrollable anxiety can be debilitating
- Anxiety involves 3 interrelated anxiety response systems:
 - Physiological system:
 - The brain sends messages to the sympathetic nervous system, which produces the fight/flight response and activates important chemicals
 - Cognitive system:
 - Activation often leads to subjective feelings of apprehension, nervousness, difficulty concentrating, and panic
 - Behavioral system:
 - Aggression and a desire to escape the threatening situation
 - Avoidance perpetuates anxiety

Physical Symptoms of Anxiety

- Increased heart rate
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Upset stomach
- Dizziness
- Blurred vision
- Dry mouth
- Vomiting
- Sweating
- Numbness
- Muscle tension
- Heart palpitations
- Increased respirations

Cognitive Symptoms of Anxiety

- Thoughts of being scared or hurt
- Thoughts or images of monsters or wild animals
- Self-critical thoughts
- Thoughts of incompetence or inadequacy
- Forgetfulness or blacking out
- Thoughts of appearing foolish
- Thoughts of bodily injury
- Images of harm to loved ones
- Thoughts of going crazy
- Thoughts of contaminations
- Difficulty concentrating

Behavioral Symptoms of Anxiety

- Avoidance
- Crying or screaming
- Nail biting
- Trembling voice
- Stuttering
- Trembling lip
- Swallowing
- Immobility
- Twitching
- Thumb sucking
- Avoidance of eye contact
- Physical proximity
- Clenched jaw
- Fidgeting

Causes of anxiety

- Biological Factors
 - Genetics
 - Imbalance of hormones
- Environmental Factors
 - In response to loss, change in the family, abuse, transitions,
 - Lack of downtime
 - Academic pressure
 - Social disruptions
- Family/Individual Factors
 - Modeling anxiety from others in the family



Disorders involving Anxiety

- **General Anxiety Disorder** – General anxiety disorder (GAD) is the diagnosis when a child experiences anxiety, but the cause cannot be determined. General anxiety disorder can last a few months or several years.
- **Phobias** – Children sometimes suffer from a specific phobia. These children greatly fear a particular object, animal or certain situation. When a child encounters his or her phobia, they often exhibit symptoms such as shaking, difficulty breathing, heart palpitations, and an upset stomach.
- **Panic Attacks** – Panic attacks are also called as agoraphobia. Children suffering from panic attacks have repeated episodes of shaking, dizziness, chest pains, and intense feelings of fear. They often avoid certain situations for fear of having a panic attack.
- **Social Anxiety** – Children with social anxiety only have symptoms when in social settings. They fear unwanted attention from anyone, including friends.
- **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder** – Children with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) are consumed by a specific obsession. They perform repetitive rituals as a coping mechanism.
- **Post Traumatic Stress Disorder** – When a child experiences a traumatic event, he or she may suffer from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The child cannot stop thinking about the stressful event. Certain people or situations that remind the child of the traumatic event will make the child feel very anxious.

inhale

5

4

3

2

1

Stop

BREATH

Start

exhale

1

2

3

4

5



Self-Care

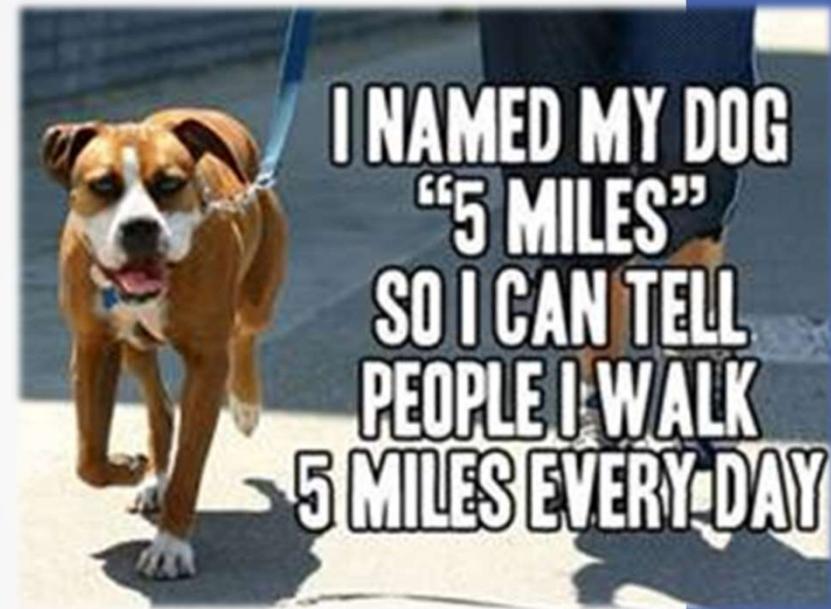
Put Your Oxygen Mask On Before Putting It On Your Child

- Plan time for yourself to do something you love
 - Spend the day in the park reading
 - Go out to eat
 - Do something creative i.e. painting, coloring, write a song
 - Shut your bedroom door and take a nap

Self-Care continued.... because you can never have too much!

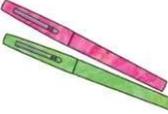
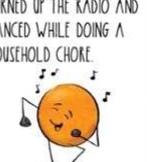
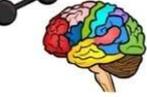
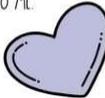
Practice healthy habits

- Exercise
- Eat healthy foods
- Get 7 hours of sleep



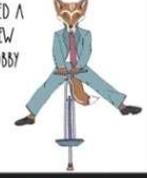
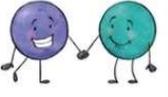
SELF-CARE BINGO

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 <p>WROTE A HAND WRITTEN THANK YOU TO SOMEONE</p>	 <p>MADE A PLAYLIST OF SONGS THAT MAKE ME HAPPY</p>	 <p>FORGAVE SOMEONE BECAUSE I DESERVE THE PEACE</p>	 <p>WROTE DOWN TEN THINGS I AM THANKFUL FOR TODAY.</p>	 <p>TOOK A BUBBLE BATH, TRIED A FACE MASK AT HOME OR BOOKED A SPA APPOINTMENT</p>
 <p>ORGANIZED A CLUTTERED SPACE AT HOME OR SCHOOL</p>	 <p>CHANGED A NEGATIVE THOUGHT TO A POSITIVE ONE</p>	 <p>GAVE MY TIME, OLD CLOTHING, OR \$ TO CHARITY</p>	 <p>TRIED A MEDITATION</p>	 <p>TURNED UP THE RADIO AND DANCED WHILE DOING A HOUSEHOLD CHORE.</p>
 <p>PLANNED & MET UP WITH A FRIEND JUST BECAUSE</p>	 <p>HAD A GUILT FREE TREAT (snack, nap, alone time, or a break)</p>	 <p>FREE SPACE WOKE UP</p>	 <p>FORGAVE MYSELF FOR SOMETHING IN THE PAST</p>	 <p>CONNECTED WITH SOMEONE I HAVEN'T SEEN IN A WHILE</p>
 <p>TRIED A NEW EXERCISE FOR MY BODY AND/OR MIND</p>	 <p>STOPPED A BAD HABIT FOR _____ DAYS</p>	 <p>GOOGLED BELLY BREATHING AND TRIED IT</p>	 <p>FOUND SOMETHING TO DO THAT MADE ME BELLY LAUGH!</p>	 <p>TOOK A _____ HOUR BREAK FROM TECHNOLOGY & SOCIAL MEDIA</p>
 <p>TOOK A MOMENT TO NOTICE WHAT I CAN SEE, SMELL, TASTE, TOUCH AND HEAR.</p>	 <p>READ/LISTENED TO A SELF-HELP BOOK, BLOG OR PODCAST</p>	 <p>WENT OUTSIDE AND FOUND THREE THINGS I AM THANKFUL FOR IN NATURE.</p>	 <p>WAS EXTRA KIND TO SOMEONE WHO WASN'T NICE TO ME.</p>	 <p>BINGE WATCHED A SERIES OR BINGE READ SOME BOOKS</p>

SELF-CARE BINGO

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 <p>DID A RANDOM ACT OF KINDNESS ANONYMOUSLY</p>	 <p>PUT A POST IT NOTE ON MY FRIDGE WITH A POSITIVE MESSAGE TO MYSELF.</p>	 <p>WROTE DOWN FIVE GOOD THINGS ABOUT MYSELF</p>	 <p>BOUGHT MYSELF FLOWERS, ICE CREAM OR A SMALL TREAT JUST BECAUSE</p>	 <p>SAID NO TO SOMETHING I DON'T HAVE TIME FOR OR THAT DOESN'T SERVE MY HEALTH</p>
 <p>IGNORED ALL NEWS AND POLITICAL TALK FOR _____ DAYS</p>	 <p>TURNED ON MUSIC AND DANCED FOR 20 MINUTES FOR EXERCISE.</p>	 <p>THOUGHT OF THREE POSITIVE THINGS ABOUT SOMEBODY I DON'T LIKE</p>	 <p>TOLD THE TRUTH EVEN THOUGH IT WAS UNCOMFORTABLE.</p>	 <p>DID SOMETHING CREATIVE OR ARTISTIC - MADE SOMETHING JUST BECAUSE</p>
 <p>SET A GOAL FOR A NEW HEALTHY HABIT (FITNESS OR NUTRITION GOAL)</p>	 <p>GOT RID OF 3 ITEMS THAT I HAVEN'T USED IN A YEAR</p>	 <p>FREE SPACE SURVIVED</p>	 <p>CAUGHT MYSELF BEING NEGATIVE AND REMINDED MYSELF OF 3 POSITIVE THINGS</p>	 <p>CLEANED OUT OR ORGANIZED A MESSY DRAWER, CLOSET OR SMALL SPACE</p>
 <p>PAID ATTENTION TO MY WATER INTAKE FOR AN ENTIRE DAY TO STAY HYDRATED</p>	 <p>GOOGLED "MEDITATION" AND FOUND ONE THAT I LIKE</p>	 <p>TRIED A NEW HOBBY</p>	 <p>VOLUNTEERED</p>	 <p>TRIED A NEW HEALTHY RECIPE OR A FRUIT I'VE NEVER TASTED.</p>
 <p>SCHEDULED AN OUTING WITH SOMEONE I LOVE</p>	 <p>WENT ON STRIKE FOR ONE DAY.</p>	 <p>LET GO OF A GRUDGE</p>	 <p>WROTE A PRIORITY LIST AND SCRATCHED OFF THREE THINGS I CAN LET GO</p>	 <p>WENT OUTSIDE AND COUNTED ALL OF THE BEAUTIFUL THINGS I COULD FIND.</p>

What can you do as a Parent?

Support vs enable

Build Resilience

Teach Healthy Habits

Support vs. enable

The goal isn't to eliminate anxiety, but to help manage it

- Reframe negative thoughts
 - What IF I don't make an "A" OK, really what if I don't?
- Focus on the positive
 - Journal at night, list 3 good things that happened today/ thankful journal
 - Talk at dinner – everyone share something fun/good that happened today
 - Find a personal, positive mantra
 - Upcoming dreaded situation – find the positive
- Teach Big problem vs. Little problem
 - Actually make a list of truly big problems – SERIOUS ILLNESS, blindness, homeless, etc.

Support vs. enable

Express positive – but realistic – expectations

Your child may actually fail a test, or lose a game, or get hurt, or hate ice skating, or forget the words of their part in a presentation....

But... they will be OKAY!!!

- Express confidence that
 - They will be able to manage the situation
 - They can handle it
 - Anxiety level will drop with time if they face their fear

Support vs. enable

- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings.
 - Discuss feelings and emotions often. It can be comforting to a child to know that they can talk to you about their feelings without judgment.
- Respect feelings, but don't always empower them
 - Validation does not always mean agreement
 - Important message to convey: "I know you're scared, and that's Okay. I'm here and I'm going to help you get through this."
- Don't ask leading questions
 - They need to learn to express and talk about their feelings
 - Don't ask yes/no questions
 - Are you worried about the big test?
 - Are you worried about the science fair?
 - Are you worried about not being included at the party?
 - Ask questions that lead to explanation and discussion
 - How are you feeling about the test?
 - Tell me what you're thinking about the science fair?
 - What are you thinking about the party?

Support vs. enable

Don't reinforce your child's fears

Check your own fears at the door!

- You don't want to give your child something new to worry about.
- Don't let your body language or tone of voice convey, "maybe this IS something you should be afraid of."

Examples:

- Your child (or you) had a bad experience with a dog – their best friend has a big dog
- You failed algebra and now they have an algebra final
- They are going to overnight camp....

Support vs. enable

Encourage your child to tolerate their anxiety

- Realize that it is very difficult for the child to control their anxiety. Praise the child when they handle anxiety appropriately.
- Expect the child to be anxious in certain situations. Let your child know that feeling anxious sometimes is ok.
- Be aware of your child's different moods and feelings. Discuss known triggers or what upsets your child.
- Let them know that you appreciate the work it takes.
- Encourage them to engage in life and ride the anxiety wave
- It's called an "habituation curve" – it will drop over time – IF faced
- It might not drop to zero – or drop as quickly as we would like but it will drop!!!

Overcoming the anxiety wave is the way to beat anxiety

Support vs. enable

Try to keep the anticipatory period short

- The hardest time is before we do something
- Don't force them to think about things before they have to
- Balance “fore warning” with “dragging it out”



Support vs. enable

Most Importantly!

Don't punish the child for anxious behavior

Build Resiliency by Thinking it Through

Think things through with your child

- Don't overly reassure your child that everything will be ok, talk through the "what ifs"
 - What if mom isn't there after soccer to pick you up?
 - What could you do?
- Don't avoid things just because they make your child anxious
 - Reassure them, but insist on participation
 - Make a plan to help support them. Guide them to see that they are not helpless or alone.
 - Help break down large tasks into smaller tasks
 - Plan how long they will be there
 - Help them plan things to do and say
 - Decide who is the "safe" person they can go to
 - Role play scenarios

Build Resiliency through Modeling

Try to model healthy ways of handling anxiety

- Model self-care – healthy diet, exercise, yoga, etc.
- Role play social situations with your child and model appropriate behavior.
- Have a sense of humor around your child. Show your child how to laugh at life.
- When your fears or anxieties do come out “think out loud” to yourself sometimes so your child sees how you handle stress
- Use the same strategies you want them to use
- Don’t get caught up in complaining about stress to friends – they hear you!

Teach Healthy Habits

- Make sure your child is getting their daily allowance of vitamins and nutrients.
- Try to maintain a consistent routine. Stick to a regular bedtime and mealtimes. Let the child know if something out of the ordinary will occur in the day.
- Make sure your child is getting enough sleep.
- Make sure your child has quiet downtime to decompress.
- Unhealthy eating and sleep deprivation can cause stress.
- Encourage your child to be active. Exercise releases mood-boosting endorphins.
- Don't do everything for your child. They must learn to be independent.
- Try to be consistent across caregivers about how to handle your child's mental illness. Children with anxiety disorders need consistency. It makes them feel safe.

Additional Coping Strategies

- When your child becomes anxious, talk to them in a calming voice. Offer distractions. When you feel that your child is becoming anxious, try to get them involved in an activity they enjoy.
- Unplug- Limit your exposure to violent or scary books, video games, television and movies which feed our fears.



Interventions & treatment

- Many self-help books that you can purchase online and review with your children
 - What to do when you Worry too much – dawn Huebner
 - Outsmarting worry: an older kid's guide to managing anxiety – Dawn huebner
 - What to do when your brain gets stuck – dawn huebner
 - When my worries get too big – Kari dunn buron
 - Homemade books to help kids cope – Robert g. Ziegler, Md
- There are also many helpful online home treatments that can help young children cope with their anxiety disorders.
 - www.childmind.org (child mind institute)
 - www.additudemag.com
 - www.understood.org
 - www.adaa.org (anxiety and depression association of America)
 - www.worrywisekids.org
 - www.childanxiety.net
- More severe cases may involve therapeutic or medical intervention.

Resources available within Katy ISD

- Campus administration is ready and willing to support all students with any supports they need through response to intervention.
- Canvas page
 - Shwari
 - <https://katyisd.instructure.com/enroll/TEE6AN>
 - Beckendorf JH
 - <https://sites.google.com/katyisd.org/bdjh-counseling/calming-room#h.urjl2ge3jrjt>
- Mental illness which requires significant support
 - Section 504
 - Special Education
- Katy ISD Family Support Center
- Katy ISD partners with several mental health providers
 - TCHATT
 - Vida Clinic
 - Excel Center
 - A list of outside providers can be provided upon request

Questions ?

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