

Anxiety: The Monster Among Us

Region 4 Presentation Notes

- Stress vs. Anxiety
- Signs & Symptoms
- Parenting Tips
- Resources

Presenter

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Anxiety: The Monster Among Us

- I. Difference between Stress and Anxiety Disorder and Stats**
 - A. Stress: Bodies response to feeling afraid, overworked, overstimulated, threatened, excited
 - B. Anxiety Disorder: Stress that has become excessive, irrational and debilitating.
 - C. Approx. 40 million Americans (18%) 18 years old or older have an anxiety disorder.
 - D. Approx. 10% of children 6-12 years old and 17% of adolescents suffer with an anxiety disorder. Only 18% of those receive any mental health care to address it.
 - E. Very important we correctly distinguish between stress and anxiety because how we frame our feelings strongly influences our life experience. Normalize stress and treat anxiety.
 - F. Long-Term or Chronic Stress can lead to anxiety disorders: Just a sample-Serious and ongoing family conflict, separation/divorce, serious illness, death, frequent moves, being bullied or harassed, dealing with unrealistic expectations/demands that are developmentally inappropriate or just plain too much.
- II. Two questions to ask to help identify if your child is at risk for an anxiety disorder**
 - A. Is my child more shy or anxious than other children his/her age?
 - B. Is my child more worried than other children his/her age?
 - C. If yes to either or both stay alert for specific signs that your child is overly stressed and anxious. Teach them tools to manage their stress (See handout attached for both).
 - D. Types of Anxiety Disorders (average onset 10-13): Separation Anxiety, Generalized Anxiety, Social Anxiety, Obsessive Compulsive, School Refusal, Specific Phobia
- III. Understanding Stress and Anxiety: Why some and not others**
 - A. Genetics and the Brain: COMT, Dopamine, slow acting enzyme (worrier) vs fast acting enzyme (Warrior).
 - B. Warriors vs Worriers (SAT Example) People who perform best under normal conditions are not always person who performs best under stress.
 - C. Situations that are inducing "Threat State" in children these days: Feeling can't make mistake, Sense of being judged, Fear of disappointing others, Unrealistic or developmentally inappropriate expectations, Lack of right structure and clear consequences, Problems don't know how to solve, temperament/personality, attachment issues, ineffectual parenting (i.e. over parenting; authoritarian & permissive parenting), too much and deleterious technology use, separation/divorce.
 - D. 2013 American College Health Association Survey of 100,000 college students' mental health
 - E. ADHD and Anxiety: 25% w/ADHD also have anxiety disorder; 25% w/ anxiety disorder have ADHD. Chance that Anxiety can be misdiagnosed as ADHD. Medication used to treat ADHD can cause anxiety. Careful assessment needed.
- IV. Prevention and Treatment**
 - A. Get treatment for own anxiety!
 - B. Don't over-protect your child. Less challenge isn't the answer to anxiety. More of the right challenges is the answer.
 - C. Teach sensory identification and stress reduction techniques to kids: Affirmations/positive statements, Create visualizations, Practice controlled breathing, Calming Jar, Progressive Relaxation, Yoga poses, Butterfly Hug/tapping, Problem solve with them not for them, regular bedtime routine and plenty of sleep, Vigorous physical activity, Hang out/laugh/be silly, Give them time on their own to unwind, Teach your child to talk about their feelings, Stop/Look/Listen, Sensation Body Map, Drawing Rhymes – see handout attached.
 - D. Professional Treatment: CBT, DBT, ERP, Art Therapy, Play Therapy etc. Medication is a last resort that should be considered VERY carefully. If used should be prescribed and monitored by a psychiatrist or by a psychologist in concert with a physician. My recommendation is before medication is used therapist work with parents first to recognize their children's anxiety and build tools to teach their children how to manage their anxiety.

Specifics Signs and Symptoms of Anxiety Disorder in Children

- **Excessive worry and anxiety about a variety of matters on most days for at least 6 months.**
- Overreacting to minor problems (yelling, crying, shutting down)
- Frequent self-doubt and self-critical comments.
- Inability to stop the worrying despite parental reassurance.
- Physical problems: headaches, stomach aches, fatigue, muscle tension.
- Intensification of nervous habits: nail biting, hair twisting, thumb sucking.
- Oppositional/aggressive behavior -- Irritability, increases with increased worry; biting, kicking, poor listening, acting out, impulsiveness.
- sadness, crying, whining, panic, anger
- Very low energy or very high levels of energy or restlessness.
- Sleep problems: waking up early, waking up feeling unrested, trouble falling asleep or staying asleep, nightmares
- Social isolation, poor communication.
- Frequent absence from school.
- Poor concentration
- Major change in eating habits.
- Poor coping strategies. Increased dependency/clinginess; regressing to less mature behavior. Experimentation with drugs and alcohol as a way to reduce suffering (can worsen anxiety)
- Experiencing physical arousal: racing heart, sweating palms, teeth chattering, dizziness, flushed face, trembling hands.
- Depression or thoughts of not wanting to be alive.

Thought Patterns That Lead to or Indicate Anxiety Disorder

- **Do not appropriately match the context:** "If I leave the house something bad will happen to my family."
- **All or nothing thinking:** Extremes with no middle ground. Good or Bad; Safe or Dangerous, Clean or Dirty.
- **Global negative label:** "I'm a failure."
- **Overgeneralization:** Use always or never when you describe or think about one isolated current situation. Make far reaching global conclusions based on single event.
- **Negative filter:** Focus on one isolated negative detail and selectively attend to it so interpretation of everything becomes distorted. – focus on negatives and ignore the positives/bigger picture.

- **Discount the positive:** Disqualify positive events and assume they don't count. Accomplish something you could be proud of, tell yourself it wasn't important or that anyone could do it.
- **Mind reading:** Believe you know what others are thinking and that they have negative thoughts about you without any evidence.
- **Fortune Teller:** Predict things will turn out terribly before they even start
- **Emotional reasoning:** assume your feelings affect the way things really are ignoring evidence to the contrary.
- **Should and must statements:** Expect things should be the way you want them to be and if they are not, you feel guilty. "I shouldn't have made so many mistakes."
- **Personalization:** Believe others are reacting to you without considering more likely explanations for their behavior.
- **Unfair Comparisons:** Hold unrealistically high standards and focus primarily on the few people who meet those standards always finding yourself inferior.

Tools to Teach Your Child to Connect Their Mind and Body
Taken directly out of *Trauma Proofing Your Kid* by Peter Levine and Maggie Kline

Sensation Body Map (Pg. 61):

Preschool-3rd Grade: Trace your child's entire body on a piece of butcher paper. Make a coding key matching colors/markings to emotions. (i.e., Blue=Sad, Orange squiggly lines = nervous/jittery/scared, Pink polka dots = happy, Black=numb, Red = mad/hot, Purple curvy lines=energetic, Brown=tight, Green = calm/strong). Have your child color and mark their body map where they feel different sensations and emotions. Hang the body map in their room so they can use it to identify their feelings/sensations when different things happen to them. You can use the map to help generate conversation about how they are feeling and how to manage their feelings. (Have older kids that are too big for the butcher block draw a gingerbread person or their favorite animal on a large piece of paper. Also, if a child is too young, very shy or learning-delayed can simplify the coding to include just one color for comfortable feelings and another for uncomfortable feelings.

Drawing a Scene or Story (Pg. 62):

1. Have your child make two drawings on two separate sheets of paper. One drawing depicts a fear, or whatever prevents him/her from feeling good. The other drawing shows the opposite – something that brings a feeling of comfort, hope, goodness, happiness, safety. Have your child share the feelings/sensation they experience as they talk about each drawing. Show them how they can cover the “worry” drawing with the “happy” drawing and change the way they feel. This exercise can be used to process a particular event or experience in the child's life.
2. Discuss with your child the resources they have to help themselves feel better when stressed/anxious (i.e., internal resources like inner strength, confidence, self-love; external resources like pets, grandparents, making cookies, dancing, their room, singing, playing ball, reading, drawing etc.) Then have your child draw a picture of their favorite resource and explain to you how they can use it during stressful time

Using Rhymes to Help Children Explore Their Strength and Resilience (Pg. 65):

The Magic in Me: We're going to play but before we begin, I want you to find your own magic within. Just take some time to feel and to see all the great things that your body can be. Pretend you are a tree with your branches so high that you can reach up and tickle the sky. What's it like to be strong like a big old oak tree? With roots in your feet and your leave waving free?

Pause here to let your child explore being a tree and how it feels. Then continue. Have fun!

Or you can be a river that flows clean and free, from high in the mountains right down to the sea. Your breath can flow through you, just like a river. From your head to your toes, feel yourself quiver! Now you're connected to the earth and the sky. It may make you laugh, it may make you cry. It doesn't matter when you go with the flow. Your branches up high, and your roots way down low. Hear the breath in your body, if you listen it sings. Now you are ready for whatever life brings.

Top Fifteen Boots on the Ground Parenting Tips

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1. Never do for your children what they can do for themselves. **Builds self-esteem.**
2. Allow your children to experience the natural consequences of their choices. **Builds resilience.**
3. Use positive reinforcement more than punishment to guide behavior. **Builds trust, respect and self-control.**
4. Solve problems with your children not for them. **Builds critical thinking skills and competence.**
5. Use humor whenever possible. **Builds in fun and positive connection.**
6. Let your children falter and fail. **Builds grit and a strong sense of self.**
7. Give your children a few responsibilities they do not like to do. **Builds perseverance.**
8. Set reasonable and clear boundaries and expectations. Just challenging enough so your children have to stretch but not so high they break in the process. **Builds skills for establishing priorities and following through.**
9. Always communicate to your children that they are worthy of love. **Builds self-respect.**
10. Act as you want your children to act. Do as you want your children to do. You are the most powerful and influential person in your children's lives. **Builds strength of character.**
11. Listen more and talk less. **Builds connection and understanding.**
12. Identify and communicate your family values through what you say, do and how you handle tough times. **Builds a family identity and soul.**
13. Relax. Take serious things seriously and keep a lightness of heart about the rest. **Builds skills for stress management.**
14. Have fun! Have fun! Have fun! **Builds a zest for life.**
15. Take care of yourself and your adult relationships. You are allowed to have an adult life separate from your children. **Builds fortitude and life satisfaction.**

Boots on the Ground Parenting Resources

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Books

How to Raise an Adult: Break Free of the Over-Parenting Trap and Prepare Your Kids for Success by Julie Lythcott-Haims

The Gift of Failure: How the Best Parents Learn to Let Go So Their Children Can Succeed by Jessica Lahey

How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity and the Hidden Power of Character by Paul Tough

The Blessing of a B Minus by Wendy Mogel

Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Kids Roots and Wings by Kenneth Ginsburg

How to Talk so Kids will Listen and Listen so Kids will Talk by Adele Faber & Elaine Mazlish

Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain by Daniel Siegel, M.D.

No Drama Discipline: The Whole Brain Way to Calm the Chaos and Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind by Daniel Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson, Ph.D.

Positive Discipline: The Classic Guide to Helping Children Develop Self-Discipline, Responsibility, Cooperation and Problem Solving Skills by Jane Nelson, Ed.D.

Stress Free Discipline: Simple Strategies for Handling Common Behavior Problems by Sara Au and Peter L. Stavinoha, Ph.D.

The Explosive Child: A New Approach for Understanding and Parenting Easily Frustrated, Chronically Inflexible Children

MindUp Curriculum: Brain Focused Strategies For Learning and Living by Hawn Foundation

Mindset: How We Can Learn How to Fulfill Our Potential by Carol Dweck, Ph.D.

Reefer Sanity: Seven Great Myths About Marijuana by Kevin A. Sabet, Ph.D.

Trauma Proofing Your Kids by Peter Levine and Maggie Kline

Raising Human Beings: Creating a Collaborative Partnership with Your Child by Ross W. Greene PhD

Thought Leaders

www.freerangekids.com (Giving kids freedom and independence)

www.playborhood.com and www.tinkeringschool.com (Importance of play and adventure)

www.jessicalahey.com (Letting kids do their own academic work)

www.challengesuccess.org (Reducing academic stress in schools and at home)

www.madelinelevine.com and www.wendymogel.com (Raising psychologically healthy kids)

www.danpink.com (Motivating kids)

www.christinecarter.com and www.positivityratio.com (Help kids bring happiness into life)

www.deanjulie.com (How to Raise an Adult)

www.whatkidscando.org (Voices from the next generation)

www.money-mind101.com (Financial management training for young adults)