
Helping Your Child Navigate and Cope with Anxiety

— D39 School Psychologists —
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Presentation for Parent Association of Student Services in District 39 (PASS39)

Introductions of the Psychs

Purpose of the Presentation

What is Anxiety?

- Excessive and persistent worry and fear regarding everyday situations. The worry can interfere with daily functioning (e.g., avoid places), and the thoughts can be difficult to control (pervasive;
- Fear of the unknown
 - Importance of predictability, routine and structure

Types of Anxiety

1. Generalized Anxiety Disorder
2. Separation Anxiety
3. Social Anxiety
4. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
5. Panic Disorder
6. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Honorable mention...**Adjustment Disorder**

[Symptoms and Strategies for Generalized Anxiety Disorder \(GAD\) in Children and Teens](#) (2:15)

Physical Symptoms of Anxiety

- Headache
- Stomach ache
- Rapid heart rate
- Quick breathing or difficulty catching one's breath
- Muscle aches (especially stomach and headaches)
- Shaking, dizziness, tingling
- Tense / Restless / Can't relax
- Sweating
- Fatigue
- Disrupted sleep
- "Nervous habits" examples: nail biting (onychophagia), skin picking (excoriation), hair pulling (trichotillomania)

Behavioral / Emotional Symptoms of Anxiety

- **Worries**
 - Ongoing friends, school, or activities
 - Anticipatory worry
 - Thoughts and fears about safety (of self or of others)
- **Avoidant behavior / increased withdrawal**
 - Procrastination
 - Reluctance or refusal to go to school
 - "Clingy" behavior with parents / increased adult dependence
- **Externalizing behaviors**
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Irritability
 - A need for everything to be "perfect"
 - Negative self-talk
 - Persistent hand washing

Anxiety Symptoms - Children & Teens

[Anxiety symptoms in children](#) (Dr. Robin Goodman; 4min)

How do I know if this is more anxiety than normal?

All children experience fears or discomfort. Consider the extent to which the anxiety (physical and/or emotional symptoms) **impact daily functioning**.

- School avoidance
- Nightmares and impacting sleep
- “Mom & dad, I’m not having fun anymore.”
- Anxieties and impact on functioning are persistent / are not transient. For example, the feelings last more than six months or they persist despite changes in situations or settings, e.g., anxiety in last year and this years’ classrooms.

What can I do to help my child?

If there is immediate threat or danger, call 911

What can I do to help my child?:

Preventing and Reducing Anxiety

- **Help identify triggering thoughts**
 - Decide whether their worries are rational or irrational; realistic or unrealistic
 - Even if thoughts appear irrational, they still require validation
- **Engage in flexible thinking**
 - List possible solutions
 - Practice (e.g., conversation starters, how to join a game)
- **Practice responding to anxiety-inducing situations that children are likely to encounter**
 - Identify distressing features of a situation
 - Discuss strategies that may reduce distress
- **Model adaptive ways of coping with anxiety**
 - Children learn by watching
 - Use positive self-talk, problem solve so they can hear you, use relaxation technique

What can I do to help my child?

Responding When Anxious Behaviors Occur

- **Encourage tolerance of anxiety**
 - Remain calm, patient and supportive; Show empathy and compassion; Acknowledge, listen and validate
 - Use calming strategies: progressive muscle relaxation, belly breathing, ([Instructions for relaxation activities](#))
 - Positive self-talk
 - Worry jar, journal, designated time to worry
- **Encourage children to come up with their own solutions to the problem**
 - Focus on what they know
 - Brainstorm ideas
 - Reward efforts (e.g., praise an attempt to work independently)

What can I do to help my child?

Responding to Somatic Complaints

- **Rule out any possible medical concern**
- **Connection between anxiety and physical symptoms**
 - Physical symptoms are cues from the body
 - Identify physical symptoms
- **Encourage children to self-monitor physical symptoms**
 - To identify triggers: record somatic response and what they were doing
 - Help identify patterns
- **Encourage use of coping strategies**
 - Validate physical complaint
 - Prompt the use of strategies (e.g., 4x4 breathing; muscle relaxation, Headspace)

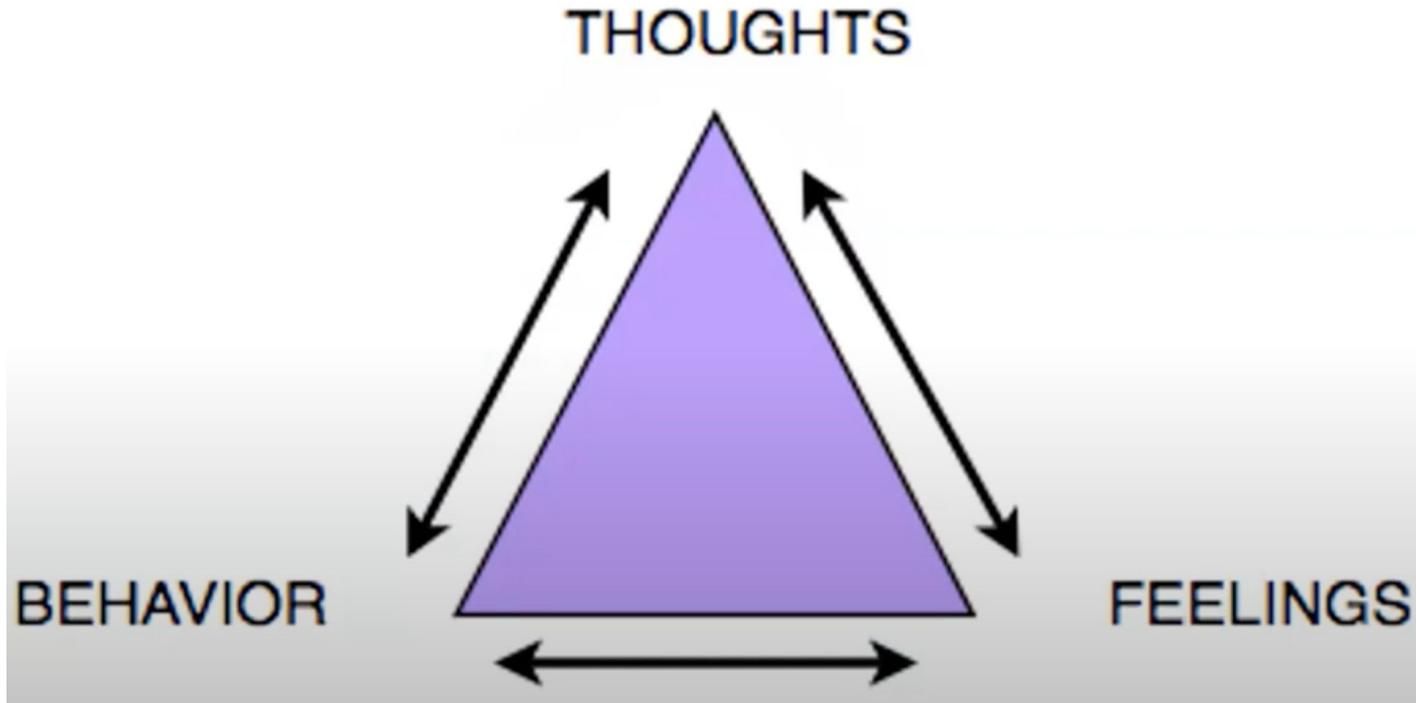
Dr. Abigail Gerwartz - *When the World Feels Like a Scary Place*

Essential Conversations for Anxious Parents & Worried Kids

- **Step 1 - Be an Emotional Coach**
 - Actively listen
 - Identify emotion / where you can feel it in your body
 - Connect it to thoughts and beliefs
 - Validate - what your child is feeling is important
- **Step 2 - Problem Solve around the emotion**
 - First thought is the worst thought
 - The feeling won't last forever
- **Step 3 - Problem solve around the problem**
 - Id and match strategy to the problem

What can I do to help my child?

Dr. Renee Dominiguez - the Cognitive Triangle



Special Topics

- **Test Anxiety**
- **COVID-19**

Test Anxiety

Test Anxiety: Why do some children struggle with anxiety around tests?

Test-anxious students tend to have a particularly low threshold for anxiety in evaluative situations in general and test situations in particular.

- It's about the evaluation and not the test.
 - Anxiety evoked when students believe their intellectual, motivational, and social capabilities and capacities are taxed or exceeded by demands stemming from the test situation.
 - The evaluation session (i.e., testing session) is seen as a threatening event.
- Worry is the cognitive aspect of test anxiety and is responsible for depressing test performance in students with high test anxiety. **Students with elevated worry approach testing situations with an expectation of negative evaluation or failure rather than an expectation of success.**

Test Anxiety Student Traits

Test anxiety is most commonly seen in students who are:

- Female
- African American or Hispanic
- Are generally anxious
- Have average ability
- Have poor study skills
- Have low self-esteem
- Perceive that a test will be hard
- Have just moved to District 39
- Have teachers who are anxious about testing

Cycle of Test Anxiety

- Student enters the evaluation (test) session and sees it as a threatening event.
- Anxiety associated with the threatening event often lowers test performance.
- Poor test performance confirms student's perspective that the evaluation session is a threat.
- Feelings of the evaluation session as a threatening event are reinforced.
- Test anxiety grows stronger.

*Research shows that higher achievement scores are earned by students with lower test anxiety.

BEFORE a Test

Students can reduce test anxiety by:

- Learning and practicing test taking skills.
- Getting as much information about the upcoming test as possible.
 - Test length, time limit, penalty for guessing, location
- Becoming comfortable with any equipment to be used during the test.
 - NWEA MAP test tools, calculator, computer, word processing tools
- Learning to recognize symptoms of test anxiety (e.g. unsettled stomach, poor sleep in day(s) before test)
- Thinking positive thoughts or anticipating a positive outcome.

DURING the Test

Students can reduce test anxiety by:

- Skimming the test first
- Build confidence by answering easiest questions first
- Keeping track of time limits and pacing accordingly
- Using relaxation techniques
 - pauses, relaxation breathing, muscle stretching, neck rolls
- Using learned calming strategies
 - deep breathing (Belly Breathing), recalling peaceful memories, alternating tensing and relaxing muscles
- Using positive self-talk

Self-Talk Tip

- **Avoid "must" talk**

"I want to do well" rather than "I must do well"

Example: *"There is a good chance I may do well. Even if I don't, it doesn't mean I'm stupid. I can just try harder next time."*

- For younger students in particular, help them **grasp the bigger picture to alleviate irrational unrealistic fears (catastrophizing).**

Example: *"Suppose that you don't do well, what would be the worst thing that would result from that?"*

Therapeutic Interventions for Test Anxiety

- Behavioral interventions/strategies to treat **emotionality** surrounding testing event
 - Examples: Relaxation techniques, covert positive reinforcement
- Cognitive interventions/strategies to treat **worry**, i.e., modify thought patterns, surrounding testing event
 - Research indicates this is less effective in reducing test anxiety.
- Cognitive/Behavioral interventions/strategies to treat the combination of **emotionality and worry**.
 - Examples: anxiety management training, cognitive modification, stress management.
 - Research indicates this combination of interventions is effective at reducing test anxiety.

COVID-19

[How to talk to and support your child during Covid-19 pandemic](#) (7 min)

In this video, Dr. Amanda Heins, the supervising psychologist at Rogers Behavioral Health's OCD and Anxiety Center Adolescent Residential Care in Oconomowoc, WI, gives tips on how you can help school-aged kids during the COVID-19 crisis.

[Helping your child with Coronavirus stress](#) (4min)

In this video, Jenna Schaefer, MS-LPC-II lists six tips for helping your child cope with Covid-19 stress.

[Stress Management During the Covid-19 Crisis](#)

In this webinar, Dr. Renee Dominiguez of Wilmette's Family Service Center discusses strategies for maintaining resilient families during times of social distancing.

Online Resources

- **Anxiety and Depression Association of America** provides tips for parents and caregivers on how to help youth manage their anxiety, as well as a directory of licensed mental health professionals who specialize in treating anxiety disorders. <https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/children/tips-parents-and-caregivers>
- **Child Mind Institute's** website provides psychoeducational information about anxiety and several resources for addressing children's anxiety at home and at school. <https://childmind.org/topics/concerns/anxiety/>
- **Psychology Today** offers 12 Tips to Reduce Your Child's Stress and Anxiety, has advice for parents and caregivers to reduce their children's anxiety and stress. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/dont-worry-mom/201302/12-tips-reduce-your-childs-stress-and-anxiety>

Online Resources (con't)

The following resources have been utilized and/or referred to District social workers and school psychologists

- The Child Anxiety Network www.childanxiety.net
- WorryWise Kids www.worrywisekids.org
- Temple University's Child and Adolescent Anxiety Disorders Clinic www.childanxiety.org
- UCLA Childhood OCD, Anxiety, and Tic Disorders Program <https://www.semel.ucla.edu/catp/>
- NYU Langone Health's Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry www.aboutourkids.org
- Anxiety Disorders Association of America www.adaa.org
- The Center for Mental Health Services: www.mentalhealth.org
- American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry www.aacap.org
- National Association of School Psychology <https://www.nasponline.org>

Video and App Resources

[This Test Does Not Define You \(addresses standardized testing\)](#)

[Anxiety Disorders in Children and Teens](#)

[FAN Presentation - When the World Feels like a Scary Place - Essential Conversations for Anxious Parents and Worried Kids](#)

[Khan Academy Guided Meditation to Help With Test Anxiety](#)

[Headspace](#) - [meditation app](#)

[Headspace](#) - [Netflix series](#)

[Calm](#) - sleep and meditation app

Dr. John Duffy - *Parenting in the New Age of Anxiety*

What I didn't know 10 years ago...

- Vaping
- Drug crisis
- Access to technology and lots of information
- Knowledge of mental health issues
- Social media/social stress

So...we need to be more than just “available” to our kids

FAN Presentation 1/16/2020

Books for Parents

- Gerwitz, Abigail (2020). ***When the World Feels Like a Scary Place: Essential Conversations for Anxious Parents & Worried Kids***. Workman Publications, New York
- Anthony, M. & Swinson, R. (2009). ***When perfect isn't good enough: Strategies for coping with perfectionism***. New Harbinger Publications, Oakland
- Damour, Lisa (2019). ***Under Pressure: Confronting the Epidemic of Stress and Anxiety in Girls***. Ballantine Books, New York
- Chansky, T. E. (2014). ***Freeing your child from anxiety: Powerful, practical solutions to overcome your child's fears, worries, and phobias***. Harmony.
- Chansky, T. E. (2020). ***Freeing your child from negative thinking: Powerful, practical strategies to build a lifetime of resilience, flexibility, and happiness***. Da Capo.
- Dacey, J. S., Mack, M. & Fiore, L. B. (2016). ***Your anxious child: How parents and teachers can relieve anxiety in children***. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hawn, G., & Holden, W. (2011). ***10 Mindful minutes: Giving our children--and ourselves--the social and emotional skills to reduce stress and anxiety***. Perigee.
- Manassis, K. (2015). ***Keys to parenting your anxious child***. Barron's Educational Series, Inc.
- Rapee, R. M., Spence, S., et al. (2008). ***Helping your anxious child: A step-by-step guide for parents***. New Harbinger.
- Spencer, E. D., DuPont, R., & DuPont, C. (2014). ***The anxiety cure for kids: A guide for parents and children***. Wiley.
- Zucker, B. (2016). ***Anxiety-free kids: An interactive guide for parents and children***. Prufrock Press Inc.

Books for Students

- Acres, D. (1998). **Passing exams without anxiety: How to get organized, be prepared, and confident of success.** Trans-Atlantic Publications.
- Crist, J. (2004). **What to do when you are scared and worried: A guide for kids.** Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.
- Hipp, E. (2019). **Fighting invisible tigers: A stress management guide for teens.** Free Spirit Publishing Inc., Minneapolis.
- Huebner, D. & Matthews, B. (2005). **What to do when you worry too much: A kid's guide to overcoming anxiety** (What to do guide for kids). Magination Press.
- Huebner, D. & Matthews, B. (2007). **What to do when your brain gets stuck: A kid's guide to overcoming OCD.** Magination Press.
- Schab, L. (2008). **The anxiety workbook for teens: Activities to help you deal with anxiety and worry.** New Harbinger Publications.
- Stallard, P. (2019). **Think good-feel good: A cognitive-behavioral workbook for children.** Wiley.
- Buron, K.D. (2013). **When my worries get too big!: A relaxation book for children who live with anxiety.** AAPC Publishing.

Questions?