COPING WITH ANXIETY - HELPING YOUR CHILDREN BE MORE RESILIENT

Presented by: Steve Gallas, School Psychologist and Stephanie Gallas, School Social Worker
AGENDA

IDENTIFICATION

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

PREVENTION AND COPING
IDENTIFICATION:
- What is anxiety?
  - A Normal reaction to stress
- Anxiety vs Anxiety Disorder
- Normal reaction to stress
- Can be good/bad
- Harmful when excessive
SOME SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

- Heart pounding
- Sweating, cold, clammy hands
- Tension, dizziness, feeling faint
- Disturbed sleep
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Difficulty breathing
- Hypervigilance
HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH?

- Feeling anxious for no reason
- A matter of degree
- Worry about everyday events
- Constantly checking to see if you are correct (obsessing)
- Feeling of panic
CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

- NERVOUSNESS MAY BE INBORN
- NERVOUSNESS MAY BE LEARNED
- SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE AND BELONGING
- FAMILY- CONFLICT WITH SIBLINGS, FRICITION WITH OR BETWEEN PARENTS, FEELING OF LETTING PARENTS DOWN, EXPECTATIONS FOR PERFORMANCE AND NEED FOR APPROVAL
- SLINGS AND ARROWS OF OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE - LOST OF INCOME, HOUSE FIRE, DEATH
- TRANSITIONS - MIDDLE TO HIGH, LEAVING HOME (somatic complaints)
- ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE
- SCHOOL REFUSAL
ACTIVITY: FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS
What is Test Anxiety?

Uneasiness, nervousness and/or apprehension felt before, during, or after a test or evaluative situation that significantly interferes with performance, emotional and behavioral well-being
A Culture of Testing

- Tests, tests, tests everywhere
- High stakes
- High pressure
- Ubiquitous, inescapable
- Necessary in real life situations
Role of Test Anxiety

Facilitating
- Appraisal as challenge
- Motivation
- Effort and preparation
- Problem-solving
- Coping skills
- Mastery and control

Debilitating
- Appraisal of threat
- Excessive preparation
- Outcome overly important
- Constant preoccupation
- Impaired performance
# Levels of Anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Optimal</th>
<th>High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Insufficient preparation</td>
<td>• Productive energy</td>
<td>• Excessive preparation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Not important</td>
<td>• Test important</td>
<td>• Tests very important</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>• Preoccupation</td>
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Vicious Cycle of Test Anxiety

1. Perception of tests as difficult, threat
2. Perception of self as unable to handle threat
3. Preoccupation with consequences
4. Poor performance confirms perceptions
5. Increased arousal distress
6. Distraction lowers performance
7. Approach next test with greater expectation of threat and failure
Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

- Fear becomes reality simply by one's behavior
- Feared outcome is triggered by the person's response
- Applies to thoughts, actions, interpersonal situations
How Common is Test Anxiety?

- Range from 1% to over 40%
- Different definitions
- Midpoint about 20%
- 4-5 students in a class of 25
Age & Gender Differences in Test Anxiety

- Test anxiety scores rise in grades 3 to 5
- Rise to high point in junior high
- Level off in high school
- Slight decline in college
- Gender differences start in 3rd-4th grades
- Females consistently higher levels of test anxiety
Effects of Test Anxiety on Students

- High level of stress
- Negative attitude toward tests
- Lower academic motivation & effort
- Negative attitude toward self
- Potential for unethical test behavior
Test Anxiety & Achievement

- Negative effect on achievement
- Correlation increases with grade level
- Low ability related to higher test anxiety
- Not all high test anxiety students perform poorly
Study Skills: Knowing **What** to Study

- Study Guides
- Cooperative Learning Techniques
- Provide clear expectations about what to study
- Use educational games and simulated tests to review test content, questions, and conditions

-Salend, 2011
Study Skills: Knowing **How** to Study

- Create a study schedule
- Test oneself at home
- Use mnemonic devices
- Study in a place without distractions
- Flash cards

-Sawka-Miller, 2014
Effective Test-Taking Skills
- Sawka-Miller, 2014

- Goal: Stay relaxed, focused, and motivated
  - Pay no attention to what others are doing

- Memory dump
  - Every time students study; as well as on test

- Work on easier items first to build confidence
  - 4 times: Answer questions you know cold; answer those you didn’t immediately remember, but now do; make educated guesses on rest; one more time for clerical errors

- Budget your time

- Highlight key directions
SCHOOL REFUSAL

- A NORMALLY ANXIETY PRODUCING EVENT BECOMES LARGER THAN LIFE OR CAN BE TRIGGERED BY:

- AN EVENT UNRELATED TO SCHOOL
  - Changing relationship with parent
  - Illness of parent or student
  - Divorce or separation
  - Relocation
  - Death of a loved one (family or pet)
AN EVENT RELATED TO SCHOOL:

- Performance on tests or schoolwork
- Safety concerns - gangs and bullies
- SOLs and high stakes tests
- Change in teacher
- Change in schools or grade level
- Relationship with teacher
- Peer relationships and boyfriend/girlfriend
SEPARATION IS OFTEN WHAT IS BEHIND SCHOOL REFUSAL BECAUSE THEY ARE CONCERNED THAT SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN AT SCHOOL OR SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN AT HOME WHILE THEY ARE AT SCHOOL.

SOMETIMES THIS GIVES THE CHILD A SENSE THAT THEY CAN GIVE THEIR PARENTS A CAUSE TO RALLY AROUND TO BRING THEM TOGETHER IN A UNITED FRONT.
BREAK
ACTIVITY

REFLECTION ON LIVED EXPERIENCE OF ANXIETY AND SUCCESSFUL COPING.
BUILDING ON THE RELATIONSHIP - THE BIG PICTURE (SAFETY, PREDICTABILITY, SECURITY)

- FLOOR TIME
- LITTLE ONES
- TEENS
WHAT TO DO ???

- Listen carefully without feeling compelled to talk
- Help trace anxiety to specific situations
- Review or remind of previous situations and successes
- Praise when they take part in the feared activity - but don’t overdo!
- Stop reassuring your child - it's hard for a child to hear the logical side of the brain (he wants to listen but his brain won’t let him)
- 3 steps - freeze, empathize, and evaluate
- Highlight why worrying is good (they don’t need to feel something is wrong with them)
GO FROM “WHAT IF” TO “WHAT IS” (BRING THEM BACK TO THE PRESENT NOT TIME TRIP INTO FUTURE.

TEACH THEM TO THINK ACCURATELY - THE 3 Cs.
- CATCH THE THOUGHT (PUT IT IN A BUBBLE ABOVE HEAD)
- COLLECT EVIDENCE - (CHECK EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT OR NEGATE THOUGHT)
- CHALLENGE THEIR THOUGHTS
10 DO’S AND DON’T’S

1. The goal isn’t to eliminate anxiety, but to help a child manage it
2. Don’t avoid things just because they make a child anxious
3. Express positive - but realistic- expectations
4. Respect his or her feeling, but don’t give them too much power
5. Don’t ask leading questions
6. Don’t reinforce the child’s fears
7. Encourage the child to tolerate the anxiety
8. Try to keep the anticipatory period short.
9. Think things through with the child
10. Try to model healthy ways of handling anxiety
Cognitive Behavioral Approach

1) Identify and label feelings and thoughts
2) Identify worry thoughts, feared consequences
3) Replace worry thoughts with realistic thoughts and calming self-talk
4) Evaluate situation after completion

Wagner, 2005a
Feelings Thermometer

Full Panic
High Anxiety
Anxious / Agitated
Minor fears / Worry
Calm
Total Relaxation

http://www.chariscounselling.net/
Replace worry thoughts with realistic thoughts and calming self-talk

- Realistic Thinking:
  - What am I worried about?
  - What are the chances that it will happen?
  - What proof do I have that it will happen?
  - What else could happen?
  - So what if it happens?
  - Can I be absolutely sure it won’t happen?
  - How could I handle it if it happened?
Replace worry thoughts with realistic thoughts and calming self-talk

- Calming Self-Talk
  - I’m nervous, but I can handle it.
  - I think I’ll do okay.
  - It’s a fair test.
  - I just have to concentrate and I’ll do fine.
  - I know this information.
  - I’m having trouble with some questions, but I’m doing well on others.
Evaluate situation afterwards

- How would I rate the level of anxiety during the event?
- What positive self-talk did I use that helped me?
- What relaxation or calming strategies did I use that helped me?
- Were there times I let the anxiety get the best of me?
- What could I do next time to have even less anxiety?
NEXT STEP

- INDIVIDUAL OR FAMILY THERAPY
- MEDICATION
- COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY
- BIOFEEDBACK
- RELAXATION - BREATHING TECHNIQUES
Use Relaxation Strategies

- Taking voluntary control over involuntary tension
- Deep breathing
- Visual imagery
- Muscle relaxation
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Involves systematically tensing and relaxing different muscle groups through the body one at a time
- Often combined with diaphragmatic breathing
- Use scripts (age appropriate)
- Teens may prefer to do this on their own
- Could audiotape script for them
- Full session - 10 to 20 minutes

Miller and Miller (2014)
Thanks for coming!!
Questions?

Comments?
Presentation Sources