



Anxiety in Children
What it is and What we can Do
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Understanding Anxiety = The response to perceived danger

Our senses pick up a danger signal, alerting the thalamus and the amygdala. The body releases hormones preparing the body to:

- Fight
- Flee
- Freeze

Cognitive Impact: Blood moves to the primitive areas of the brain, leaving the frontal lobes unable to function properly, resulting in:

- inability to concentrate
- indecisiveness
- memory loss
- increased number of mistakes
- difficulty doing things usually found easy

After the 'danger' passes

- *When the danger is past, the body can return to a relaxed state, but the memory of the danger (neural pathway) will remain (fear and anger)*
- *Related situations can trigger the fight, flee or freeze response*
- *Imagining future events where danger may occur triggers these responses*



The False Alarm

- *Anxiety becomes a problem when one's body reacts as if in danger in the absence of real danger. This creates a "false alarm" (the body does not know the difference)*
- *Chronic anxiety can result when the nervous system is consistently triggered or never completely resets*
- *Anxiety can be managed successfully by learning how to temper this "false alarm"*

Key to remember:

Children who are prone to anxiety are often sensitive, intelligent and imaginative... all positive traits!!

Anxiety is very treatable!!

How do you see the anxiety show up?

- Avoidant behaviour but can also be oppositional behaviour!

Anxiety Disorders

When the level of anxiety and/or physical symptoms impair functioning (school, home and/or social) and/or cause clinically significant distress.

Multiple and complex origins:

- Genetics
- Brain biochemistry
- Overactive fight/flee/freeze response
- Learned behaviour
- Stressful circumstances/environments
- Trauma
- Our non-stop wired, buzzing world!

Physical causes need to be considered and ruled out!

The “Don’t Do’s”:

Do Not:

- Focus on the content of the worry
- Excessively respond to your child's anxiousness and excessive reassurance-seeking
- Punish anxious behaviour
- Encourage avoidance
- Minimize or invalidate the child's anxiety
- Try to reason or problem-solve while a child is in a heightened state of anxiety



Helpful Strategies: Educate!

- Anxiety is normal and adaptive and everyone gets anxious
- Teach about the brain
- Teach helpful practical strategies
- Attend to health basics- sleeping, eating, and exercise!
- Normalize that worry happens
- Note the Self Talk
 - Global, Catastrophizing, Permanent?
 - Instead, challenge the worry!
 - Is this a signal or noise?
- Go on offense!
 - Be uncomfortable on purpose!
 - “Fake it ‘til you make it”!
- **Foster a growth mindset versus fixed mindset**
- Exposure! Taming the worry monster
- Aim for Goals “Progress not perfection”
 - Have KIDS practice problem solving
- Breathe!
 - Mindfulness, yoga, playful movement

When to Refer: Helpful Resources

*Lynn Lyons: www.lynnlyonsnh.com

*AnxietyBC: www.anxietybc.com

*Teen Mental Health: <http://teenmentalhealth.org>

*Community Education Service: <http://community.hmhc.ca>

*Carol Dweck Growth mindset info: <http://mindsetonline.com/>

*Infographic Comparing Growth Mindset versus Fixed Mindset:
<https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/01/29/carol-dweck-mindset>

*Cheng, Mi. (2009). Overcoming anxiety: A guide for families.
www.drcheng.ca/resources/Articles/anxiety_info_for_families.doc