

Child Anxiety: What Can Parents Do?

Dr. Jessica Howland
Director of Special Services

Petria Funes
School Psychologist

Childhood Anxiety Disorders

Among the most common type of psychopathology (Affrunti & Ginsburg, 2012)

Prevalence rate of about 5%
(Muris, et al, 2010)

25.1 % of 13-18 year olds suffer from an anxiety disorder (Weersing VR et al., 2017)

Doesn't necessarily remain stable over time (Laurin, Joussemet, Tremblay & Boivin, 2015)

Be Aware of the Age of Onset...

Social Anxiety Disorder	Specific Phobias	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	Generalized Anxiety Disorder	Panic Disorder
13 years	7 years	14 years	Greatest risk between childhood and middle age	Not as common in children; typical onset in adulthood (20 years)

The experience

Parents: How do you think your children feel when they are experiencing anxiety?



Physical Symptoms

Physical

- Stomach discomfort
- Warm/hot feeling
- Dizziness
- Rapid heart rate
 - “Strange feeling in chest”
- Flushing of the skin
- *Perspiration*
- Headaches
- Muscle tension
- Sleeping problems
- Nausea
- *Shortness of breath*
- *Trembling*

(Huberty, 2010)

“Fight-fright-freeze”

Older children (around 13) are more likely to associate sweating, feeling warm and an unpleasant feeling in the head as related to anxiety (notice-less severe feelings in general)

Children as young as 7 can reliably understand their physical symptoms and link them to their anxiety; some as young as 4

(Muris, Mayer, Freher, Duncan & van den Hout, 2010).

These physical symptoms can then be interpreted as a “catastrophic” physical occurrence, making the child’s anxiety intensify.



Retrieved from
<http://operationmeditation.com/discover/what-you-should-know-about-anxiety-attack-cures/>

“Feeling nauseous” can range from non-anxiety producing “prefer to stay home”, to the belief there is an external threat such as, “eaten something wrong” to an internal threat such as, “going to throw up”.

Dizziness -> Too many spins? Fell down? Afraid of fainting?

Unpleasant feeling in the head -> Too many choices? Afraid someone is going to laugh at me? Something is very wrong inside my head?

(Muris, Mayer, Freher, Duncan & van den Hout, 2010).

Behavioral Symptoms



Shutterstock. [Anxious child] Retrieved from:
<http://www.spring.org.uk/2015/10/stop-children-catching-your-anxiety-before-its-too-late.php>

Behavioral

- ***Restlessness***
- ***Fidgeting***
- ***Task avoidance***
- ***Rapid speech***
- ***Irritability***
- ***Withdrawal***
- ***Perfectionism***
- ***Lack of participation***
- ***Failing to complete tasks***
- ***Seeking easy tasks***

(Muris, Mayer, Freher, Duncan & van den Hout, 2010).

Thinking/Learning Symptoms



[Anxious male] Retrieved from:
<https://www.ldatschool.ca/strategies-to-support-students-with-learning-disabilities-who-experience-anxiety/>



[Anxious Female] Retrieved from:
<http://livelymindstutoring.com/2017/04/22/how-to-conquer-test-anxiety/>

Thinking/Learning

- ***Concentration problems***
- ***Memory problems***
- ***Attention Problems***
- ***Problem-solving difficulties***
- ***Worry***

(Muris, Mayer, Freher, Duncan & van den Hout, 2010).

It is all in the interpretation

Younger children (under 7) are less likely to interpret anxiety as stemming from an internal factor (Muris, et al, 2010).

External signals have been found to cause anxiety more often in younger children (Affrunti & Ginsburg, 2012).

Why?

Risk factors for developing anxiety as a child include:

- Child's sex (girls are at a higher risk)
- Child's early aversion to new experiences
- Family environment (low family support, inter-parental conflict especially before the age of 5, poverty, maternal depression)
- Children of parents with anxiety
- Child-rearing practices, particularly controlling practices, are the **most** impactful
- "...controlling parenting are the strongest and most consistent...predictors of childhood anxiety" (p. 3280)

Controlling parenting

- Over-control (excessive parental regulation of activities and routines)
- Over-involvement (interference with autonomy; boundary problems)
- Autonomy thwarting (parent deters child's opinions, choices, or input)

“It is important to differentiate controlling parenting from structure.” (Laurin, Joussemet,

Tremblay & Boivin, 2015)

Controlling parenting

Defined as: practices that put pressure, are intrusive or are domineering on children.

- Power assertion
- Intrusion
- Internal control: guilt, shame, overprotection, appeals to the feelings of anxiety
- External control: threats of punishment, coercive practices, invokes feelings of anxiety

Structure

- Emphasizes outcomes due to actions
- Clear and consistent guidelines
- Predictable consequences
- Clear feedback

What does it look like? Examples:

Coercion:

- Telling your child they are bad/not good
- Punishment depends on parent mood
- Corporal punishment

Over-protection:

- Assuring the child remains near the parent
- Not letting others watch the child

Over-permissive:

- Letting the child pass on something that the parent should have punished them for
- Not firmly implementing the punishment

Structure:

- Discussing problems calmly with child
- Removing privileges for a continued behavior
- Discussing alternate ways of behaving
- Ensuring a child executes a desired behavior

How to help your child

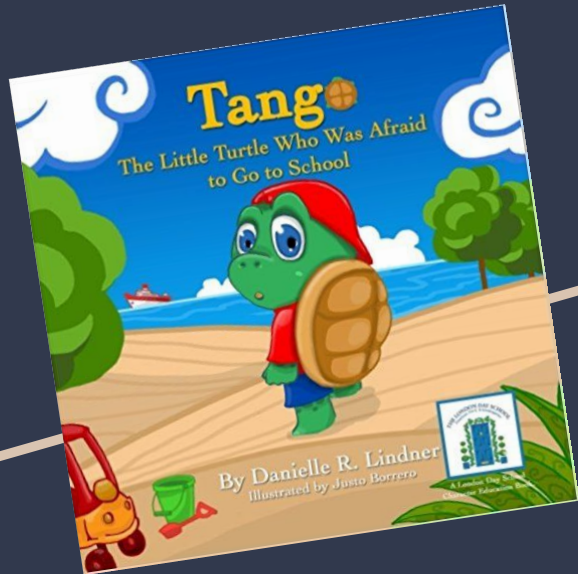
- Be consistent in how you handle problems and administer discipline.
- Be patient and be prepared to listen.
- Avoid being overly critical, disparaging, impatient, or cynical.
- Maintain realistic, attainable goals and expectations for your child.
- Do not communicate that perfection is expected or acceptable.
- Accept that mistakes are a normal part of growing up and that no one is expected to do everything equally well.

- Teach your child simple strategies to help with anxiety, such as organizing materials and time, developing small scripts of what to do and say to himself or herself when anxiety increases, and learning how to relax under stressful conditions.
- Do not treat feelings, questions, and statements about feeling anxious as silly or unimportant.
- Often, reasoning is not effective in reducing anxiety. Do not criticize your child for not being able to respond to rational approaches.
- Seek outside help if the problem persists and continues to interfere with daily activities.
- Praise and reinforce effort, even if success is less than expected. Practice and rehearse upcoming events, such as giving a speech or other performance.

Coping skills are *not*
innate; they are taught.

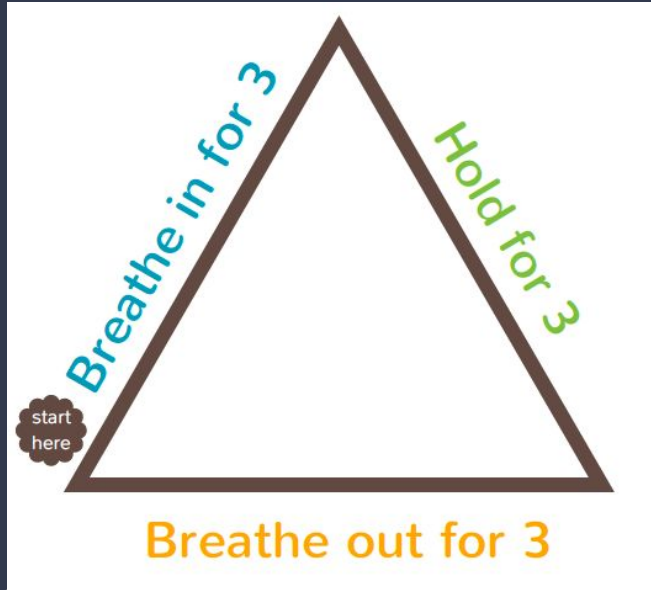
...they must
be practiced

Simple Coping Skills for Preschool Age



- Blowing bubbles, breathing activity
- Provide a safe place for breaks
- Read books about feelings and how to deal with them
- Validate their feelings
- Counting breaths
 - Count each breath, up to 10, or their ability
 - Will automatically slow their breathing

Simple Coping Skills for Elementary Age



<https://copingskillsforkids.com/blog/using-shapes-to-teach-deep-breathing>

- Deep Breathing
- Books about feelings
- Grounding
 - 5 things you can see
 - 4 things you can touch
 - 3 things you can hear
 - 2 things you can smell
 - 1 thing you can taste
- Visualization
 - Imagine a happy place
- Distraction
 - Read a book
 - Take a walk
 - Draw a picture
 - Mandalas
- Fidget/calming tool
 - Squishy ball
 - Sand (kinetic sand)
 - Stress ball
- Practice mindfulness



Coping Skills for Teenagers



- Deep breathing
- Visualization
- Grounding (see previous slide)
- Yoga/Meditation
- Practice Mindfulness
- Practice positive self-talk
 - “I can do this”
- Distraction
- Exercise
- Support Groups
- Get enough sleep
 - 8-10 hours (National Sleep Foundation, 2018)
- Challenge negative thoughts
- Stop! Break the thought cycle
- Adult coloring books (Mandalas)
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
 - Tense each part of your body, starting from your toes, and release one at a time, continue throughout body

Mindfulness

“A mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique”

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/mindfulness?s=t>

“If you want to conquer the anxiety of life, live in the moment, live in the breath.”

Amit Ray

<https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/mindfulness-quotes/>



Resources/Additional Recommendations

- National Association of School Psychologists
- GoNoodle.com
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America:
 - <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety>
- 37 Techniques to Calm and Anxious Child:
 - <https://blogs.psychcentral.com/stress-better/2016/07/37-techniques-to-calm-an-anxious-child/>

Thank You

“Be where you are,
otherwise you will
miss your life.”

Buddha



Works Cited

- Affrunti, N.W. & Ginsburg, G.S. (2012) Maternal Overcontrol and Child Anxiety: The Mediating Role of Perceived Competence. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development* (43) pp. 102-112.
- Affrunti, N.W. & Ginsburg, G.S. (2012) Exploring Parental Predictors of Child Anxiety: The Mediating Role of Child Interpretation Bias. *Child Youth Care Forum* (41) pp. 517-527.
- Chalfant, A.M., Rapee, R., & Carroll, L. (2007). Treating Anxiety Disorders in Children with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Controlled Trial. *Journal of Autism Developmental Disorders* (37) pp. 1842-1857.
- Laurin, J.C., Joussemet, M., Tremblay, R.E., & Boivin, M. (2015) Early Forms of Controlling Parenting and the Development of Childhood Anxiety. *Journal of Children and Family Studies* (24) pp. 3279-3292.
- Muris, P., Mayer, B., Freher, N.K., Duncan, S., & van den Hout, A. (2010) Children's Internal Attributions of Anxiety-Related Physical Symptoms: Age-Related Patterns and the Role of Cognitive Development and Anxiety Sensitivity. *Child Psychiatry and Human Development* (41) pp. 535-548.
- Pereira, A. I., Barros, L., Mendonca, D., & Muris, P. (2014) The Relationships Among Parental Anxiety, Parenting, and Children's Anxiety: The Mediating Effects of Children's Cognitive Vulnerabilities. *Journal of Children and Family Studies* (23) pp. 399-409.

Huberty, Thomas J. (2010). *Anxiety and anxiety disorders in children: information for parents*. Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists. Retrieved from <http://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/mental-health/mental-health-disorders/anxiety-and-anxiety-disorders-in-children-information-for-parents>

National Sleep Foundation (2018). Retrieved from: <https://sleepfoundation.org/how-sleep-works/how-much-sleep-do-we-really-need/page/0/2>

Untitled image of anxious male student. [Online image] Retrieved January 29, 2018 from <https://www.ldatschool.ca/strategies-to-support-students-with-learning-disabilities-who-experience-anxiety/>

Untitled image of anxious female student. [Online image] Retrieved January 29, 2018 from <http://livelymindstutoring.com/2017/04/22/how-to-conquer-test-anxiety/>

Coping Skills for Kids. Triangle breath image. [Online image]. Retrieved January 29, 2018 from <https://copingskillsforkids.com/blog/using-shapes-to-teach-deep-breathing>

Goodluz. Shutterstock. Retrieved January 29, 2018 from <http://www.spring.org.uk/2015/10/stop-children-catching-your-anxiety-before-its-too-late.php>

Greenon, J. (2008). Complementary Health Practice Review 14(8). Mindfulness research update: 2008 Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1533210108329862>

Amit Ray quote [Online image] Retrieved January 30, 2018 from <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/mindfulness-quotes/>

Buddah quote [Online image] Retrieved January 30, 2018 from <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/mindfulness-quotes/>

Anxiety and Depression Association of America. (2010-2016). Facts and statistics. Retrieved from <https://adaa.org/about-adaa/press-room/facts-statistics>

Operation Meditation. [Online image]. Retrieved January 30, 2018 from <http://operationmeditation.com/discover/what-you-should-know-about-anxiety-attack-cures/>