



Anxiety in Children: How to “COPE”

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Introduction



- ❖ Call it “***PRESSURE***”
- ❖ Call it “***EXPECTATIONS***”
- ❖ Whatever it’s called the end result is the same, “***STRESS***”



Stress



- ❖ Begins the first moment we are born.
- ❖ Not automatically a bad thing.
- ❖ Being stressed or “challenged” makes you learn new things and promotes brain functioning.
- ❖ In all the major theories of learning, there is stress.
- ❖ The amount of stress that children today are faced with can be overwhelming.



What Stress?



❖ Examples of childhood stressors:

- Poor family dynamics
- Change in home environment
- Lack of basic needs (safety, food, shelter, etc.)
- Loss or grief related to death or divorce
- Academic pressures
- Being over scheduled/Lack of down time
- Fear of unknown or constant change
- Lack of classroom structure
- Lack of discipline or unfair discipline
- Risk of bullying by peers



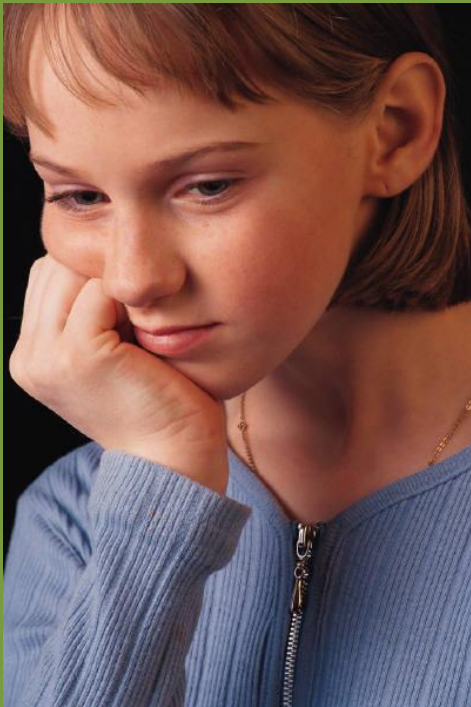
The Effects of Stress



- ❖ Childhood stress and worry can make simple everyday activities like coming to school ***DIFFICULT***.
- ❖ Too much stress causes children to get immobilized and can interfere with their development.



Secondary Emotions



- ❖ Many times children react to childhood stress by thinking, feeling, and behaving in a secondary manner.
- ❖ These emotions are often due to a need to protect oneself from or cover up other vulnerable feelings.



(D) Anger



ANGER

is only one letter short of



Definition



❖ Anger is a normal emotion with a wide range of intensity, from mild irritation and frustration to rage

- (www.pbs.org)

❖ Anger is a “warning bell” that tells us that something is wrong.



Healthy vs. Unhealthy



Anger can provide good opportunities in a child's life for learning self control and forgiveness.

However, repeated episodes of sustained and explosive anger can signal the need for professional intervention.



Anxiety

A state of apprehension, uncertainty, and fear resulting from the anticipation of a realistic or fantasized threatening event or situation, often impairing physical and psychological functioning.

- (dictionary.search.yahoo.com)



Prevalence

1 in 8 children
are affected by
anxiety.

(National Institute of Mental Health)



Anxiety disorders
are the most
common disorder to
occur in childhood
and adolescence.

(SAMHSA, 2008)



Contributing Factors



❖ Biology

❖ Cognitive-emotional influences

❖ Chronic stress



Reactions



❖ Physiological

- Dry mouth, rapid heart rate and breathing, sweating, muscle tension, and hot flashes or chills

❖ Behavioral

- Inability to cope, school refusal or poor school attendance, lower academic performance, somatic complaints, anger, irritability, and social withdrawal

❖ Psychological

- Fear of losing control, uneasiness, and apprehension



Effects

Children who are enabled and provided decreased opportunities for independence experience higher levels of anxiety and demonstrate less coping skills.

High anxiety negatively effects memory, focus, sleep, eating patterns, and overall physical health.



Presenting Problems



- ❖ Many children arrive to school stressed, angry, or anxious or become that way throughout their day.
- ❖ It can become difficult to determine the source of the emotion or behavior.
- ❖ Can be disruptive to academic learning.



Emotional Intelligence



- ❖ Parents, teachers, counselors, and adults in general can learn strategies to teach children emotional intelligence.
- ❖ These strategies begin with validating the child's feelings and then teaching them ...

Coping Skills



What Are Coping Skills?

C - Create

O - Opportunities

P - Personal

E - Empowerment



Empowerment vs. Enabling

Empowerment

The process of encouraging or authorizing an individual to think, behave, take action, and control work and decision making in autonomous ways.

Enabling

The process of taking responsibility, blame, or making accommodations for another person's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors (often with the best of intentions).



Teaching Methods



- ❖ The primary way *anything* is taught is through modeling and then by allowing for and encouraging practice and application of the new skill.



Modeling How to “COPE”



- Teach through storytelling
- Label feelings
- Communicate calmly
- Validation
- Reflective listening
- Provide safe environment
- Offer challenges and risks
- Express belief in their ability to handle the situation
- Encourage problem solving
- Praise their efforts and results
- Promote positive self-talk
- Let go of “control”



Tools for Reducing Stress



- Books
- Stress Balls
- Music
- Journaling & Drawing
- Sensory Tables
- Physical Activity
- Visualization & Imagination Activities
- Deep Breathing & Relaxation Exercises
- Teach Organizational & Time Management Skills
- Free Time



Asking for Help



- ❖ Sometimes even with our best efforts, there comes a time to ask for additional help.
- ❖ A mental health evaluation of the child and/or family system may be necessary to assess the need for therapy services and/or medication(s) to provide an increased opportunity for development of healthy coping skills and healthy boundaries.



Conclusion



- ❖ Stress is a *normal* part of life.
- ❖ It is necessary to teach & encourage children how to “*COPE*”.
- ❖ The primary adults in children’s lives need to focus on children’s *readiness* for tomorrow, not just their happiness for today.
- ❖ The end result will be increased self-confidence, self-control, and self-esteem on which children can build healthy relationships and form a healthy self-image.



Inspiration



“You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.”

- A.A. Milne



Helpful Resources

Books:

Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents: 7 Ways to Stop the Worry Cycle and Raise Courageous and Independent Children by Reid Wilson, PhD

Emotional Literacy: To Be a Different Kind of Smart by Rob Bocchino

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk by Adele Faber

I Can Relax! A Relaxation CD for Children by Donna B. Pincus

I'm Not Bad, I'm Just Mad: A Workbook to Help Kids Control Their Anger by Anna Greenwald

My Mouth is a Volcano by Julia Cook

What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety by Dawn Huebner

Websites:

American Psychological Association
www.apa.org

Anxiety Disorders Association of America
www.adaa.org

Mental Health America (MHA)
www.mentalhealthamerica.net

National Alliance on Mental Illness
www.nami.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
www.samhsa.gov



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