



Counterintuitive but Practical Strategies to Help Anxious Children

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Intelligence, Creativity,
Compassion...



“You can’t tell if you burnt your toast or if the curtains are on fire based on how loud the alarm sounds”



Adaptive Anxiety vs. Disordered Anxiety

ADAPTIVE ANXIETY

- Keeps us safe
- A response to real danger
- Prevents the repeating of mistakes

DISORDERED ANXIETY

- Results in functional impairment
- Equivalent to a “false alarm”
- Leads to unnecessary avoidance

Avoidance and Fear are Teammates



Experiential Avoidance vs Psychological Flexibility

Trying to stop the wind
from blowing



Knowing you can handle
the wind



Why this is so important

Children and Adolescents

- Median age of onset 11 – earliest of all forms of psychopathology
- 8 % of children between ages 13 and 18 currently have an anxiety disorder
- 31.9% will have an anxiety disorder between the ages of 13 and 18
- 8.3% will have “severe” anxiety disorder
- Only as few as 18 % of these teens receive treatment



It Didn't Use to be This Way

Teens are 5 to 8 times more likely to show symptoms of an anxiety disorder compared with teens during WWII and the Great Depression

Peter Gray's work

- Between 1950 and 2010, the average length of the school year in the US increased by 5 weeks.
- average amount of time that US children in school, ages 6-8 years, spent at school plus school homework increased by 11.4 hours per week between 1981 and 2003, equivalent to adding a day and half to an adult's work week.
- Play needs to be child-directed

We develop coping competency
through practice



”Anxiety is a door disguised as a wall”



Anxiety Doesn't Mean You're Doing it Wrong



Comfort and Growth are Incompatible



Fire alarm at the top of the Empire State Building



“ You can be Scared and Brave at the same time”

Fill in the Blank:

I can be anxious and _____
at the same time.

Cognitive Coping Strategies:

“Just because I feel scared doesn’t mean anything bad is going to happen”

- Discuss importance of self-talk
- Create “Coping Cards”
 - Individually tailored to fear cues
 - Review appropriate situations in which to use each card
 - Pop-quizzes with rewards for successful recall

Coping Card Examples

- “Fear is temporary and harmless”
- “Scary thoughts can’ t hurt me”
- “Just because I feel scared doesn’ t mean anything bad is going to happen”
- “Just because I am scared doesn’ t mean I can’ t do it”
- “Just because I feel sick doesn’ t mean I’ m going to throw up”
- “I am stronger than my fear”

Self-Efficacy

- An individual's belief in his/her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments
- I know I can do it because...
 - Mastery experiences
 - Vicarious Experiences
 - Verbal Persuasion
 - Emotional States

Why Does the Bird not Fear the Branch Breaking?





Importance of Resilience

- Foster connections
- Model altruism
- Structured Routine
- Take breaks and have unstructured time
- Teach and model self-care
- Acceptance of change
- Help children move towards goals
- Nurture a positive self-view
- Model optimistic outlook
- Facilitate self-discovery

“Model what you want the child to feel.”



“No good caregiver would just give their child the answer. They need to learn how to solve it.”




“Water the seeds, not the weeds.”





SPACE

- Supportive Parenting for Anxious Childhood Emotions
- Evidence based treatment: SPACE, Dr. Lebowitz
- Environmental changes, family education =KEY

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- Validation + Confidence=Support
 - "This feels really hard right now, and I know you can do it."



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