

COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS AT PREVIOUS SCREENINGS

The **Angst** Team wants to make sure you have the resources you need to lead a healthy discussion. We have included some questions from previous **Angst** screenings we think you might find interesting. These questions may be helpful for attendees with children.

The following questions were answered by Cathy Cassani Adams, LCSW, Chicago/Zen Parenting Radio

1. How do I differentiate between not removing my kid from the anxiety-provoking situation (not picking them up from school) while also allowing them to take a walk, take a break, go listen to music.

I started by explaining that every child/situation is different, and that there is a lot of grey. There is not always a right and wrong, there is a what works for this particular child, what have they been able to articulate as useful or helpful in decreasing their anxiety.

I also explained that picking a child up from school is very different than allowing them to take a break from class – on a break they are still IN the school, but just using a coping tool so they can STAY in the school. Actually leaving the school could contribute to the anxiety, and if the parent is always picking up the child, they are unknowingly playing a role that may not be helping the situation.

2. Why is medicine not mentioned?

The filmmakers explained that the people in the film didn't mention medication. I added that the core of the movie is really about that we are "built" to cope with the challenges of anxiety – that within the challenge of anxiety, we have innate coping tools that can help us manage what we are experiencing (breathing, breaks, counting, asking for help, even the use of ice cubes...). I went on to explain that in some situations people are so deeply anxious and so in a "hole" that they need a "ladder" just to get to the point of finding these innate coping tools. In these situations, medication can be really helpful, because the med allows the person to climb out just enough to reach for an innate coping tool. And sometimes meds are used alongside coping tools to deepen a practice. There are times when clients ask for a med, but then chooses to not explore other ways to cope/manage what they are experiencing. In these cases the med can become a band-aid, because the core issues are not being addressed and innate coping tools are not being utilized. I explained that we are lucky to have meds available for when they are needed, and for some, they can be the difference between life and death. But for most, if used, they should be used as a tool to access what we already innately have available to us – they are a ladder to reach a solution rather than the entire solution.

3. When we talk to our kids about anxiety, do we use the word anxiety?

I explained that the more we normalize words and not shy away from them, the more we are capable of having honest conversations about how we are feeling. But we should be careful of our tone/body language when we talk about anxiety, because if we are using the word and then looking/sounding afraid, we are doing the exact opposite of what we are hoping to do (normalize/validate). So it takes a lot of self-awareness on the part of the

parent to become comfortable with anxiety, what it is, what it means, and how one can cope – so the conversation with our kids can be grounded and calm rather than filled with fear.

4. What tools can we use to manage everyday anxiety

I am a mindfulness teacher, so I appreciated this question. I talked about meditation (but also used the words stillness, quiet, and calm as synonyms so people don't get too caught up in the word "meditate"). I explained how daily stillness/meditation can strengthen the mindfulness muscle, which means creating some space between stimulus (like a feeling of anxiety) and reaction (becoming more anxious about feeling anxious). A meditation/stillness practice can help us RESPOND, rather than REACT. We can practice noticing a feeling and then choosing to breathe through it, rather than react to it. Anxiety will still show up, that's part of being human, but being mindful means we can decrease the pressure of the feeling, or sit with the feeling until it passes (rather than getting more anxious about feeling anxious).

Daily meditation/stillness is like "working out" this mindfulness muscle every day, so then we can use it in present time when something anxiety provoking actually occurs.

Compare dealing with anxiety to running a marathon – to run a marathon, we need to exercise our bodies on a daily or weekly basis so we are ready to perform during the race. A meditation/stillness practice is exercising the brain by noticing and breathing through thoughts – then when an anxiety-provoking situation arrives, we can actually "perform" what we've been practicing. Other ways to practice mindfulness – breath work, yoga, walking meditations, visualizations. Anything that helps the brain "practice" calming down.

5. A little girl asked about how to manage her panic attacks

In front of the crowd I told her that the only thing she needs is her breath – that her thoughts feelings may not be clear, but if she can remember to breathe, she will slow down every part of her body and mind. It may not "stop" it immediately, but it will keep it from getting worse and help ground her. I talked with her (and her mom) for a long time after the movie – we talked more about things that preceded the panic attacks and how they could work together to decrease the anxiety before they took hold (the little girl admitted to being a perfectionist with homework, and this would make mom anxious and annoyed, and then it would just escalate, etc...).

With the help of our experts we've rounded up some tips on anxiety support that can be printed and handed out at your screening; decide which list is best for your audience.

HOW TO HELP A FRIEND WHO HAS AN ANXIETY DISORDER

Having supportive and understanding friends is an essential component to recovering from an anxiety disorder. How can you help?

- **Educate yourself** - Understanding what your friend is going through will help you better support them. It will also help alleviate frustrations that you may have about his or her behavior.
- **Be supportive** - Encourage your friend when he or she is having a tough time and be empathetic to what he or she is going through. Be respectful but do not support avoidance of stressful situations.
- **Don't try to change your friend** - Modify your expectations of how you want your friend to be and accept your friend for who he or she is.
- **Communicate** - Be sure to listen with a nonjudgmental attitude. Help him or her find treatment. Sometimes it's hard to take the first step alone. Be a good support and encourage your friend to get help.
- **Encourage** - Encourage your friend to confront stressful situations and support them through the experience, rather than avoiding anxiety-provoking situations. Avoidance can actually make the anxiety disorder worse.
- **Be fun** - Sure it's good to have someone to talk to, but your friends need you to keep the fun going. Help make them laugh and relax.
- **Visit angstmovie.com** for more information including videos, articles and websites.

Tips powered by TeenMentalHealth.com

TIPS FOR MANAGING ANXIETY AT WORK, SCHOOL OR IN YOUR COMMUNITY

- **Be Specific:** Address your stress inducing thoughts and label them concretely. Make a list at the end of each workday and evening (at home) with the labeled stressors and an action plan of completion. Even if the items of stress are not task oriented in nature, it is beneficial to label them and write them down (for example, “Concerned about my daughter’s lack of interest in school. Plan – take her for a drive and begin a conversation.”) (For employees: “I am worried about an upcoming presentation.” Plan to talk with a co-worker, manager or HR representative.)
- **Take a Break and Distract:** If you feel your thoughts becoming clustered and overly emotional, or the beginning stages of anxiety increasing, get up and move for 5-10 minutes. Take your thoughts and body to a new location, even briefly, to grab a drink in the lounge or hallway, listen to music for a moment. Distracting your thoughts will allow your brain to function in an organized and efficient manner.
- **Don’t Isolate (for long):** It can be helpful to distract your mind and give yourself some space for a short period, but prolonged isolation can lead to avoidance of anxiety producing situations, which reinforces the negative thought process. Do what you fear, be it networking socials or assertively stating your idea in a meeting.
- **Model Emotional Honesty and Reach Out:** Let your coworkers, and loved ones know if you are feeling stressed, create an environment where all emotions are labeled and acknowledged. Address your needs.
- **Visit angstmovie.com** for more information including videos, articles and websites.

13 TIPS FOR MANAGING ANXIETY

Some anxiety is normal and natural, occurring in children, teens and adults every day. Anxiety is generally defined fear that is future oriented, while phobias are specific, exaggerated fears. Anxiety becomes problematic when it begins to interfere with everyday life.

1. There are many different types of anxiety disorders, and they are one of the most common forms of mental illness. They include:
 - a. Panic Disorder, which involves physical symptoms of anxiety as well as fear of having another panic attack
 - b. Social Anxiety in which people avoid social situations (i.e., public speaking)
 - c. Specific Phobias, or intense fear of specific objects (i.e., snakes)
 - d. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, which involves thoughts (obsessions) that tend to be unwanted and intrusive (i.e., maybe there are germs on my hands), and create anxiety, after which the individual engages in compulsions, or actions designed to reduce that anxiety (i.e., hand washing)
 - e. Generalized Anxiety Disorder, or excessive fear related to several things
 - f. PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) involves exposure to an extremely traumatic event that could result in death or serious injury, followed by a re-experiencing of the event, increased arousal, and avoidance of things that remind the person of the event.
2. There are three parts to anxiety: What I think (cognitions); What I feel (physical sensations); and What I do (behaviors). Helping people break down and verbalize these distinct thoughts, feelings, and behaviors helps them understand and face their fears.
3. Our bodies have a natural, physiological, way of coping with fear. A specific set of sensations occurs when we're anxious, including pounding heart, shortness of breath, dizziness, and sweating. This set of symptoms, called the fight or flight response, is designed to help us avoid danger, but sometimes works more like a faulty smoke alarm. Helping teens understand these natural sensations in their bodies without overreacting, and showing them how quickly things can return to normal can help give them control over their feelings of anxiety.
4. Facing fears and anxiety can teach an individual that they are stronger than they think they are, and that they can face something that they thought was insurmountable, and decreases those fears in the long term while avoiding fears actually increases the chances that they will turn into a problem.
5. Excessively reassuring someone who is anxious that everything will be okay may backfire when trying to help them cope with anxiety. Instead, empathize that it's natural to feel anxious, and focus on helping them through their feeling so that they can successfully face their anxiety. Avoiding activities because of fear can lead to increased anxiety because it reinforces the false concept that anxiety makes the

activity too scary or difficult. For example, if someone is anxious about having a panic attack while driving, and therefore is encouraged not drive, they learn that driving must be dangerous, because otherwise, why would everyone be discouraging driving?

6. Fears, phobias, and anxieties can be successfully treated with cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which helps teens change their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This is a short-term (6-16 session) weekly type of therapy that teaches an individual to become his or her own therapist. The cognitive piece helps people identify their fear as excessive, and as something they can overcome by focusing on, and then changing, specific irrational thoughts that lead to anxiety.
7. Behavior therapy for anxiety often relies on the concept of Exposure Therapy, which focuses on helping an anxious person face their fears in a controlled environment. This may involve helping someone with a fear of public speaking give a speech in front of a few people, and then a larger group, and finally, a target audience. The goal of Exposure Therapy is to help an individual learn that they can feel anxious but that they can still live their lives.
8. Medication for anxiety may be an option as well. The most typical types of medication prescribed for anxiety are called Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, or SSRIs.
9. The best thing you can do for someone with anxiety is help them face their fear. If you're experiencing symptoms of anxiety, think about how you can tackle your fear head on, possibly in small steps.
10. You can also help reduce anxiety through changing "self-talk", a part of CBT where people learn to identify the thoughts that they have that perpetuate their fears. Instead, try and identify what you're really worried about, and whether it's likely to happen.
11. Praise and reward yourself for facing tough situations. Be liberal with support if you know someone who is struggling with anxiety – even if the fear is irrational, it's difficult to face your fears. Any small step in the right direction should be encouraged.
12. Finally, take care of yourself! If you're feeling anxious, make sure you're managing your base stress levels by exercising, eating right, and getting enough sleep. All those factors can play a part in making anxiety worse as well.

by Regine Galanti, Ph.D. Director, Long Island Behavioral Psychology

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