

HELPING STUDENTS COPE WITH ANXIETY

ONTEORA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES



WHAT IS ANXIETY?

- Anxiety is defined as a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.

Primary Characteristics

Worry

Fear that future events will have negative outcomes

Anxiety can be a normal reaction to stressful situations

FIVE MAJOR TYPES OF ANXIETY

- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder**
 - characterized by chronic anxiety, exaggerated worry and tension, even when there is little or nothing to provoke it.
- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder**
 - characterized by recurrent, unwanted thoughts (obsessions) and/or repetitive behaviors (compulsions). Repetitive behaviors such as hand washing, counting, checking, or cleaning are often performed with the hope of preventing obsessive thoughts or making them go away. Performing these so-called "rituals," however, provides only temporary relief, and not performing them markedly increases anxiety.
- **Panic Disorder**
 - characterized by unexpected and repeated episodes of intense fear accompanied by physical symptoms that may include chest pain, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, dizziness, or abdominal distress.
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**
 - anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened. Traumatic events that may trigger PTSD include violent personal assaults, natural or human-caused disasters, accidents, or military combat.
- **Social Anxiety Disorder and selective mutism**
 - characterized by overwhelming anxiety and excessive self-consciousness in everyday social situations. Social phobia can be limited to only one type of situation - such as a fear of speaking in formal or informal situations, or eating or drinking in front of others - or, in its most severe form, may be so broad that a person experiences symptoms almost anytime they are around other people.

(National Institute of Mental Health)



WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE (SYMPTOMS)

- Withdrawal from others or situations
- Struggle to keep up with various demands of school
- Inattention often
- Perfectionistic
- Forgetful and/or unwilling to participate due to concerns about failure or embarrassment
- Avoids difficult tasks
- Does not volunteer or participate in classroom activities
- Perceived as unmotivated, lazy, uninterested in school

OVERT SYMPTOMS

- Expressed fears and worries
- Crying
- Irritability and oppositional behavior (anger)
- Silly/goofy behavior or dysregulation
- Antsy/fidgety and difficulty concentrating
- Self-doubt and fearful/clingy behavior
- Sleep disturbance
- Repetitive behavior, thoughts or questions
- Panic
- not eating or overeating

ANXIETY ICEBERG ORIGINAL

Behavior

Anxiety

Feelings

embarrassed
ashamed
disgusted
overwhelmed
depressed
stuck
jealous
disrespected
offended
frustrated
confused
helpless
hurt
insecure
regret
uncomfortable
rejected
sad
grief
lonely
tired

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8 WAYS A CHILD'S ANXIETY SHOWS UP AS SOMETHING ELSE

1. Anger

The perception of danger, stress or opposition is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.



2. Difficulty Sleeping

In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.



3. Defiance

Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child's defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.



8. Overplanning

Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.



4. Chandeliering

Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.



5. Lack of Focus

Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.



6. Avoidance

Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.



7. Negativity

People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.

EVERYDAY STRATEGIES FOR CAREGIVERS

- Have predictable routines
- Set clear and reasonable expectations
- Break down tasks into manageable units (e.g. homework, chores, classwork, etc.)
- Build your child's personal strengths; praise for brave behavior and facing challenges
- Give time to relax when anxiety becomes high
- Provide breaks
- Growth mindset (encourage mistakes) (teach resiliency) (they have the ability to train their "brain" to learn and change)

EVERYDAY STRATEGIES (CONTINUED)

- Teach Flexible thinking (learning to handle the uncertainty of life)
- 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
- Rather than say “not to worry”, validate their fear/worry as they describe it, for them it feels very real and from there you can help rationalize with your child and problem solve rather than disregard their feeling
- Listen to your child if they are willing to talk or let them know you are there for them. If they don't want to talk don't push the issue but let them know you are there to listen (discuss with your child the trusting caring adults they have in their life that they can talk to if they have a problem)
- Eat healthy (diet is extremely important to everyone's mental health!) , nutrient-dense foods, including vegetables, salads, fruits, fish and less processed foods

MORE STRATEGIES

- Make sure everyone is getting enough sleep
- Limit access to upsetting news or stories and be mindful of your conversations around children (they listen in on everything!)
- Set a calm example; try to keep your fears to yourself (children follow by example)
- Allow for some autonomy and control. (Let your child learn to do things on their own; don't want to send message that you don't believe your child can do it)
- Work together alongside teachers and administrators and community partners. When anxiety is at a point where it is impacting your child's quality of life and inability to learn and prosper. Seek support.
- Create a home environment where humor and laughter are valued

CALM STRATEGY FOR PARENTS

- **Catch your breath:**
 - Pause to think or withdraw briefly to become calm and plan a response
- **Accept negative feelings:**
 - Wait patiently and respond with “I see, uh-huh, ok”
- **Label emotions:**
 - “You seem really nervous”
- **Model coping skills:**
 - Show your child how to remain calm and collected

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