



Conference Day School Counselor Series – Anxiety

Fall 2023

Middle School

“We have anxious thoughts because the brain is trying to keep us alive. To the brain, survival is much more important than happiness. So, the brain often conjures up worst case scenarios and “what ifs”, so that we can prepare for disaster. The trouble is, the brain regularly gets it wrong.”

Dr Lucy Russell

The WHY



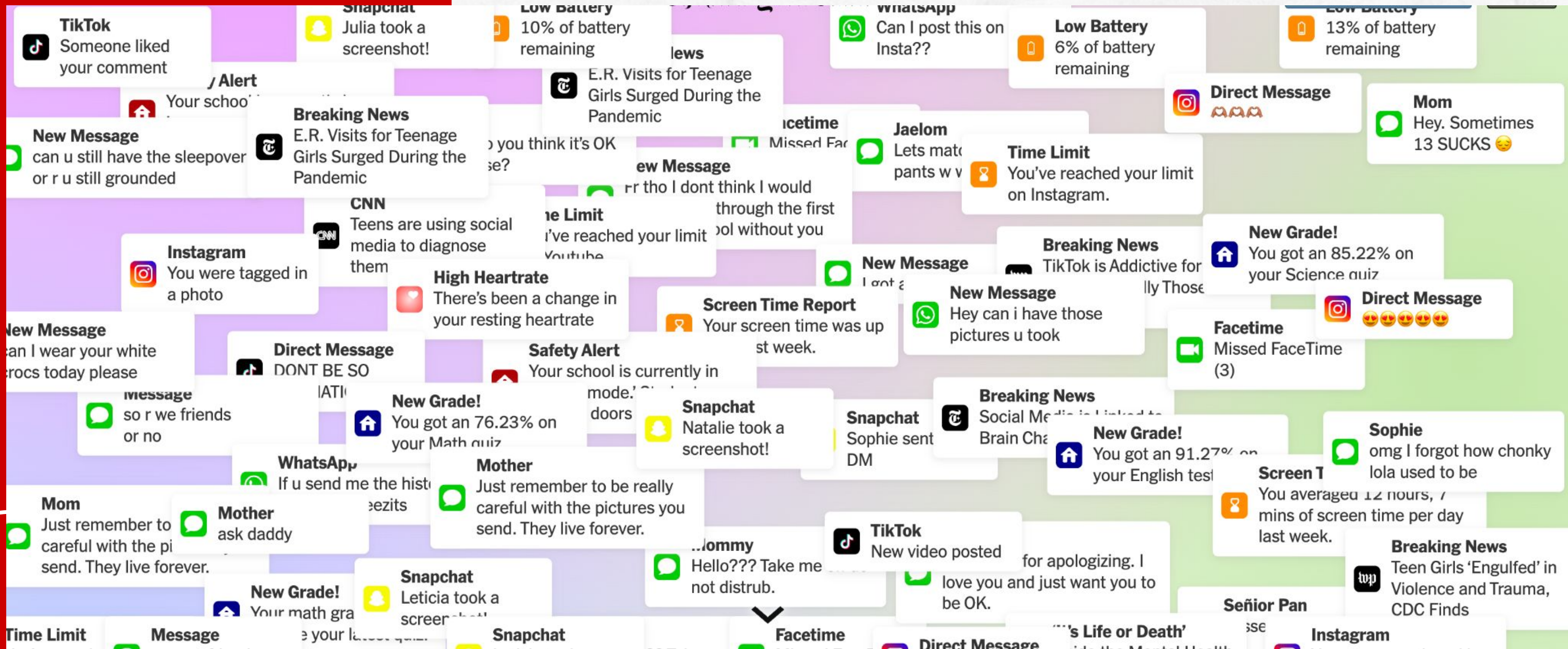
Changing the perspective on anxiety: “My child is not giving me a hard time. My child is having a hard time.”

- ❖ Affects 1 in 8 children (according to ADAA)
- ❖ Children who suffer from anxiety are at higher risk to perform poorly in school and miss out on important social experiences if they don't receive support
- ❖ Anxiety disorders often co-occur with depression and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
- ❖ Fear has a protective function - fear and anxiety are different.
- ❖ Kids often feel a little nervous or anxious about an upcoming event- this is normal.
- ❖ *When the anxiety is strong, lasts a long time and begins to impede your child from being able to perform daily routines, that's cause for concern.*



The WHY

[Oct 13th New York Times Article](#)



Signs/Symptoms



- ❖ Trouble concentrating, complaining of their mind “going blank”
- ❖ Restless, jumpy and on the lookout for something bad to happen
- ❖ Feeling irritable and upset; outbursts of anger
- ❖ Feelings fatigued or out of energy to cope, trouble staying or falling asleep
- ❖ Somatic complaints- stomach ache, headache
- ❖ Intensely afraid of social or performance situations that involve unfamiliar people or being evaluated by others



Signs/Symptoms



- ❖ Withdrawal- avoiding places, people and situations (school)
- ❖ Changes in school performance and poor grades
- ❖ Aggressive behavior and/or not obeying adults in charge
- ❖ Excessive worry and needing to do things perfectly
- ❖ Serious distress and panic when separated from parent or caregiver (ie, going to school, day care or other places)
- ❖ Losing interest in normal activities



Common Missteps



- ❖ **“Elimination, Permanence and Isolation”**
- Lisa Lyons
- ❖ “We try to convince kids that nothing bad is going to happen, that they do not need to worry because they are safe.”
- ❖ “We over detail our schedules or provide the exact nature of upcoming events.”
- ❖ “We alter the family’s plans and school activities to accommodate their fear and keep them comfortable.”



Common Missteps



- ❖ “We excuse tantrums and outbursts of anger, as though they are extensions of the child’s uncontrollable anxiety.”
- ❖ “We allow them to see our own anxious behaviors without modeling any coping strategies...”
(pg. 4, *Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents*, by Dr. Reid Wilson and Lisa Lyons, LCSW)



Strategies



- ❖ **Open and Non-Judgmental Communication:**
 - **Encourage your teen to talk about their feelings and concerns.**
 - **Be a good listener, avoid criticism or judgment, and validate their emotions.**
- ❖ **Educate About Anxiety:**
 - **Help your teen understand what anxiety is and that it's a normal response to stress.**
 - **Teach them about the physical and emotional aspects of anxiety.**
- ❖ **Identify Triggers:**
 - **Work with your teen to identify the specific situations or thoughts that trigger their anxiety.**
 - **Understanding the triggers can help develop targeted coping strategies.**



Strategies



- ❖ **Set Realistic Expectations:**
 - Help your teen understand that perfection is not achievable, and mistakes are part of the learning process.
 - Encourage a growth mindset.
- ❖ **Problem-Solving Skills:**
 - **Teach your teen effective problem-solving techniques.**
 - **Help them break problems down into smaller steps and develop solutions**
- ❖ **Encourage Social Connections:**
 - Support your teen in maintaining and building social connections.
 - Engaging in social activities can provide emotional support.
 - Encourage your teen to pursue their interests and passions, which can serve as healthy outlets for stress and anxiety.



Strategies



- ❖ Time Management:
 - Assist your teen in developing time management skills to reduce academic stress.
 - Help them break tasks into manageable parts and set realistic goals.
- ❖ Healthy Lifestyle:
 - Promote a balanced diet, regular exercise, and adequate sleep, as these can positively impact anxiety levels.
- ❖ Limit Screen Time:
 - Set boundaries on technology and social media use to reduce exposure to potential stressors.
- ❖ Establish a Routine:
 - Create a consistent daily schedule to provide structure and predictability, which can reduce anxiety.



Strategies



Child Self-Help Strategies:

- ❖ Positive self-talk statements
 - “You can do this!”
 - “Change is constant. This too will pass.”
- ❖ Calming visualizations
- ❖ Talk to the anxiety
- ❖ Worry jar or journal
- ❖ Relieving tense muscles- progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, yoga



Resources



❖ Books for Middle Schoolers:

- *The Anxiety Workbook for Teens* by Lisa M. Schab
- *Don't Let Your Emotions Run Your Life for Teens* by Sheri Van Dijk
- *My Anxious Mind: A Teen's Guide to Managing Anxiety and Panic* by Michael A. Tompkins and Katherine A. Martinez

❖ Parenting Books:

- *Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents*, by Reid Wilson and Lynn Lyons
- *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* by Edmund J. Bourne
- *Freeing Your Child from Anxiety* by Tamar Chansky



Resources



- ❖ Apps for Managing Anxiety:
 - Calm: Offers meditation and relaxation exercises.
 - Headspace: Provides mindfulness and meditation techniques.
 - WorryTime: Designed to help children manage their worries.
- ❖ Anxiety and Depression Association of America- <https://www.adaa.org> - Descriptions of types of childhood anxieties. Tips for parents and caregivers
- ❖ Child Mind Institute: Provides resources on various mental health topics, including anxiety in children. (childmind.org)
- ❖ 49 Phrases to Calm an Anxious Child- <http://blogs.psychcentral.com/>
- ❖ Kid's Relaxation: Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercises- <http://kidsrelaxation.com/?cat=>



THANKYOU

