

## **ANGST Notes:**

### **1. Is anxiety on the rise or are we just more aware?**

Anxiety is on the rise. According to the National Institute of Mental Health:

- 32% of teens are diagnosed with an anxiety disorder that is 1/3 teens versus 19% of adults.
- Gender breakdown - Of that 32% - 38% are female and 26% male
- Anxiety is up 20% overall in teens.
- Kids being hospitalized for suicidality has doubled in the last decade.

An example to illustrate this is a study done by Higher Education Research that was conducted with 18-19 year olds who were in their Freshman year at UCLA. They were asked:

#### **Do you feel overwhelmed by the amount of work you have to do?**

- 1985- 18% felt overwhelmed
- 2000- 28% felt overwhelmed
- 2016 – 41% felt overwhelmed
- American College Health Association says 60% of current college students have overwhelming anxiety.

#### **Theories on why this is:**

- High pressure teens feel they have to meet the requirements to get into college, having to know and plan out career right now, standardized testing, top performance in whatever sport, music, theater, club, etc. they are involved in. A “culture of achievement.”
- External forces such as the 24/7 news cycle that can make them feel unsafe in the world they are going to embark in. Lockdown drills due to school shootings, Covid, etc.
- Social Media where they compare themselves to others, bullying, body shaming, sense of inclusion or feeling excluded. Statistics show the more a teen uses social media the higher they rate their anxiety and feelings of unhappiness.
- Decrease in social support. More time alone and on tech.
- Decrease time for unstructured free play that does not involve tech.
- Lack of tangible coping skills that they have learned or been taught.

- Genetics

### **Types of Anxiety Disorders:**

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder – most common
- Panic Disorder
- Specific Phobias – heights, tight spaces, public speaking, etc.
- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- PostTraumatic Stress Disorder

Anxiety disorders can lead to depression

- 20% of teens suffer from depression but only 30% get treated.
- Anxiety disorders are common and very treatable.
- According to the Anxiety & Depression Association of America 80% of anxiety disorders in teens are not treated.
- Don't wait, get help sooner than later so the anxiety does not progress.
- Undiagnosed anxiety can lead to substance use to manage symptoms, withdrawal from activities, depression and suicide.

### **2. Why do you think it is so hard to talk about anxiety and mental health if it affects our entire community?**

- Lots of reasons contribute
- Stigma about mental health
- Cultural and familial messaging around mental health
- You opened up to someone before and did not receive positive feedback which adds to shame and reinforces staying quiet
- Hard to talk about because you are embarrassed or don't have the words to describe it
- Makes it "real" when you say it aloud

### **Tips for how to open up and ask for help:**

- Start with writing down how you feel
- Choose a "safe" preferably adult person (parent relative, coach, teacher, religious leader, school counselor, doctor) to open up to – they should be a good listener, kind, trustworthy, empathetic. (Friends are great at supporting but often times won't know how to connect you with resources or next steps)
- Go slow – "I don't feel good and I don't know why"
- Be honest – no downplaying
- No right way to say it. Just speak from your heart.
- Support team of people around you – therapist, parent, friends, doctor, etc.

- Remember boundaries (you don't have to tell everyone everything), feel safe and be vulnerable with trusted support team, and avoid people who make you feel worse.

### **3. Since we know that anxiety affects all of us, how can we manage our daily stress and anxiety?**

Each of us has to learn what stress management looks like for us. Some ideas for stress management are:

- Meditation
- Journal
- Art
- Social Connection
- Exercise
- Healthy eating
- Gratitude practice
- Alone time
- Reading
- Have fun!
- Time management strategies – what can I eliminate?
- Say no!
- Ask for help!
- Breathe
- TALK to someone
- SLEEP! – sleep hygiene (sleep schedule, wind down, no tech, etc)

### **4. What ways can we support someone who experiences severe anxiety?**

- LISTEN – as parents we want to “fix” because they are our child and we love them. We don't want them to hurt.
- It feels invalidating to our kid when they open up and we say “well, you are just overly stressed today”. Sometimes that is it but sometimes there is more going on.
- Just LISTEN and support.
- Try to limit questions and just listen.
- Reach out for help. A starting point is typically their pediatrician.
- Another resource are school counselors (Tamra Jamali MFT at St. Charles)

### **5. Can you share one thing that stands out from the film?**

- In my opinion, the awesome kids in the film! They are so brave and vulnerable just like Amelia & Connor on our panel. By speaking out, they are making an impact and frankly saving lives by being honest, real and vulnerable. Imagine if we could all treat each other with that sense of

openness and understanding. Our mental health stats would be greatly improved!

## **6. What are schools doing to help with anxiety management?**

I can speak to the effort Saint Ignatius has and continues to put into teen mental health:

- Changing the daily schedule. Later start time (9:00am) to promote more sleep in teens
- Resource period (study hall) to have time to get work done during the day
- Wellness Classes mandatory for all Sophomores – stress management, asking for help, healthy habits, destigmatizing mental health.
- Mandatory counselor check-in twice a year.
- Student panels to discuss “what they have learned” – mental health, college process, etc.
- College Counseling encouraging test optional colleges, looking at our grading policies, growth vs. achievement.
- Wellness Counseling created to work with our students experiencing anxiety, depression grief, etc.
- Encourage students to get help for a friend they are worried about. Culture of understanding.
- Parent education nights on mental health, supporting your teen, having a balanced perspective.
- Having fun! – not just academics but rallies, games, competitions, etc. High school should be fun!
- It’s a community effort on all fronts to send positive and understanding messaging to our students. We are all in it together.