

What Anxiety Wants- Parent Presentation

Presentation by the RETSD
Mental Health Education Team

Agenda

- Anxiety Disorders in Children
- Treatment
- What Anxiety Wants
- Ways to Stop the Worry Cycle

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Anxiety

- Anxiety disorders most common form of disorder for adolescents – also most undiagnosed
- Prevalence rates range from 4 – 15% for adolescents
- Increase in social phobia and panic disorder
- Anxiety disorders are the most treatable of all mental health disorders



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Three Ingredients in Anxiety

(Foxman, 2004)

1. Biological Sensitivity
2. Personality Traits
3. Stress Overload

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Childhood Anxiety Video

Generalized Anxiety

<http://www.adam.mb.ca/generalized-anxiety-disorder>

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Co-Morbidity

(Wagner, 2002)

- 75-80% of children with an anxiety disorder suffer from another psychiatric disorder
- Anxiety and depression together is typical
- Untreated anxiety in children- leading predictor of depression in teens and young adults

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Treatment of Anxiety

- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)
 - Cognitive - refers to our thoughts
 - Behavioural - refers to our actions
 - CBT - learning how our thoughts & actions influence our feelings
- Pharmacotherapy
 - Medications are used as a primary or complementary treatment

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Anxiety Wants Two Things

1. Certainty:

"I have to know exactly what is happening next... and I want to control it!"

2. Comfort:

"I want to feel safe and comfortable... or else I want out!"

The problem is Anxiety wants these two outcomes... immediately and continually.

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Overly Anxious Youngsters

- Cling to their parent
- Refuse to try new activities
- Continually ask you for reassurance of their "what if" question
- Feel sick and complain of aches, pains, and nausea
- Avoid school, or throw tantrums if forced to go
- Act shy and don't talk in class or around others
- Worry about future events "Is something bad going to happen to my family?"

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Common Patterns:

- Worried kids fail to recall what they've accomplished
- They don't remind themselves of previous obstacles overcome
- They don't realize that being nervous is normal
- They never think, *I can handle this because I've done it before*
- They don't have a voice to talk to the worry
- Instead they look to trusted adults to step in and manage their thoughts and feelings

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Why Adults Help Kids Avoid:

- You don't know what else to do
- It works. Anxious kids calm down
- You want to protect the child

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Inadvertently Reinforcing Fear

- We try to convince kids that nothing bad will happen
- We tell them to just calm down
- We alter plans and school activities to accommodate their fear
- We excuse tantrums and outbursts of anger, as though it is an extension of uncontrollable anxiety
- We become frustrated and angry and make unreasonable demands for the child to "just do it"

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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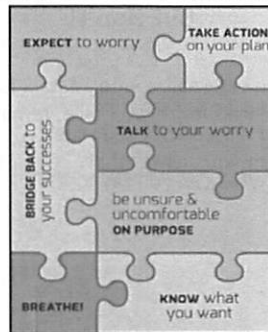
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Ways to Stop the Worry Cycle (Wilson & Lyons, 2013)



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Think of Yourself as a Coach

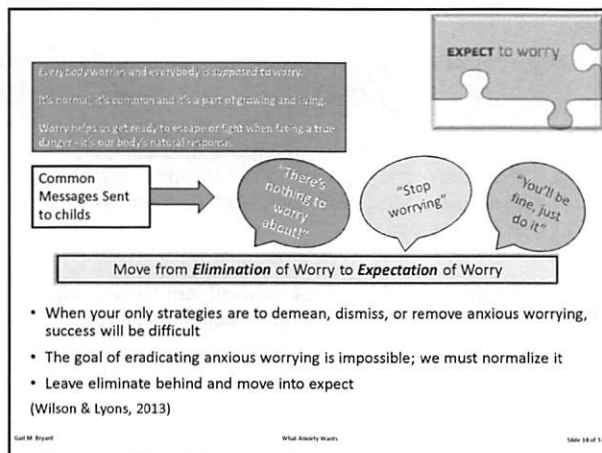
- Kids have to do the work, but coaches play an important role
- Instead of cajoling the child to stop worrying, your job is to acknowledge worry's presence and how uncomfortable it feels
- Be clear you are no longer going to give worry what it wants or fall for its tricks
- Reinforce the understanding that being scared is okay
"Of course your scared. You're not sure if you're going to be able to handle this. It's perfectly natural to have worries."

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Coach Kids To Expect Worry

- When something scary is happening
- You're doing something new or different
- You're unsure about your plans
- You have a lot of "what if" questions
- You have to perform
- You need it to go exactly right
- You don't feel prepared, or you're afraid you will be criticized or fail

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Externalization



- Placing anxious worries outside of the child- allowing the child to see the worry and its messages from a different perspective



- We need to send the message that up until now worry has been in control but you and the child are no longer going to allow it to call the shots

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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It's Quicker & More Efficient to Reassure. But Don't!

Instead...

- Cue the child to externalize worry & talk to it
- When the child asks for reassurance, remind them to give themselves the reassurance they seek
- Ask, "How might you answer that?" Or, "That sounds like worry talking. What can you say to it?"

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Self-Talk Examples

- "I want to do this, even though it feels really scary."
- "It's okay that I'm anxious right now, I can handle not being certain how this will turn out."
- "I expected these worries to show up. I don't need to pay attention to them. But I do need to tolerate this distress."
- "I've got to feel awkward before I can feel competent."

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Courage:
Be willing to feel unsure and uncomfortable, and then step into the unknown.



- If we act on our desire to remove their pain, we slide down that slippery slope of trying to eliminate their insecurities instead of teaching them how to be courageous.
- Before you intervene ask yourself, *Am I promoting independence? Or am I encouraging dependence?*

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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A New Approach To Adaptations

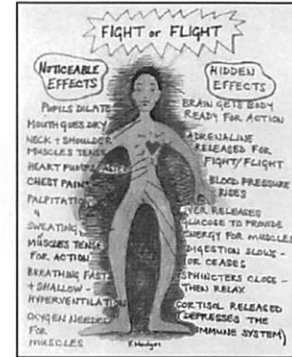
1. All plans for anxiety should be based on teaching the skill of managing anxiety when it arrives, rather than eliminating or avoiding triggers
2. Plans should have a "weaning off" component that moves the child towards more independence
3. If a plan allows a child to leave the classroom, there must be a plan for HOW the child will deal with the anxiety and return as soon as possible... and adults must be aware of the plan
4. The school, parents and the treating therapist must be working together with the child on the same "step into it" plan

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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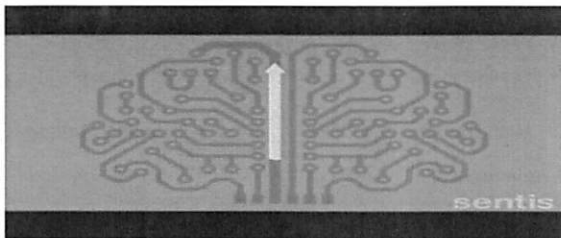


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Video Clip - Neuroplasticity



- **Neuroplasticity** - is the term neurologists use to describe the brain's ability to change

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ELpfYZa87g>

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When Our Brains Are Frightened

- Feeling frightened? Stressed? Your amygdala is on alert!
- It blocks information from flowing to your prefrontal cortex and prompts a fight, flight or freeze response

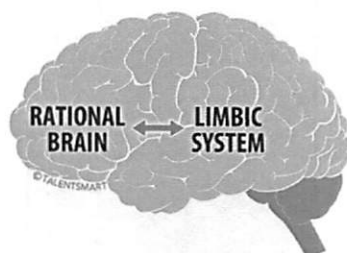


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An Evolutionary Response to Danger



Uncertainty makes your brain yield control to the limbic system.
You must engage your rational "brain" to keep yourself on track.

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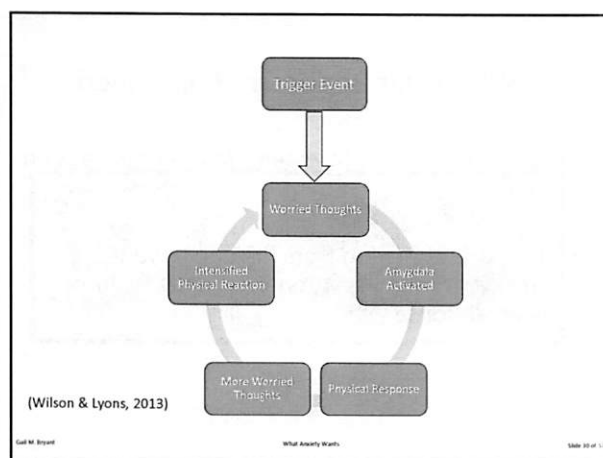
A New Way to Think About Our Bodies Reactions

- Instead of wanting to get rid of these sensations it's our bodies way of giving us the energy we need:
 - Your heart speeds up
 - Your breathing deepens to give you more oxygen
 - Your adrenaline help your muscles and brain take in and use that energy more efficiently
- In all these ways, your stress response gets you ready to face whatever challenges lie in front of you

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Some Phrases to Practice

- "I'm willing to feel uncomfortable."
- "My alarm system is going off again, but I know it's just a false alarm."
- "Even though I don't like _____ when I tell my brain I can handle it, it stops acting like it's an emergency."
- "I'm willing to grab onto my courage & do it."

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Just Breathe!

BREATHE!

- You can't be anxious and relaxed at the same time
- Simple, brief relaxation skills to manage discomfort as brain relearns
- Adults get to practice staying calm when the child escalates

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Goal:

To practice what makes you uncomfortable until you become confident

KNOW what you want

- We can increase kids motivation to take the risk of facing those worries if we help children pick goals that they really want to accomplish.
- Rewards can be used but should be explained, small and happen when kids "step in"

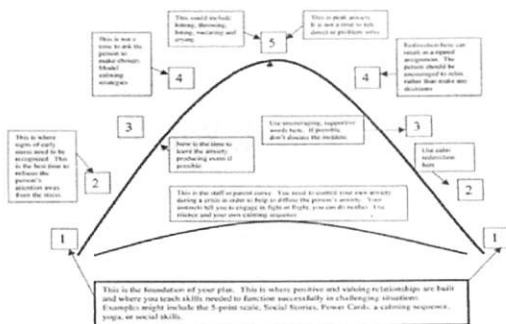
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The Anxiety Curve - By Buron and Curtis



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BRIDGE BACK to your successes

- Anxious children suffer from "amnesia"
- Use 'Reminder Bridges':
 - Help the child to focus on remembering, rather than telling them of past successes

(Wilson & Lyons, 2013)

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Kids are amazingly resilient when
we give them the tools that they
need to manage life!

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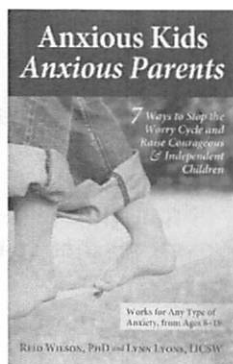
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Questions

*This presentation has been adapted
from the book:*

Anxious Kids Anxious Parents

by Dr. Reid Wilson & Lynn Lyons
Health Communications Inc. 2013



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Thank You