

Anxiety: How much is too much?

Kyle T. Ganson, MSW, LCSW, LICSW

Christine V. Rogerson, MSW, LCSW

Purpose

This interactive presentation is focused on understanding adolescent anxiety. Attention will be given to understanding what is “normal” and what is “too much”. Caregiver strategies supporting adolescent anxiety management, as well as promoting resiliency will be shared.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Activity



Anxiety Definition

- A. Excessive anxiety and worry (apprehensive expectation), occurring more days than not for at least 6 months, about a number of events or activities (such as work or school performance).
- B. The individual finds it difficult to control the worry.

Anxiety Definition

C. The anxiety and worry are associated with three (or more) of the following six symptoms (with at least some symptoms having been present for more days than not for the past 6 months): Note: Only one item is required in children.

1. Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge.
2. Being easily fatigued.
3. Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank.
4. Irritability.
5. Muscle tension.
6. Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling or staying asleep, or restless, unsatisfying sleep).

Anxiety Definition

D. The anxiety, worry, or physical symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

There are other anxiety disorders:

- Panic Disorder
- Phobia-Related Disorders
- Social Anxiety Disorder*
- Separation Anxiety*
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*

Statistics

15-20% of children and adolescents experience an anxiety disorder (Kessler et al., 2012; Merikangas et al., 2010) - Most common mental illness

Females: 2x more likely to develop an anxiety disorder (Beesdo et al., 2009)

Commonly associated with:

- Depression
- Behavioral Disorders (Lewinsohn et al., 1997)
- Substance Use (Ohannessian, 2014)

Predicts adulthood anxiety, depression, and substance use (Beesdo-Baum et al. 2012)



Impact of Anxiety



Decreased academic achievement
(Van Ameringen, 2003)

Difficulty with friendships and family
relationships

Anxiety: What is normal? Too much?

In your groups, make a list of what might be “normal” anxiety for your child or adolescent.

Next, make a list of what might be “too much” anxiety for your child or adolescent.



What Causes Anxiety?

- Ongoing Stress
 - Environmental Factors
 - Relationship Factors
 - Expectations are too high
- Acute Stress
 - Traumatic Situations (Medically related, Environmentally related)

Other Causes of Anxiety to Watch Out For:

- Too much caffeine
- Substance use
- Diet pills
- Medication side effects
- Medical Conditions

Our Body's Response

The Stress Response (Fight or Flight Response)

- Our bodies are designed for protection.
- The nervous system and endocrine systems respond to stressful situations by releasing hormones (adrenaline, cortisol, norepinephrine & others)



Our Body's Response (Cont.)

This causes:

More energy

Heightened awareness 

Heart rate

Heightened reactions

Changes breathing

Tightens muscles

Changes brain functioning

Changes digestion

Increased blood flow to brain;
Increased production of
catecholamines (epinephrine,
norepinephrine, dopamine)
which help to facilitate cognitive
performance

Pupils dilate/Peripheral
vision is reduced

Heart rate increases

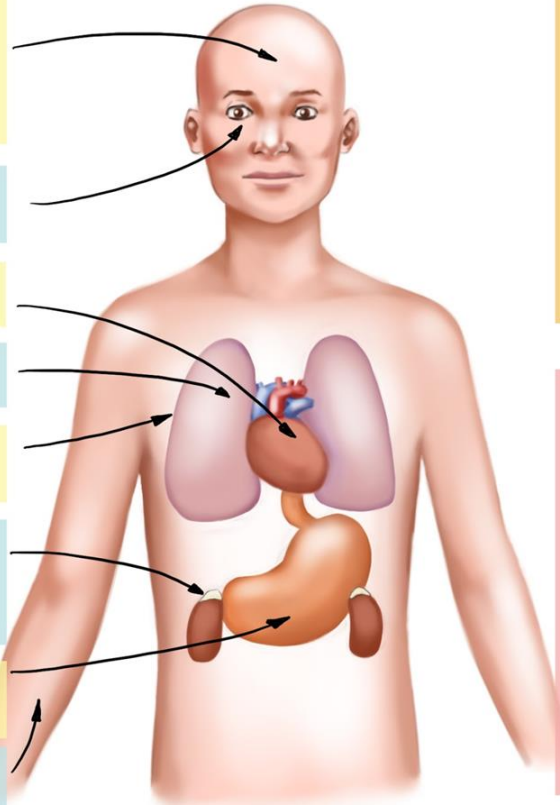
Faster, deeper breathing

Increased blood flow to
large muscle groups

Adrenal hormones (cortisol and
DHEA) released, resulting in
increased energy mobilization

Digestion slows
dramatically

Blood pressure increases



Reactions

- Increased alertness
- Increased short term strength
- Increased ability to handle stress
- Heightened ability to focus
- Increased oxygen to the brain
- Faster, deeper breathing
- Heightened sense of smell
- Body and mind are hyper-alert

Other Responses

- Perspiration increases to cool body
- Muscle tension increases to prepare for "fight or flight"
- Saliva production decreases
- Metabolism speeds up considerably
- Inflammation increases
- Blood flow from skin surface is diverted to larger muscle groups & brain
- Body extremities can change temperature
- Blood pressure increases

A Little Bit is Ok, Too Much is Not

Having this autonomic response can sometimes be helpful

- Increase ability to perform
- Increase motivation
- Increase “confidence”
- Get out of danger or react to an event



Prolonged Exposure

- When someone is exposed to a situation or event the body will react
- The more someone is exposed to same situations that cause autonomic responses, the more the body is taught to respond in that manner (even when not in danger)



What About Genetics?

- Some people are more prone to anxiety and anxiety disorders
- They have a genetic component just like other health conditions
- Some personality types are more prone as well

CDC: ACES What are They?

- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Abuse, Neglect, Life Challenges (divorce, relatives incarcerated, relatives with substance use etc)
 - Increase risk of:
 - Risky Health Behavior
 - Chronic Health Conditions
 - Low Life Potential
 - Early Death
- Risk can be changed! ACES HANDOUT

Coping Skills for Children and Adolescents

Activities

5 Senses

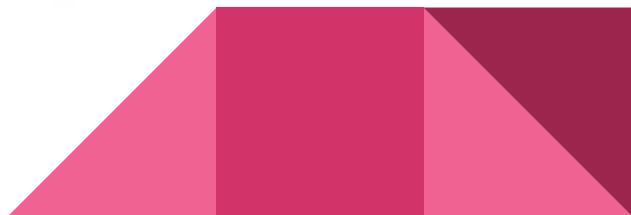
Challenge All or Nothing Thinking (CBT)

Sensory Box



What is Your Role?

- Pay attention to your child's feelings.
- Stay calm when your child becomes anxious about a situation or event.
- Recognize and praise small accomplishments.
- Don't punish mistakes or lack of progress.
- Be flexible, but try to maintain a normal routine.
- Modify expectations during stressful periods.
- Plan for transitions (For example, allow extra time in the morning if getting to school is difficult).
- Work together as parents.
- Maintain consequences





Mind Full, or Mindful?



When Anxiety is too much....

- Reach out to your support natural or professional
- Professional supports may include: School counselor, local therapist (this does not mean you have failed)
- Encourage your children to engage in healthy activities they enjoy
- Open communication lines
- Support your child
- No secrets

