

Understanding the Influence of Stress and Anxiety in our Children and Ourselves



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April 3, 2019



Questions:



- What have you done that has helped to reduce your and your child's stress/anxiety?
- What strategies do you use that have been helpful?

Positive Vs. Harmful Stress

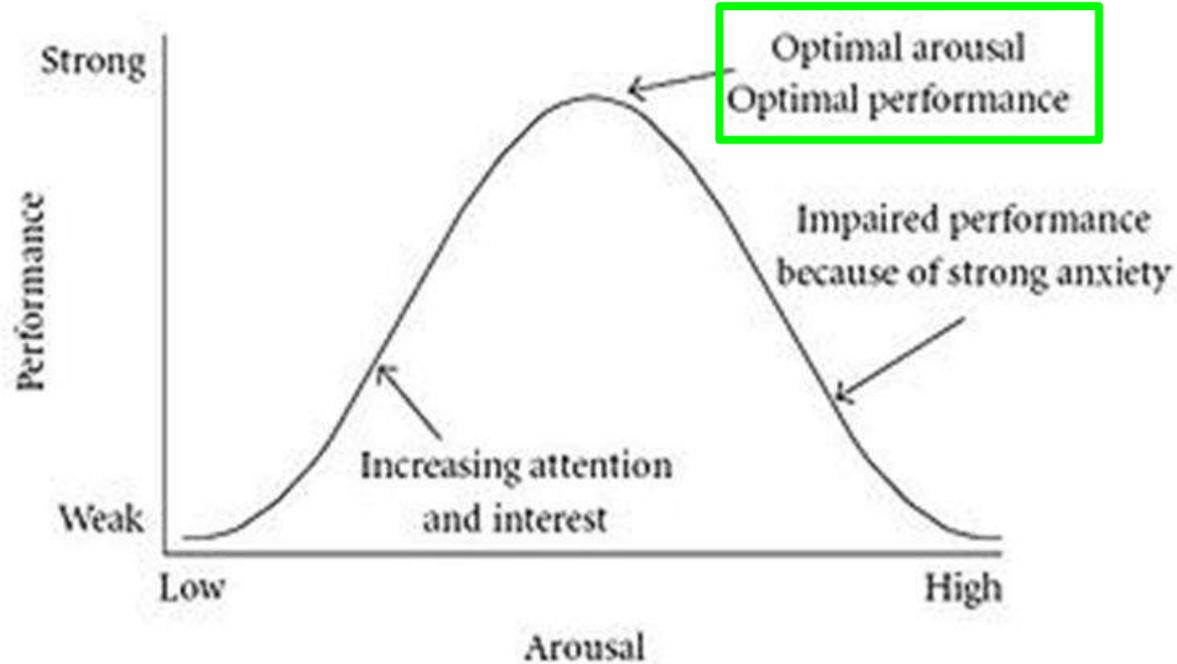
Positive effects (mild/moderate levels):

- Motivates us to take action
- Helps us stay focused and alert
- Prepare our bodies for action

Negative effects (severe levels, chronic):

- Debilitating
- Prevents us from functioning
- Leads to health & mental health problems

Positive Vs. Harmful Stress



What is an Anxiety Disorder?

- A condition in which the person experiences fear/worry in the absence of or out of proportion to a threat.
- The emotional reactions are intense, prolonged and difficult to manage.
- Interferes with performance and causes continued distress.



When does Anxiety Become A Problem?

- Significant distress
- Interferes with functioning
- Developmentally inappropriate
- Duration



Behaviour

- Avoidance
- Escape
- Procrastination
- Reassurance-seeking
- Opposition
- Hostility and irritability

What do you see?



How Can we help?

- Our own self awareness
- Explaining that feeling anxious is normal
- Teaching kids about emotions/feelings and how thoughts and words influence them
- Learning how to relax

- Learning to problem solve, encouraging independence
- What worked in the past
- A balance between empathy and firmness
- Planned ignoring
- Gradual Exposure

Parental Anxiety

“If Parenting can feel like a rollercoaster of anxiety, then special needs parenting is a whole carnival. One where the rides never stop and you are always juggling fire.”

Self Awareness



Set priorities

*“Don’t try to boil the ocean,
you can’t do everything at
once”*



Identifying your
coping strategies



Being stressed/anxious is

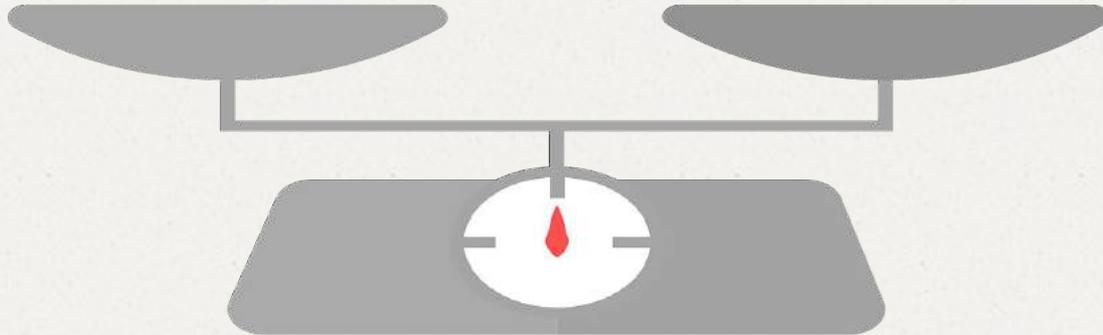


- It serves a purpose
- Everyone gets anxious sometimes
- Feeling anxious doesn't mean that you can't do it or that something bad will happen.
- We are able to control how we feel

Don't forget to balance

"It's ok to feel nervous about a test. What you are feeling is your body and mind helping you face the challenge."

"How can we work together to help you through this? What can you do to cope?"



Solution Focused Parenting

- If it is not working do something different
- If you find something that works do more of it
- Identify what your child is good at and help them to amplify this rather than focus on the problems
- If not succeeding, identify a smaller step

**IF YOU ONLY
FOCUS ON THE PROBLEM**



**YOU MIGHT
MISS THE EASY SOLUTION**

Problem focused vs Solution focused

"My child is anxious all the time"

"I won't be chosen for the game"

VS

"His anxiety was not so bad last week, what allowed for this and how can we do more of that?"

"How did I find a group or person to join at recess in the past?" How could you do that again?

Problem focused vs Solution focused

"I can't do it and everyone will think I am stupid"

VS

" I feel my heart racing, I am nervous and don't have confidence "

"Just because I can't do this doesn't make me stupid, what has helped in the past when I feel stuck"?

" I am a bit nervous and that is why I feel this way, what difference does it make for my child when I remain calm and use my strategies?"

Activity

Change the Problem Focused Thinking

- " I am bad at math, I will never be able to do it"
- " I don't want the teacher to help me because everyone will think I am stupid"
- " Kelly didn't ask me to play with her because she doesn't like me"
- "My belly hurts that means I am nervous and will mess up"

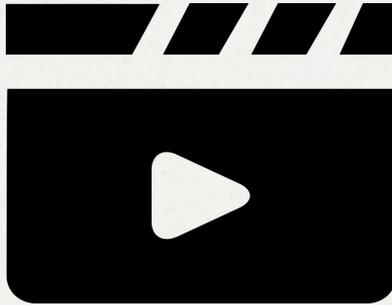
Language and Feelings

Teaching children words to label their various emotions helps them understand them and interpret them more effectively



Video: Teaching Self-Regulation by Modeling

<https://www.edutopia.org/video/teaching-self-regulation-modeling>



Relaxation Techniques

- Mindful Breathing
- Guided Imagery
- Relaxation with music or natural sounds



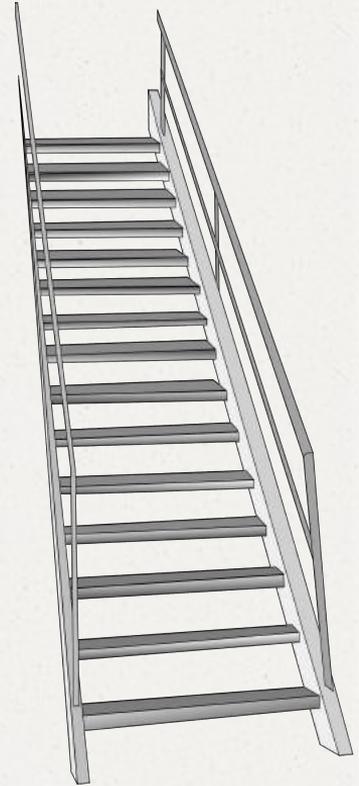
Safe Space in the home

- Calm space/corner in the house - a place to take a break: teach your child to access it before the anxiety takes over.
- Create a "Calm-box"
- What tools help you and your child when feeling stress/anxiety



Discourage Avoidance

Remind the student that you understand their anxiety and will help them cope as reasonably as you can. Help them set a goal of achieving the behaviour with a stepwise approach to slowly increase the demands:
(exposure hierarchy)



Gradual Exposure: School Refusal

Stay in school all day no phone call to Mom	10
Stay in school half day no phone call to Mom	9
Stay in school half day 1 phone call to Mom	8
Go to class & stay until recess	7
Go to school and stay with Ms. X until recess	6
Walk to bus stop with Mom, get on bus, Ms. X meets you at school, go home	5
Drive to bus stop, get on bus, Mom & Ms. X meet you at school, go home	4
Drive to school and meet Ms. X and return home	3
Get in car, drive to school, return home	2
Wake up, get dressed, do school work at home	1

Gradual Exposure: Homework

- The number of steps you use, depends on the child you are working with and the issue to be worked on
- Some need very small steps, others may be able to take larger ones

10 min of slightly challenging homework independently	5
10 min of slightly challenging homework with some guidance	4
10 min of easy homework independently	3
5 min of easy work independently, then 5 min with guidance	2
10 min of very easy homework with adult guidance	1

Planned Ignoring

- This involves a gradual reduction in the attention given to the "anxious" behaviour (such as whining or reassurance seeking, complaining)
- You implement it once your child has began learning some coping strategies
- Your child needs to be aware and understand the reason for ignoring

Resources/Links

<http://cemh.lbpsb.qc.ca/index.htm>

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/>

<https://chopra.com/articles/3-kid-friendly-meditations-your-children-will-love>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/some-nerve/2016/03/anxiety-the-special-needs-parent>

<http://www.headachereliefguide.com/relaxation.php>

Resources/Links

<https://laughingkidslearn.com/20-books-to-help-children-who-worry-or-suffer-from-anxiety/>

Questions?

