

Help Group Summit
10.15.21

Managing COVID-related Anxiety at Home and School

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DISCLOSURES

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Outline of Presentation

- Provide overview of youth stress and anxiety phenomenology and impact especially in light of the pandemic
- Review anxiety continuum and best-practice clinical intervention strategies
- Present tools and techniques for helping to manage child stress/anxiety at home and school, especially in light of the pandemic

The Scope of the Problem

- Anxiety is most common mental illness in U.S.
 - 40 million adults or 18% of the population (NIMH)
- Anxiety is most common child psych disorder
 - 12-20% of children suffer from anxiety severe enough to interfere with their functioning (US Surgeon General's Report on MH)
- Yet 80% of kids with a diagnosable anxiety disorder are not getting treatment
 - This is compared to only 20-30% of youth with ADHD (2015 Child Mind Institute Children's MH Report)



The Scope of the Problem

- Negative impact on educational achievement
- Delays in important developmental milestones (e.g., delayed independence, development of social skills)
- Associated with depression, suicidal ideation
- Increased risk for substance use disorders
- Related to heart disease, hypertension, insomnia, gastrointestinal problems, respiratory illness, diabetes, skin problems, fatigue



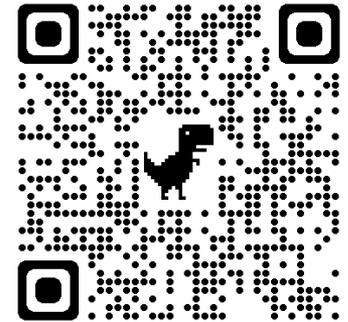


UCLA Center for Child Anxiety Resilience Education and Support (CARES)

Building a Resilient Community for our Kids

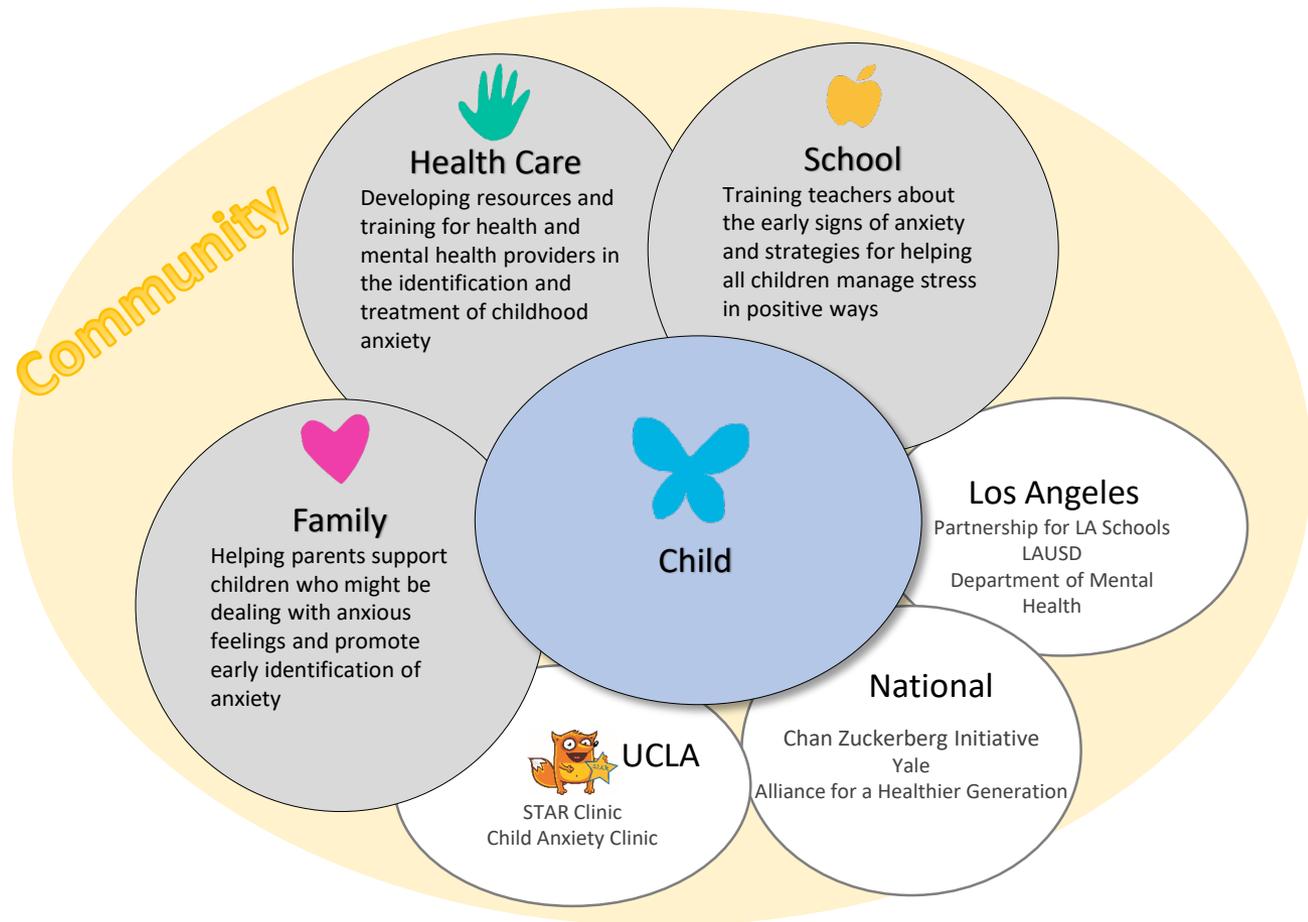
We focus on:

- Education and Prevention
- Training
- Innovation
- Research
- Public Awareness and Advocacy



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UCLA CARES Center Ecological Model



Anxiety vs. Stress

- Stress is a physical and emotional reaction to circumstances that frighten, irritate, confuse, endanger or excite
- Stress occurs in reaction to both positive, negative and real or imagined events and situations
- Often conflated with anxiety
- Stress is a **normal part** of childhood
 - can be overpathologized

Child/Adolescent Stress

SCHOOL is the **most common** source of stress.

Nearly **60% of teens and 40% of children** report time-management of all their activities to be a source of stress.

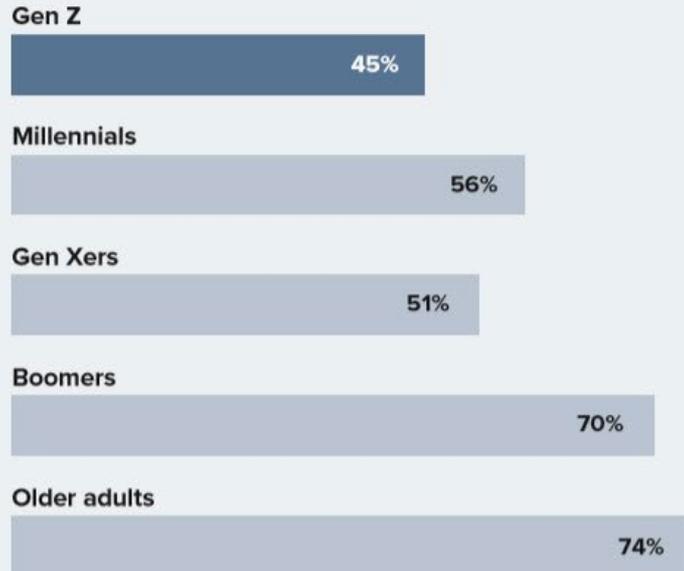


Generation Z Stressors

Kids born 1995-2010

Mental Health of Gen Z

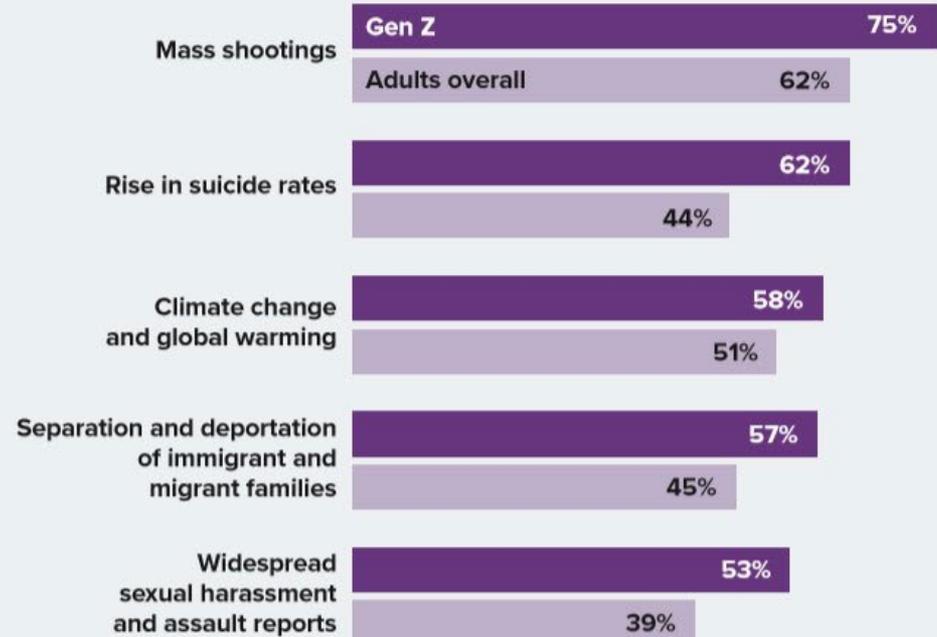
Compared with other generations, Gen Z is least likely to report very good or excellent mental health



Source: APA. (2018). *Stress in America: Generation Z*

News Events Stressing Gen Z

Compared with other generations, Gen Z is more likely to report stress related to these national news topics



Coping Strategies Kids Use

- 52% play/do something active
- 44% listen to music
- 42% watch TV/play video games
- 30% talk to a friend
- 29% try not to think about it
- 28% try to work it out
- 26% eat
- 23% lose my temper
- 22% talk to a parent

75% of the kids said they want and need their parents' help in times of trouble

Helping Children Manage Stress

- Teach what stress is and how it feels
- Validate (Normalize) child's experience
- Model your own stress management
- Limit exposure to stressful events, discussions, TV/social media
- Set & maintain daily routine(s)
- Remind kids of past successes
- Keep things in perspective

The Limits of Living Online

- Social distancing and school closures led to tremendous disruptions in social development and identity formation among youth
- Youth with mental health challenges arguably at most risk
- Social media/gaming are primary tools for social connection – associated with mood boosts and drops; “a sedative”
- Impacted learning – worries about the future
- Missed social opportunities/milestones - anger, sadness
- Social Isolation – boredom, anxiety, depression
- Increased gaming/decreased activity – health, sleep issues

How to Manage Living Online

Prioritize Sleep (at least 9 hrs/night)

- Consistent sleep/wake times
- Room at comfortable (cool) temperature
- No/low light
- Avoid caffeine/sugar, heavy meals

Physical Activity (at least one hour/day)

- Regular breaks – yoga, online dance, nature walk, playing with pet

Mindfulness

- “Reality check” – do I feel better or worse scrolling/posting?
- Apps: Smiling Mind, Calm, Headspace, others

Parents as role models; Support child/teen’s other interests

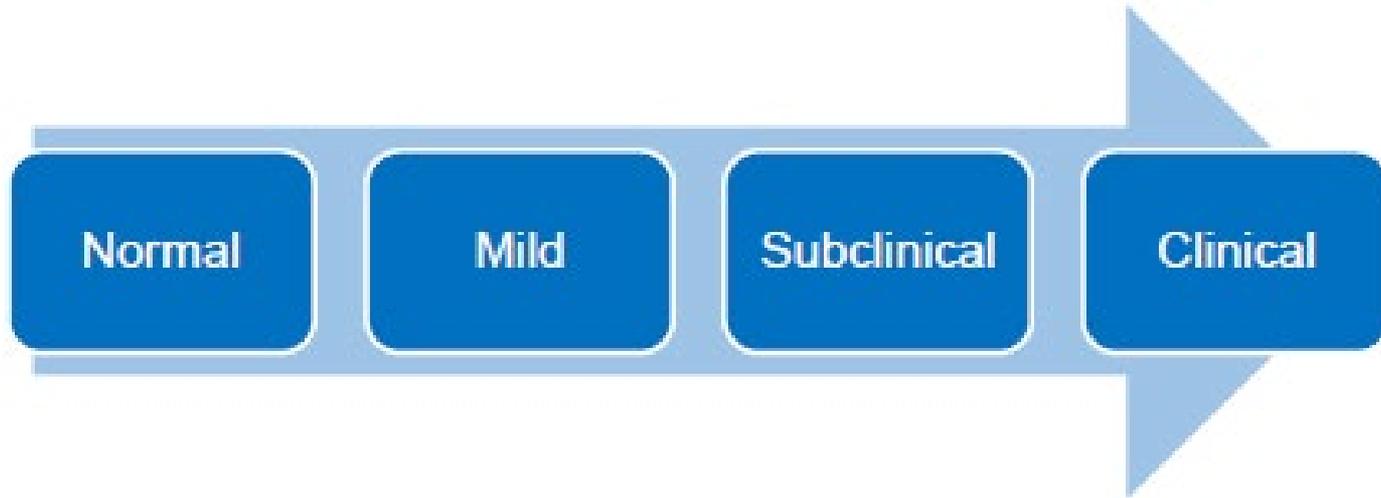


Expected vs Problematic
ANXIETY



Anxiety Continuum

Even During the Pandemic



Determines Scope and Intensity of Intervention

Short-Term Episodes of Anxiety

- Are expected and cause relatively little interference in functioning for the average child or adolescent
- Are associated with circumscribed events (e.g., thunder; new situations; oral report; teasing)
- Are overshadowed by the cumulative effect of positive reinforcement delivered by peers, parents, and teachers (habituation occurs)
- Rarely require professional intervention

Normal vs. Problematic Anxiety

- Intensity
- Frequency
- Innocuous threats
- Spontaneous
- Avoidance
- Interference
- Distress
- Duration

Anxiety Continuum

Even During the Pandemic

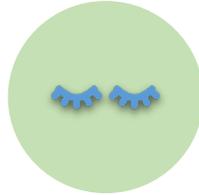


Determines Scope and Intensity of Intervention

Core Components of CBT



PSYCHO-
EDUCATION



RELAXATION
TRAINING



COGNITIVE
COPING



EXPOSURE
PRACTICE



CONTINGENCY
MANAGEMENT



FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Cognitive Behavioral Model of Anxiety



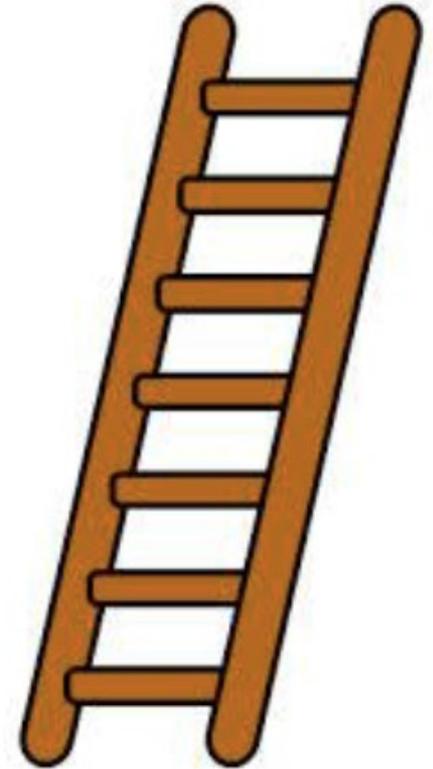
Understanding School Avoidance

- For serious cases of school refusal, the first step is getting a comprehensive diagnostic assessment.
- School refusal is not a disorder, but may be a symptoms of a disorder.
- Assessment necessary to individualize treatment approach.
- The most important question to ask is:

What is the purpose/reason for the refusal?

Changing Behavior with Exposure

- Facing fears in a graded, or gradual way
- Like climbing a ladder step by step
- Rank fears from easiest to most difficult
- Practice and repeat
- ***It's not about making the fear disappear it's about LEARNING***
 - Have a more realistic worldview
 - How to manage the feelings of anxiety



Behavioral Exposures

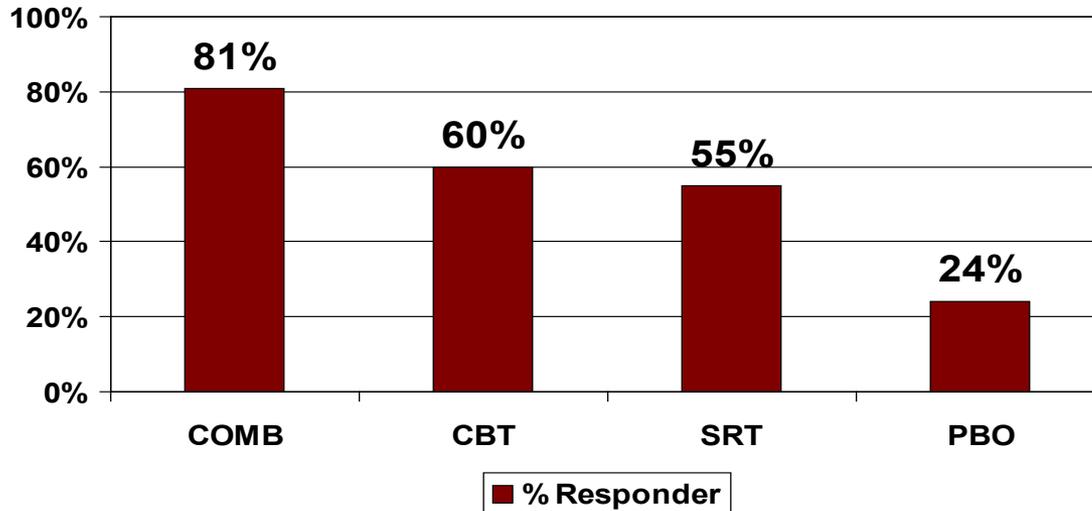
- Provide experience performing in and **managing** anxiety-provoking situations
- Practice and refine cognitive, social, emotion regulation and problem solving skills
- Gather evidence to refute anxiogenic thoughts
- **Tolerance/habituation** of anxiety
- Retrain the Brain

Key Points

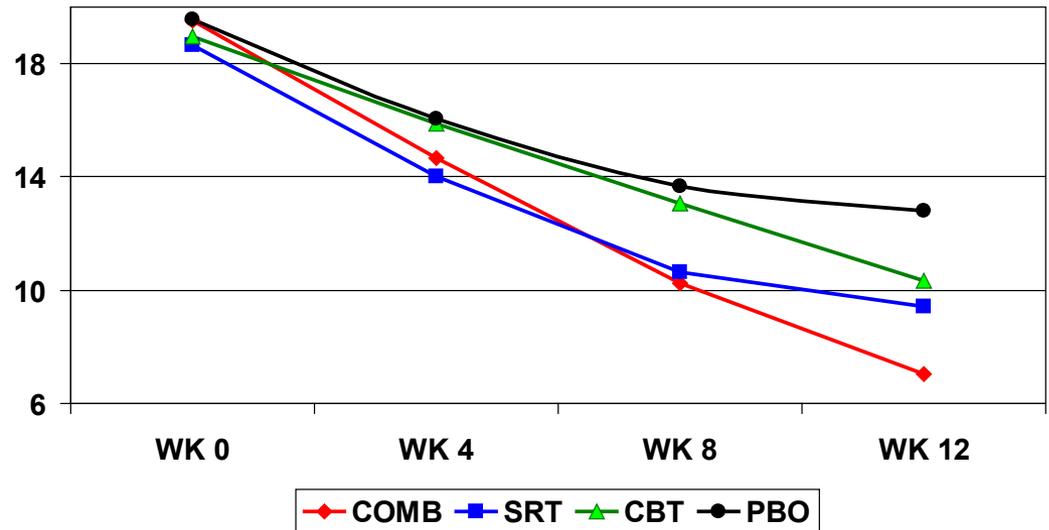
- Psychoeducation to enhance expectations
- More time spent in exposure; avoid activities that reduce anxious arousal
- Challenge anxious youth with difficult exposure tasks
- Work collaboratively with patients to ensure mastery and compliance

Child Anxiety Multimodal Treatment Study

Walkup et al., 2008



**COMBINATION >
CBT = SERTRALINE >
PLACEBO**



The NEW ENGLAND JOURNAL of MEDICINE
ESTABLISHED IN 1812 DECEMBER 25, 2008 VOL. 359 NO. 26

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Sertraline, or a Combination in Childhood Anxiety

John T. Walkup, M.D., Anne Marie Albano, Ph.D., John Piacentini, Ph.D., Boris Birmaher, M.D., Scott N. Compton, Ph.D., Joel T. Sherrill, Ph.D., Golda S. Ginsburg, Ph.D., Moira A. Rynn, M.D., James McCracken, M.D., Bruce Waslick, M.D., Satish Iyengar, Ph.D., John S. March, M.D., M.P.H., and Philip C. Kendall, Ph.D.*



Treatment Effects at 9 Years

- Participants who received **CBT, compared with pill placebo**, demonstrated improved trajectories pertaining to life satisfaction, overall impairment, and impairment in academic functioning.
- Participants who received **CBT or CBT+Medication** had increasing employment rates.
- Participants who received **Medication-only** did not differ significantly from the Placebo group.
- **Positive early intervention is associated with improved overall functioning and life satisfaction into early adulthood.**



Managing Child Anxiety at Home

Pandemic or otherwise



Parenting Strategies - General

Be Consistent

- Clear expectations about school and other areas
- Consistent routines, especially mornings
- But some flexibility as needed (fixed choices)

Stay calm (!!!!!)

- Be prepared to face child's and your anxiety
- Be firm and as neutral as possible

Focus on the positives

- Reward, praise, and give positive attention for brave behaviors, e.g., attending school
- Avoid accommodation



Parenting Strategies - COVID

- Keep your child **UPDATED** about the situation and place this information in context, but limit excessive media contact
- **LISTEN** to and **VALIDATE** your child's concerns – provide corrective information as needed
- BUT **AVOID EXCESSIVE** REASSURANCE
- Keep your child **ACTIVE** and engaged – challenge them with new activities. Puzzles, games
- Control your **own** anxiety

Parenting Strategies - COVID

- Maintain **STRUCTURE** – schedule – but be **FLEXIBLE** as needed, good to build in choices
- **STAY IN TOUCH** WITH OTHERS: Remote social events and careful live social distancing are important
- Watch for **SIGNS** of stress, avoidance, and isolation
- Stress management skills and problem-solving/coping skills – the whole family can do them

Parent Pitfalls: What to avoid

- Accommodation
- (Negative) attention
- Overprotectiveness
- Intrusiveness
- Anxious interpretation of events
- Tolerance or encouragement of escape or avoidance



Communication Strategies

DON'T

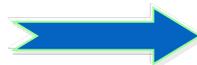
Ask loaded questions



Overreact or react with excessive emotion



Jump to a conclusion, Problem-solve too quickly or immediately respond with solutions



DO

Ask non-leading questions in empathic and neutral manner

Express empathy, caring, and validation

Express concern honestly by grounding it in reason

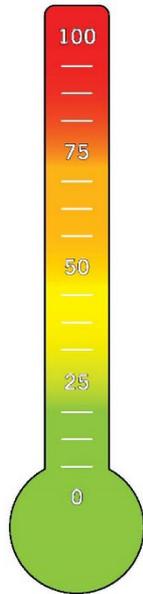
Listen and ask questions or make comments.

How to Win the Avoidance Battle

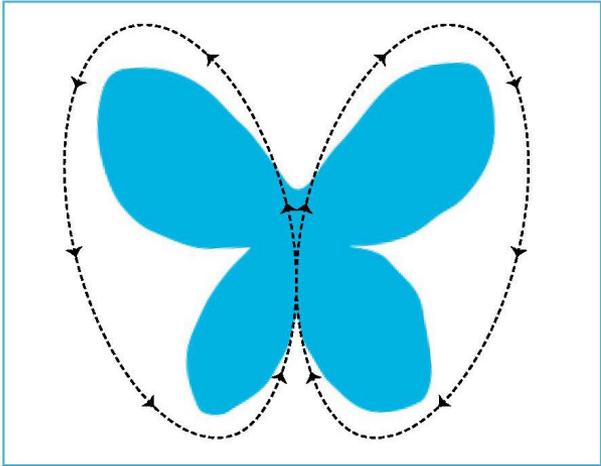
- Disengage/ignore at earliest possible point.
- Do not engage in back-and-forth arguing.
 - Extinction burst (dog at door)
- Maintain calm/non-emotional reaction.
 - Avoid punishment
 - Calmest participant wins
- As soon as child calms down, even briefly, engage him/her in different activity.
 - Positive reinforcement of appropriate behavior
 - This can include discussion of event



Feeling Thermometer



Butterfly Breath



Fuertos Juntos / Strong Together

- Bilingual School-based Family Resilience Program
- Taught in Spanish, English, Korean, Mandarin and Cantonese across LA County
- Online version in development





Anxiety/Stress Management Tools for the Family

[VIDEO](#)



Health

How can

Anxiety is a nat
However, when
usual activities,

"All children and a



Child Anxiety Resi
Support (CARES)
anxiety tends to va

These "normal" type
which may somet
— usually do not t
life. Anxiety beco
when it lasts for a
is so intense that i
ability to function
physically and em

A child who has an
show a fairly stable
(irritable or unhap



All health and health-rel
professional. Subscribe t

John
Director, U
Resilienc
Support

to seek professional

An example of "bad" stress is when
feels so overwhelmed with a problem
home or at school that it interferes
or her ability to function normally.
situations, the body activates a "fig
flight" response, resulting in heigh
strength and alertness. Once the cause
how to recognize a stressful situation, he or
she can begin to make good decisions when
managing stress.

to seek professional
Cognitive Behavioral
learn stress-management
manage their time and
For more health tips, visit uclahealth.org/m



When to seek help

"Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is often used to help children learn stress management skills and to teach them how to better manage their time and

ONLINE EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND TIP SHEETS

How can I help my child handle stress?

Stress is the way our minds react to a part or situation.

How can I help my child handle anxiety?

Anxiety is a natural human emotion and a normal reaction to life's stresses. However, when the stresses associated with anxiety interfere with a child's usual activities, he or she may have an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety becomes a problem (disorder) when it lasts for a long time each time, and is so intense that it interferes with a child's ability to function socially, academically, physically and emotionally.

Changes in mood

Irritable or unhappy

Cognitive issues

Difficulty concentrating

A child with an anxiety disorder will likely show:

For Parents - For Kids - For Providers - Resources - Support

Parents often come to me with questions about ways that they can help their child manage difficult feelings like anxiety or stress. When these questions come up, I like to remind parents that certain levels of stress are normal and can actually be helpful to children. I encourage parents to help their child learn to manage stress in positive ways but not to try to eliminate it altogether. The following are some of my favorite tips that parents can use to help their child manage anxious feelings. Even if your child is not experiencing feelings of anxiety, these tips can help them to feel more confident in their own ability to handle difficult or stressful situations.

Tips to help an anxious child:

- Gently encourage your child to do things he/she is anxious about instead of avoiding them
- Praise and support your child's efforts for attempting to approach a feared situation even if s/he is not ultimately successful



VIDEO LIBRARY



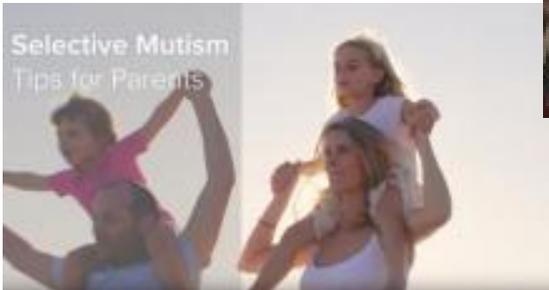
COVID-19: Mental Health and Isolation



When is it OCD?



About CARES



Selective Mutism: Tips for Parents



How Parents can help with Child Anxiety



Managing Child Anxiety at School

Pandemic or otherwise



Child Management Strategies

Consistency

- Morning and night routines
- School arrivals (e.g., check-ins)
- School schedule (e.g., knowing what to expect in each class)

Tolerating distress/anxiety

- Deep breathing
- Mindfulness-based activities
- Self-talk



Positive events

- Have things to look forward to at school
- Fun activities following school (reward for going to school)

School-based COVID Skills/Strategies

- Check in privately if the child appears to be anxious
- Identify specific people the child can go to for help (school counselor, teacher)
- Have a plan in place for when the child is feeling overly anxious
- Classroom-wide resilience exercises
- Encourage extracurriculars (built-in rewards, social support)

School Skills/Strategies

Communication style

- Give (forced) choices.
- Be sensitive and encouraging, but firm.

Which response is best?

•“Don’t be silly, why would you be anxious about that?”



•“Wow, this might be too much for you. Everything is going to be okay, don’t worry, you don’t have to do this.”



•“I can see that you’re feeling anxious right now. Let’s take a few minutes, and then try this again. You’ve got this!”



Recognizing and Managing Anxiety in the Classroom

A course for educators developed by UCLA CARES in collaboration with the LACDMH-UCLA Prevention Center of Excellence

Module 1 Meeting the Course Participants



*Soft-spoken
magnet enthusiast*

MATEO



*Warm-hearted
second guesser*

MAYA



*Quiet hoodie
aficionado*

LIAM



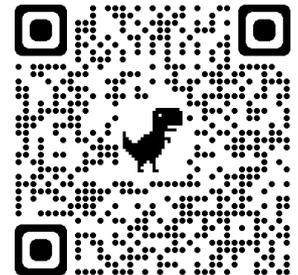
*Riddled-with-worry
thespian*

SOPHIA



Recognizing and Managing Anxiety in the Classroom Course

- Educators choose how to address students' avoidance of typical academic and social tasks, and then see those choices play out dramatically.
- Paired expert commentary guides educators to foster students' resilience.
- For each story, learners receive tools and guidance to enhance communication between school and home
- Available free to all 75,000 LAUSD teachers and staff serving over 650,000 Students
- National rollout currently in progress



Mateo - Separation Anxiety





VIDEO



Should Dad:



Insist that Mateo stay at school?

or

Let him come home?

Scaffolding Parent-Teacher Communication

Scaffolding Plan

When children are having difficulty doing things because of anxiety, it is helpful to provide some scaffolding to encourage and reward brave behaviors. Scaffolding is a great tool to set kids up for success by tackling a problem one step at a time.

First, name the desired end goal - the solution you want. Then, work backwards from there: list the hardest steps first, moving down the ladder to the easiest steps towards this goal. (Hint: The easiest step should be one that happens regularly already!) Once you have decided upon an easy first step, have the child practice this step (a brave behavior) repeatedly until they feel comfortable moving up to the next (harder) step. Practice, then praise, again and again, until they eventually reach the highest rung of the ladder.

Hard

Join a conversation with classmates at recess.

Say "hi" to a new person.

Answer one question in class without being called on.

Have a conversation with classmates during group time.

Read one sentence out loud to the whole class during reading time.

Read aloud to a reading partner in the reading area.

Have a conversation with a friend at lunch.

Answer one question in class out loud when called on.

Say "hi" to a friend.

Answer three questions for the teacher before going to recess (after other students leave).

Read aloud to yourself in the reading area.

Easy

Goal

Read one full paragraph out loud in class



AT HOME

Scaffolding Plan

When children are having difficulty doing things because of anxiety, it is helpful to provide some scaffolding to encourage and reward brave behaviors. Scaffolding is a great tool to set kids up for success by tackling a problem one step at a time.

First, name the desired end goal - the solution you want. Then, work backwards from there: list the hardest steps first, moving down the ladder to the easiest steps towards this goal. (Hint: The easiest step should be one that happens regularly already!) Once you have decided upon an easy first step, have the child practice this step (a brave behavior) repeatedly until they feel comfortable moving up to the next (harder) step. Practice, then praise, again and again, until they eventually reach the highest rung of the ladder.

Hard

Have a conversation with an unfamiliar kid at a birthday party.

Join in group activities.

Have a conversation with a friend at a birthday party.

Have picture taken.

Say "hi" to a new person.

Lie in bedroom while dad is not in sight, in an adjacent room.

Lie in bedroom while dad is in sight, but not in the room.

Say "hi" to a friend.

Play in bedroom while dad is not in sight, in an adjacent room.

Play in bedroom while dad is in sight, but outside of the bedroom.

Play on one side of the room with dad on the other side of the room.

Easy

Goal

Have a playdate at home with a friend.



AT SCHOOL



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Matteo 's Brave Behaviors

Date: Sept. 28

I will try to...

Mon

Tue

Wed

Thu

Fri

Pack book bag and place by door before bed

Get to school on time

Stay at school all day

Say "hi" to one person besides mom and dad

My reward for the week is:

Pick the movie for movie night

to earn my reward:

10

Liam - Social Anxiety

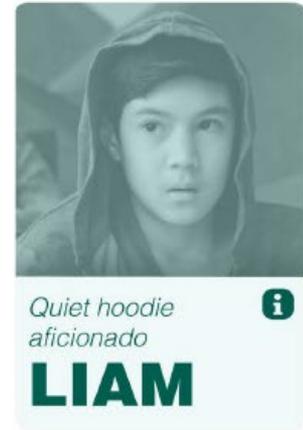




VIDEO



Should Mr. Johnson



Make Liam give his book report now?

or

Let him off the hook?

Scaffolding Parent-Teacher Communication

Noticing Anxiety

Name: Liam

Date: May 2020

Keeping track of situations that cause anxiety can help identify when you might become anxious the next time. It can also help pinpoint which strategies help manage anxiety and which ones don't. Fill in the chart with details about when, where, and how anxiety appears. Rate how strong the anxiety was at its worst. Then list anything you did to manage your anxiety, and how you felt after.

When?	Where?	What?	How Strong?	What Helped?	How Strong?
• Time • Day • Date	Where was this and what was happening as the anxiety hit?	What anxious thoughts, feelings, and/or actions did you notice?	When you noticed your anxiety at its worst, how bad was it? 1 = not too bad 10 = as bad as it gets	What things did you do to try to help? What helped the most?	About 20 min after you tried something, how bad was the anxiety? 1 = not too bad 10 = as bad as it gets
Tuesday after lunch	Mr. Casey started to call on students to do their presentations.	My stomach started hurting and I had to go to the bathroom. I felt shaky and hot.	8.5	I asked to go to the bathroom. I felt a little bit better in the bathroom.	6.5
Wednesday morning before class	Mr. Casey had me practice my presentation to just him.	I thought I was stupid. My stomach hurt. My voice and hands were shaking.	7.5	Mr. Casey showed me a breathing exercise. I think the breathing helped.	5
Saturday afternoon	My parents took me to the neighborhood BBQ.	I felt dizzy and hot. I was thinking I didn't want to be there and I didn't know anyone.	7	My mom introduced me to a neighbor I went to preschool with. He was nice.	4.5



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Monitoring Social Anxiety

Perfectionism Exposures

Scaffolding Plan

Name: Maya

Date: May 2020

Work on your goals by earning points based on how hard a task is. Write down things you want to practice from the hardest things to the easiest. (Hint: The easiest should be one that happens regularly already!) Once you have decided upon an easy first task, practice this task (a brave behavior) repeatedly until you feel comfortable moving up to the next task. Assign points to each task so that you can earn your way to a reward. Practice, again and again, until you eventually reach the highest rung - and enjoy the reward!

Hard

Points

- 25 Complete homework assignments for a week without erasing and rewriting anything.
- 15 Turn in test on time (even if unfinished).
- 14 Tear off the corner of your test before turning it in.
- 12 Write name backward on homework for a week and turn it in.
- 10 Turn in homework on time (even if unfinished).
- 10 Intentionally misspell words on my homework and ask parents to check it before turning it in.
- 8 Join Zoom call with hair covering a part of my face.
- 2 Print out a coloring sheet and color outside the lines.

Easy

Goal

Earn 100 points

Reward

Go to movies with moms



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Tips for Teachers and Families

Social Anxiety Tips for Families

Social anxiety includes many forms of worry about how others perceive, accept, or judge us. Those with social anxiety may feel anxious about a variety of social situations: the beginning of a new school year, oral presentations in front of the class, or attending a party with teammates. Even kids who did not experience significant social anxiety in elementary school may begin noticing more anxiety during middle school and high school. Adolescence typically highlights questions about identity and feeling included, and social anxiety relates to these concerns. While many kids worry about being judged or excluded by others from time to time, these worries can be more intense, persistent, and impairing for some kids than they are for others.

What are the symptoms of social anxiety?

- **Worries about what others think.** Significant concerns about being judged, embarrassed, made fun of, or being rejected are common. These worries can sound like, "What if I do something stupid? What if everyone laughs at me? Are they mad at me?"
- **Avoidance of social situations.** Social anxiety might lead to trying to get out of going to parties, pursuing a talent or interest outside of school, speaking to unfamiliar people (even family members), and participating fully in class (e.g., raising our hand, giving a presentation, working in groups, and even talking to others at lunch or recess).
- **Perseveration (or sticky thoughts).** We may replay things we said or did (online or in person) over and over again to figure out if it was ok, if we sounded dumb, or if we upset or disappointed someone. Likewise, we might worry a lot about an upcoming social situation, imagining all the different ways it could go poorly.
- **Withdrawal or isolation.** We may remove ourselves or stay on the sidelines of social interactions due to anxiety. This could look like: sitting a distance from peers, avoiding eye contact, or hiding under clothing or accessories (e.g., hoodies, sunglasses, headphones).

When does social anxiety become problematic?

Social anxiety disorder affects approximately 7% of youth, with relatively higher rates found in adolescents. In a class of 35 students, 2 or 3 would have social anxiety severe enough to impact their lives.

Persistence: Once an anxiety-provoking situation is over, the social anxiety does not go away. For most sufferers, the anxiety happens in different types of social situations.

Distress: Anxiety can cause us and our families distress. We may feel significant anxiety ahead of, during, and/or after a social situation. We may also feel physically unwell when anxious (e.g., stomach-ache, nausea).

Impairment: The social anxiety gets in the way of school, family, and/or social life. For instance, youth with social anxiety may not participate in class (and then get a lower class participation grade, might have difficulty talking with extended family members, and/or could struggle to meet people or make friends).

How is social anxiety treated?

Social anxiety disorder is best treated with cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). CBT teaches about the connection between our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Most importantly, treatment focuses on facing fears in a planned, gradual way while adding new skills to best manage anxiety when it happens.



For more information, resources, and advice, visit
carescenter.ucla.edu
info@carescenter.ucla.edu [@CARESCenter](https://twitter.com/CARESCenter)

Test Anxiety Tips for Teachers

For many youth, taking tests can be an anxiety-provoking task. They might worry about how they will do on the test, whether or not they prepared enough, or how their grades will be impacted. These concerns are typically short-lived and do not negatively impact their well-being, self-esteem, or day-to-day life. In fact, some anxiety can be a helpful motivator to do well on the test. For other youth, however, test anxiety can persist, causing significant distress and impairment.

Behavioral symptoms

- Asking for reassurance about test performance
- Expressing doubts
- Delaying start of test
- Difficulty finishing test

Physical symptoms

- Shortness of breath
- Heart pounding
- Headaches
- Stomachaches

Cognitive functioning

- Brain fog
- Second-guessing answers
- Memory impairment

What can teachers do to help?

Help develop good study habits.

Encourage students to break content into smaller, more easily digestible chunks and discourage last-minute cramming.

Provide grading opportunities for more than just tests.

Allow students to demonstrate their learning in various formats: take home assignments, group projects, presentations, etc.

Encourage effort and discourage perfectionism.

Highlight and reward hard work instead of placing emphasis on grades achieved.

When does test anxiety become problematic?

Duration: Does the worry happen only right before and/or during the test or does it start way in advance?

Persistence: Does the worry stop shortly after the test or does it last for much longer?

Distress: Is the worry only mild or does it significantly increase when thinking about the test (e.g., crying episodes, feeling overwhelmed, increased irritability)?

Impairment: Does the worry about the test get in the way of actually studying and taking the test?



For more information, resources, and advice, visit
carescenter.ucla.edu
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kids

When should parents talk to a mental health professional?

When your child's anxiety...

...seems greater than what you would expect for a certain situation.

... is starting long before a stressful event or lasting for a long time after an event.

... is impacting their schoolwork, friendships, or family dynamics.

...is preventing your child from fully enjoying life.



It's fine to feel butterflies



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