

COUNSELLING CONNECTION: P. Knox

Supporting Youth With Anxiety

Having some anxiety is a healthy and normal human feeling that helps to protect and prepare us. However, for some people, anxiety can cause intense levels of worry, fear, and distress. Anxiety has become a prevalent mental concern with many youth. Anxiety disorders can cause repetitive thoughts that can create uncomfortable emotions and maladaptive behaviors. The good news is that there are many strategies that we can teach children and teens to use to manage anxiety. We can empower them to be comfortable in the face of anxiety and to know that anxiety does not need to take over their lives.

“The mind is like water. When It’s turbulent, it’s difficult to see, when it is calm, everything becomes clear.”

Prasad Mahes

Reasons for escalated anxiety in children:

- High parent expectations
- History of trauma
- Increased screen time/video games
- Social media (constant comparing/attention/acceptance seeking)
- Increased Exposure to negative current events
- Lack of physical exercise/play
- Lack of sleep
- Increased absence of parent involvement
- Over scheduled with activities
- High Parent stress/anxiety
- Biological predisposition
- Increased home/school responsibilities

“When we are stressed, we regress.” Juli Alvarado

What Is A Panic Attack?

Sudden Intense feeling of fear, usually associated with at least 4 of the following symptoms:

- Shortness of breath
- Sense of choking
- Heart palpitations
- Sweating
- Chest pain
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Sense of choking
- Trembling
- Chills/hot flushes
- Fear of dying
- Feeling detached from world

Remain calm, patient and in control if your child is having a panic attack. It will pass but may last up to 10 minutes. Encourage deep belly breathing following attack and reassure child that he or she is safe. Seek professional support for you child, as panic attacks can be a sign of underlying emotional struggles.

How Can I support My Anxious Child?

- Educate child on what healthy anxiety is (a healthy response/feeling that our bodies use to protect/motivate us)
- Validate feelings of anxiety, even if you do not understand (the feelings are very REAL).
- Remind child he or she is not alone. A lot of people feel this!
- Externalize anxiety struggles so that child can feel distance (Instead of saying, “your anxiety,” say “the anxiety”).
- Avoid telling child not to worry (this is not helpful).
- Be curious about what the worry/anxiety is and how it is presenting itself in the body (What does the anxiety make you feel, think, want to do?)
- Talk about the worry/anxiety and ask the child to come up with ways to shrink the worry and be in control of it.
- Remind child that anxiety can be there and we can notice it (mindfulness) without doing what it is telling us to do.
- Have child illustrate the anxiety and tell you about it.
- Model deep belly breathing when you feel anxious.
- Model, encourage, and post positive statements “ I can handle this,” “I have felt this before and made it through,” etc.
- Use visual reminders of how to cope with anxiety.
- Create calm environment when child comes home from school.
- Allow child break time between school and chores/homework.
- Encourage child to do engage in physical activity.
- Encourage child to take healthy risks when fears arise.
- Purchase appropriate literature for child so he or she can feel supported (See my website/Resources/Anxiety/Literature).

Seek professional help if you feel your child is struggling with anxiety or you think he or she might have a disorder. Warning signs include decreased ability to sleep, repetitive behaviors/ thoughts, panic attacks, complaining of aches and pains when not sick, lack of ability to focus, wanting to stay home from school, stalling when leaving a room/house, extreme reactions to typical situations, excessive time spent on tasks, panic attacks.

Article References

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