

Best Practices for Anxious Children and Teens

Christina Kirsch, MS

Sharon Shorak, LSW

The Anxious Child

▶ What we see...

- ▶ Behavioral changes
- ▶ Emotional dysregulation
- ▶ Changes in academic performance
- ▶ Peer and social difficulties
- ▶ Medical and health complaints
- ▶ Poor school performance
- ▶ School refusal

▶ What they feel...

- ▶ Hypersensitivity to criticism
- ▶ Self-doubt and anticipated rejection
- ▶ Misreading social and environmental cues
- ▶ Somatic symptoms
- ▶ Avoidance
- ▶ Predicting poor outcomes
- ▶ “Stuck” on past and future worries

Common Diagnoses

- ▶ Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- ▶ Separation Anxiety Disorder
- ▶ Panic Disorder
- ▶ Social Phobia
- ▶ Selective Mutism

CBT for Anxiety Disorders

- ▶ Psychoeducation
 - ▶ What is anxiety and why do I have it?
- ▶ Identify physical symptoms of anxiety
 - ▶ How it feels to be afraid
- ▶ Focus on the cognitions associated with anxiety
 - ▶ Expecting bad things to happen
- ▶ Coach children on the use of coping strategies
 - ▶ Attitudes and actions that can help
 - ▶ Living with anxiety
- ▶ Reinforcement
 - ▶ Rewarding engagement in activities that elicit anxiety
 - ▶ Offering praise

Provide Understanding

- ▶ Help the child develop a basic understanding of what anxiety is
 - ▶ Psychoeducation - What is anxiety? Does everyone feel this way? Why do people feel anxious in the first place?
 - ▶ Somatic Symptoms - The physical manifestation of anxiety
- ▶ Help parents understand what their child is experiencing
 - ▶ Education regarding cognitive and behavioral aspects of anxiety
 - ▶ What are somatic symptoms?
 - ▶ How to support an anxious child
 - ▶ The balance of validation with push for change

Identifying Physical Symptoms

- ▶ What changes in your body when you are feeling frightened?
 - ▶ Heart racing
 - ▶ Sweating
 - ▶ Shaking
 - ▶ Thoughts racing
 - ▶ Cold sweat
 - ▶ Tense muscles
 - ▶ Tunnel vision
 - ▶ Dizziness
- ▶ Panic attacks
- ▶ Sympathetic nervous system activation
 - ▶ Fight or Flight Response
- ▶ Somatic Complaints
 - ▶ Headaches
 - ▶ Stomach aches
 - ▶ Muscle tension
 - ▶ Chest pain
 - ▶ Trouble breathing

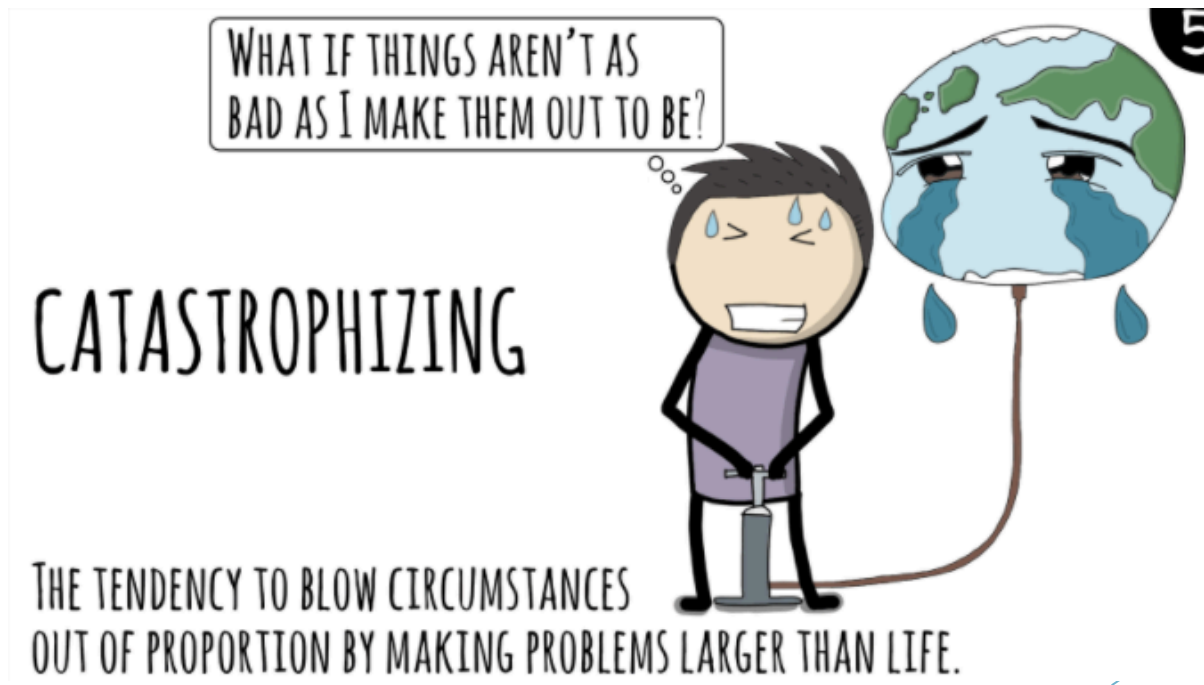
Relevant Coping Strategies

- ▶ Mindfulness and meditation
- ▶ Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- ▶ Guided Imagery
- ▶ Grounding Strategies
- ▶ TIPP Skill
- ▶ Breathing Awareness
- ▶ Belly Breathing (Deep Breathing)



Identifying Worry Thoughts

- ▶ Be creative!
- ▶ Thought tracking tools
- ▶ Suggest possibilities
 - ▶ Use of self
 - ▶ Other children I work with...
- ▶ Discussion of thought distortions
- ▶ Use of humor
- ▶ Identifying worst-case scenario
- ▶ In-vivo assessment



Challenging Worry Thoughts

- ▶ Evaluating the Evidence
 - ▶ What evidence supports that thought?
 - ▶ What evidence refutes that thought?
 - ▶ Are there alternative explanations?
 - ▶ Is it possible that the problem seems bigger than it is?
- ▶ Identifying distortions
- ▶ Reality Checking
- ▶ Experimentation

Building Problem Solving Skills

- ▶ Typically deficits in problem solving skills leads to feelings of helplessness and incompetence
- ▶ Teach a method for dealing with the worst case scenario:
 - ▶ Identify the problem
 - ▶ Identify your goal
 - ▶ Generate possible solutions
 - ▶ Evaluate pros and cons of those solutions
 - ▶ Select your course of action
 - ▶ Evaluate outcome

Graduated Exposures

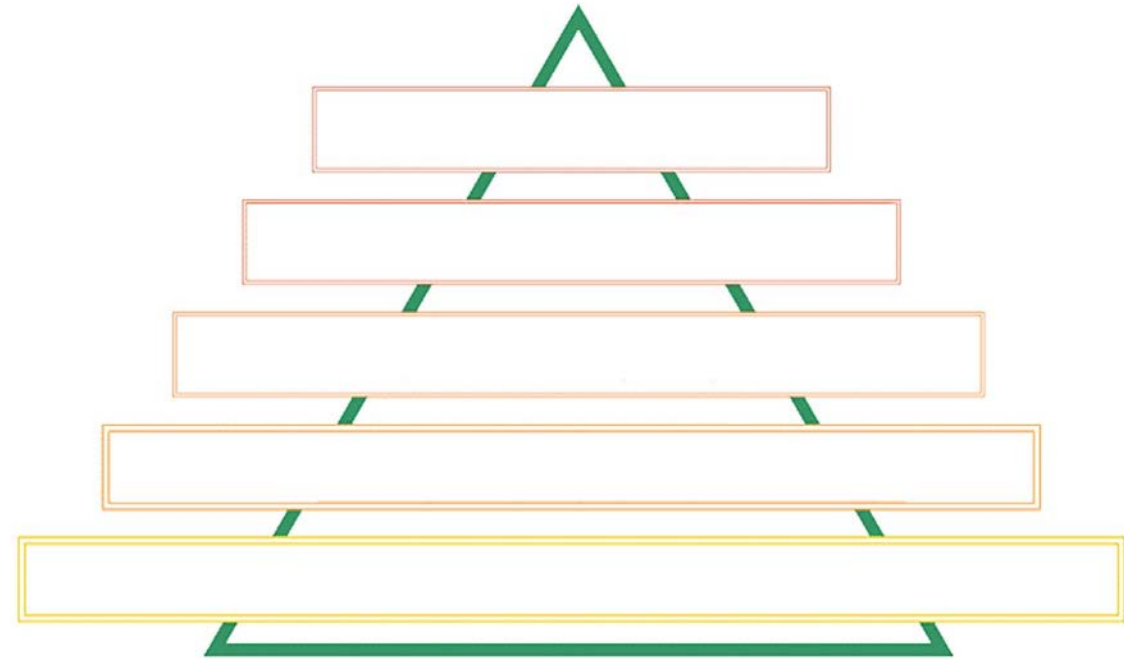
- ▶ Identify situations that elicit anxiety
 - ▶ This is typically easier for those with Social Anxiety, Specific Phobias, and Panic Disorder
 - ▶ Sometimes challenging for Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- ▶ Identify the overarching fear(s)
 - ▶ What is the big fear?
 - ▶ Fear of public embarrassment
 - ▶ Triggering situations: Talking in class, calling to make an appointment, ordering food at a restaurant, introducing yourself to someone new
 - ▶ Fear of losing a loved one
 - ▶ Triggering situations: Sleeping away from home, going to school, loved one going on a trip, not being able to call the loved one, loved one going to a doctor's appointment

Getting Buy-In

- ▶ Psychoeducation regarding the cycle of avoidance
 - ▶ For older teens, discuss the distress intolerance model
 - ▶ For children help them identify how avoidance has made their anxiety worse
- ▶ Identifying times that they have unknowingly used an exposure technique
 - ▶ For example - their first appointment with you, their first day at school, sitting in your waiting room, etc.
- ▶ What is their life worth living? Do current patterns help them achieve those goals?
- ▶ Willingness versus Willfulness

Building a Fear Hierarchy

- ▶ Organize situations that elicit anxiety under the umbrella of the overarching fear
- ▶ Collaboratively generate hierarchy of those situations
 - ▶ Have the child rate each situation - (1-10, how anxious does it make you to think about...)
 - ▶ Then organize those situations from least anxiety provoking to most
- ▶ Ideally the hierarchy should begin with something anxiety provoking but achievable - build up some victories to start
- ▶ Don't overload the child, ideally 4-5 situations
- ▶ Should hope to "over-expose"



Constructing Exposures

- ▶ Start very small and continue to work up the scale
 - ▶ Evaluate each exposure afterwards (SUDS ratings)
- ▶ In-Vivo Exposures versus Imaginal Exposure
- ▶ Exposure ideas:
 - ▶ Separation Anxiety - Having mom sit outside the door, parents sitting in the waiting room, parents waiting outside of the building, parents dropping child off and leaving
 - ▶ Generalized Anxiety - Practice doodling, drawing in the dark, asking a teacher to clarify instructions, asking a friend for help on an assignment
 - ▶ Panic Attacks - Exposure to physical symptoms (increased heart rate, feeling warm/cold, feeling dizzy)
 - ▶ Social Phobia - Talking to someone new, approaching a group of people, calling someone on the phone, calling to schedule an appointment, raising hand in class, giving a presentation, ordering food at a restaurant, asking for directions
 - ▶ Selective Mutism - Nonverbal communication, tandem play, single word responses, answering/asking questions, talking to peers

Parent Involvement

- ▶ How much do we involve the family?
 - ▶ Anxiety disorders are often heritable - it is likely that others in the family have anxiety disorders
 - ▶ Does the family system perpetuate the child's anxiety and behavioral avoidance patterns?
- ▶ Provide psychoeducation to help the family support the child in treatment
- ▶ Assistance with exposures out of session
- ▶ Skills coaching
- ▶ Discussion of available treatment options
- ▶ How to identify and disrupt avoidance patterns

- ▶ We acknowledge with gratitude the Pennsylvania Legislature for its support of the STAR-Center and our outreach efforts. □
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- ▶ A copy of this presentation will be posted on the STAR-Center web site following our conference

References

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