

ANXIETY IN CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS - A QUESTION POSED URGENTLY

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Angry parents at fault for troubled kids

- ▣ [NATASHA BITA](#)
- ▣
- ▣ The Australian
- ▣ April 26, 2016
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- ▣ Article based on The National Health and Medical Research Council funded the study by the Centre for Population Health Research at the University of South Australia, reporting data from the Federal Government's longitudinal study of 10,640 Australian children.

- ▣ **Study in the May 2016 A&NZ J. of Psychiatry**
- ▣ **... angry, cold and “over protective” parents are rearing a generation of troubled children and one in five Australian kids are at high risk of mental illness when they grow up... Parental anger, bullying and ‘low parent warmth’ are the biggest triggers for children’s distress. Other key risk factors are divorce, parental alcohol or drug abuse, parents own mental health issues and conflict between warring parents.**
- ▣ **(A sobering profile, if the incidence of “high risk” is 1 in 5.)**

- ▣ “One in seven children aged four to 13 will exhibit a ‘diagnosable mental disorder’, including depression or hyperactivity, in a 12-month period”.
- ▣ “Parental anger, bullying and ‘low parent warmth’ are the main triggers for children’s mental health problems”.
- ▣ “Risk from negative parenting behaviours is highly prevalent in Australian families,” concludes the study, published in the *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*.
- ▣ “Even by infancy, risk factors for adult mental illness are highly prevalent, with 51.7 per cent of - infants having multiple risks.”

- ▣ **Matt Sanders** (founder of PPP parenting program adopted in 25 countries)
- ▣ **“ children benefit from strong parenting that is positive and consistent, where there are proper boundaries and limits and they know where they stand... Parents need knowledge and confidence, so they’re not always shooting from the hip and reacting to the moment. They really need to take care of their own emotions - self care is one of the most fundamental principles of positive parenting” A helpful message**

▣ Michael Carr-Gregg

- ▣ “.... Michael says, ‘Parents shield their children from any negativity so that when life confronts them, they are completely incapable of dealing with loss, grief or stress.’ He spoke of a child’s mother upon the child’s gold fish dying who rang to enquire whether she should buy another one that looked the same to replace it. He replied “You need to teach your child to deal with grief.”
Colourful, but an excellent message

- ▣ It is also true that parents are loving, committed, warm, giving and considered. I see this in most of the parents I deal with. So, I put this forward as further evidence based on clinical experience; this has a place alongside evidence based on clinical research.
- ▣ Psychology an imprecise science

OBJECTIVES

- ▣ 1. Some ideas about **what anxiety is**
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- ▣ 2. Some idea of the difference between **normal anxiety and anxiety DISORDER**
 - ▣ **Interlude (poem)**
- ▣ 3. Ideas about what young people (children and adolescents) can do for themselves to manage anxiety (**Treatment**)

- ▣ 4. Ideas about what parents CAN DO and CANNOT DO (and should resist attempting?) to assist youngsters who are anxious (Treatment)

- ▣ Interlude (What's our society contributing to Anxiety??)

- ▣ 5. What factors PROTECT against too much suffering from anxiety (Prevention)

▣ **6. Summary** (Ten take-away Tips)

THE NATURE OF ANXIETY

What is It?

Definitions

- ▣ **FEAR** Imminent danger of harm or loss; immediate realistic threat to our instinct for comfort, survival, pleasure
- ▣ **WORRY** Concern about the possibility of an unwanted outcome where concern is reality-based and not significantly impeding
- ▣ **TRAUMA** Atypical, unpredictable event that represents an assault on core assumptions regarding safety/well being
- ▣ **STRESS** Energy demand depletes/exceeds available resources
- ▣ **ANXIETY** Fear sense without an external object; anticipated threat is unrealistic; demands unending vigilance ("what if?" threat) *Anxiety: the stress of excessive avoidance and control*

FEAR & ANXIETY

- ▣ **As a general concept, Anxiety is much more complex and troubling than Fear and much less dangerous. Fear is a frightening, yet simple emotion; Anxiety is incredibly complicated.**

FEAR

“A wild dog is here – Quick! Jump the fence!”;

ANXIETY

“What if there is a wild dog in the Park?”

“I hope Billy/Susie doesn’t invite me over on the W/E; he /she always wants to play in the park.”

- ▣ Anxiety is Anticipatory “What If?” It is the distressing emotion that attaches to the future ; hope, anticipation are positive emotions re future.
- ▣ Regret/guilt is retrospective - the distressing emotion that applies to the past; .

Neither can be acted on, other than mentally

Outcome emotions

- ▣ **Anger, frustration, Sadness, despair, grief, jealousy, sorrow, envy, resentment are all emotions in response to an Outcome**
- ▣ **As these emotions are a reaction to actual events they can be acted upon as opposed to managed**

ANXIETY IS THREAT

- ▣ **There is an inevitability and endlessness about threat**
- ▣ **It cannot be cured or eliminated**
- ▣ **It cannot be addressed**
- ▣ **It is intrusive and unwanted**

Hence, it is depressive and obsessive

It is like an eclipse (one needs to get on its good side)

Objects of Anxiety

- ▣ Performance & Social Attention (Exams, Public speaking, Social interaction & Parties, Job seeking)

Harm (crashes, break-ins, fire, contamination)

- ▣ Security/safety (Phobias, Dark, Separation)
- ▣ Social 'taboos' (Blushing, vomiting, sweating, drugs, sexuality)
- ▣
- ▣ Collapse (Falling Apart, Craziiness, Losing control)

Underlying Threat

Death, Rejection, Exclusion, Shame, failure, doubt & ultimately, loss of control, loss of self.

- ▣ **These are what the threat represents or means to an individual**

- ▣ So, the threat of failing the exam is not the cause for anxiety. Nor is the threat that I will not be sure what to say or the threat I will blush at the Party cause for anxiety. These are more causes of worry & concern
- ▣ The anxiety cause is more like “If I fail the exam or I’m not sure what to say, then if people are disappointed in me, or they reject me, or are critical of me I lose the acceptable sense of my self?”.

▣ **What is Normal Anxiety and How does it Differ from Abnormal Anxiety?**

. Difference Between Anxiety Order and Anxiety Disorder

Anxiety a Universal Phenomenon on a continuum from Order to Disorder

- ▣ **Degree – Intensity, Frequency and Pervasiveness. How much it impedes normal day to day activity? Phobias (encapsulated) less severe than pervasive anxieties such as school refusal and OCD and social anxiety (more widespread threat, severe restriction)**
- ▣ **Great difference between the threat of significant embarrassment (mild anxiety) through to the panic that one's very being will collapse and will never recover – one's sense of self “destroyed to the core”.**

PREVALENCE OF ANXIETY DISORDER

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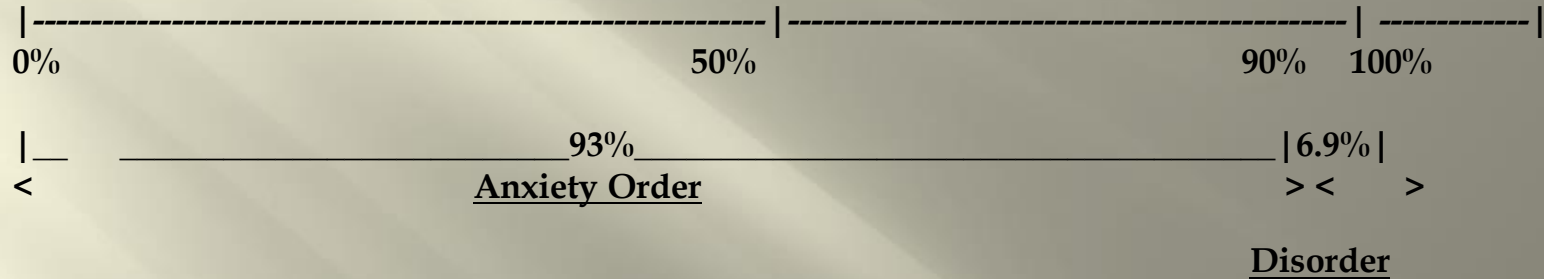
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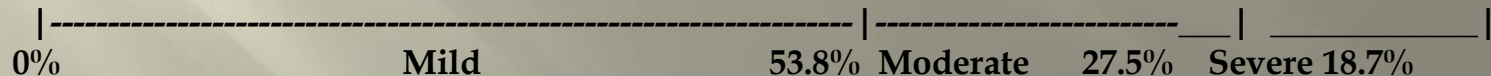
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ANXIETY CONTINUUM



SEVERITY OF ANXIETY DISORDER



So, 18.7% of the 7% with Disorder suffer severely - about 2% of 11-17 year-olds

Report on the second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (Aug 2015)

- ▣ **Anxiety Disorder** seen as a group of conditions. All involve escape from threat

Four types are most common –

- ▣ **OCD**. (escape acceptance)
- ▣ **Separation** escape separation (independence)
- ▣ **Social** escape social attention/evaluation
- ▣ **Generalized** - collective

SEVERITY

- ▣ Not a significant amount of reliable data on the factors influencing the course and longer term outcome of childhood emotional disorder
- ▣ Co-Morbidity (depression, ODD, learning difficulty co-occurring)
- ▣ Duration of Anxiety
- ▣ Social Skills Difficulty
- ▣ Suitability to school
- ▣ Recreational involvement
- ▣ Illness – self, family members
- ▣ Access to supportive, positive role models – Attachment figures
- ▣ Level of retreat into symptom
- ▣ Traumatic Events
- ▣ Socio-Economic Disadvantage
- ▣ 7% mild-moderate disturbance; 1-2% significant disruption

- ▣ When I'm Upset
- ▣
- ▣ I shut myself down
- ▣ I have no motivation for anything
- ▣ I tell myself nobody cares
- ▣ Even though I know some do
- ▣
- ▣ I think about all the negative things
- ▣ I could possibly think of
- ▣ I give myself all the pain
- ▣ Thinking I deserve it
- ▣ I'm not sure why I do that
- ▣ But that's just how I am

- ▣ **Depression versus Anxiety**
- ▣ At one moment your depression is telling you
- ▣ That you don't care what happens
- ▣ Then the next moment, your anxiety is screaming and clawing at you to do something.
- ▣ Having depression and anxiety is a constant war inside of yourself
- ▣ Though there are no winners

- ▣ Anxiety comes as a haywire mind
- ▣ A situation in your head
- ▣ Worlds away from everyone
- ▣ Words unsaid
- ▣ Scared to be anyone, much less yourself
- ▣
- ▣ But most of all
- ▣ It comes
- ▣ And it never really leaves

- ▣ The Co-Relationship of Anxiety and Depressed Mood
- ▣
- ▣ The Idea that anxiety is neither Rational nor Irrational
- ▣ It is something separate to both that I'm going to call "*emotion-speak*"
- ▣
- ▣ I argue we have to take account of this in order to deal with resistance and assist anxiety.

ANXIETY MANAGEMENT

WHAT YOUNGSTERS CAN DO TO HELP THEMSELVES

CBT Practice in Treatment of Anxiety

Exposure is the “*sine qua non*” of anxiety treatment

- ▣ Anxiety reduces when we embrace doubt and threat and increases when we need to control and avoid doubt and threat.
- ▣ This requires a decision to confront doubt

Complications to CBT Practice – Resistance

- ▣ Motivation: *“I have not decided I want this situation to change”*
- ▣ Hope *“I don’t think things can change”*
- ▣ Insight: *“It is just how I am”*
- ▣ Emotional Independence: *“If it is to be, it is up to me”*

- ▣ The Work when Anxiety is significantly disruptive is to work on those factors influencing resistance.
- ▣ Aim is to improve a *youngsters relationship with their anxiety experience*
- ▣ To help youngsters develop the ability to find hope, motivation, independence, insight

DECISION UNDERPINNING CHANGE

What if the intolerable, unthinkable threat actually happens? I cannot let it happen. Yet, it is always possible. How can I prevent the possible?

This requires a decision. This decision is the fundamental strategy in overcoming (managing) anxiety

- ▣ Will I ESCAPE? (avoid) the threat?
- ▣ Will I EMBRACE? (accept) the threat?
- ▣ Threat avoidance = Anxiety (Usually expressed through a symptom)
- ▣ Threat acceptance = Increased independence and less vigilance

Interlude

ANXIETY AND SOCIETY

- ▣ **No social commentator but do wish to make a comment only to say that yes, anxiety exists in the context of the dynamics of society and one's immediate environment.**
- ▣ **The need to adapt to and embrace what is available to us and update our sense of dangers. Seems that young people are on fire with what they have access to, yet there are things confronting them as well and this is the nature of evolution.**
- ▣ **Speed of change? Constancy of accessibility? Virtual versus In Vivo communication? Will it be the death of us?**
- ▣ **Get on board - catch the slow boat with me if you wish " HMAS Back to the Seventies" but we all have to get on board.**

**WHAT PARENTS CAN &
CANNOT DO TO ASSIST
YOUNGSTERS MANAGE
ANXIETY**

Anxiety Shared in the Parent-Child Dyad

The pathway from oneness with primary carers to separateness (or independence) is in its early stages throughout childhood and so *anxiety is a phenomenon very much operating within a close, inter-dependent relationship.*

- ▣ Like other developmental considerations, in the early stages anxiety seems shared, although importantly the child is always the sole owner of their anxiety experience and parents must appreciate and respect this boundary. And, parents can be anxious in their own right. Anxiety can be addressed as a phenomenon **shared in the parent-child dyad**

ANXIETY CONTRIBUTES TO THE FOLLOWING

- ▣ **DEPENDENCY**
- ▣ **OBSESSION (SELF OBSESSION)**
- ▣ **WITHDRAWAL**
- ▣ **IRRITABILITY/DEPRESSED MOOD**
- ▣ **LOWERED CONFIDENCE**
- ▣ **CONTROLLING/MANIPULATION**
- ▣ **DISTRESS**
- ▣ **NEED FOR CERTAINTY**
- ▣ **PERCEIVED ABANDONMENT AND INJUSTICE**
- ▣ **AGGRESSION**

DEPENDENCY

▣ In respect of ANXIETY experience

- ▣ "THIS IS YOUR FEELING AND I AM INTERESTED AND SUPPORTIVE, HOWEVER IT IS NOT MY FEELING AND I CANNOT TAKE IT OVER"
- ▣ "I WILL RESPECT WHAT I CAN DO AS WELL AS WHAT I CANNOT DO"
- ▣ "PROMISE ME MUM/DAD!"
- ▣ LET THEM USE THEIR JUDGEJEMENT

▣

▣ In respect of DAY TO DAY ACTIVITY

▣

▣ ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE

▣ GIVE RESPONSIBILITY

▣ HAVE EXPECTATIONS - CHORES AND THE LIKE

OBSESSION

- ▣ **All anxiety is Obsessive. Anxiety is more common in youngsters who like to control things, including danger, failure embarrassment, etc. If you want to control something you try to eliminate it, master it, avoid it or prevent.**
- ▣ **If it is TOO INTOLERABLE to exist as a possibility then in essence it is forbidden. If something is forbidden it is on our mind all the time - we need to be vigilant so that it doesn't catch us off guard. Hence once anxious we are locked into control and condemned to be vigilant, preoccupied and self obsessed.**

obsession

- ▣ **Anxiety is obsessive; encourage individuals to put their attention elsewhere.**
- ▣ **Re-direct Attention and Set Limits**
- ▣ **Example: Chat Time. “That’s all until tomorrow”**

WITHDRAWAL / DEPRESSED MOOD / LOWERED CONFIDENCE

- ▣ ALL THE ABOVE LEAD TO A 'GIVE UP' & AVOIDANCE TENDENCY
- ▣
- ▣ PARENTS CAN ENCOURAGE ATTEMPTS AND CREATE 'SUCCESS OUT OF FAILURE'
- ▣ SMALL STEPS
- ▣ RESOLVE "WE WILL CHIP AWAY" VICTORIES COUNT, HICCUPS DON'T MATTER
- ▣ INFINITE OPTIMISM "I DON'T WISH TO BURDEN YOU WITH EXPECTATION, HOWEVER I JUST BELIEVE IN YOU TO GET THERE "

DISTRESS/ AGGRESSION

- ▣ IN RESPECT OF ANXIETY, DO NOT ASSESS THE CHILD ACCORDING TO THE DEGREE OF THEIR DISTRESS, ASSESS ACCORDING TO THE REALITY OF THE SITUATION
- ▣ IN RESPECT OF 'OUT OF CONTROL' BEHAVIOUR IN THE MOMENT OF ANXIETY, ENSURE FAMILY RULES ARE UPHELD (THERE ARE 4 RULES)
- ▣ "WE UNDERSTAND THE LEVEL OF YOUR DISTRESS AND HOW UPSET/ANXIOUS/FRUSTRATED YOU ARE, HOWEVER THERE IS NO EXCEPTION TO THE RULES"

CONTROLLING/MANIPULATION / DEMANDS FOR CERTAINTY

“You’re just putting all this on”

- ▣ **Anxiety can be seen as manipulative, selfish behaviour**
- ▣ **When is anxiety really manipulative behaviour? “Always!!”.**
- ▣ **Anxiety is immediately self-serving (relief), ultimately self-defeating (defensive). Controlling and seemingly manipulative behaviour is a logical consequence of the priority of control and avoidance.**
- ▣
- ▣ **Children do not enjoy their anxiety, yet can appear selective (I am too anxious to be among the crowds at the shopping centre but I’ll be fine to go to the concert; “Has that food been touched by anyone”; “who put my fork on the table?” Then diving into the oranges bucket during half-time at the footy match).**
- ▣ **Avoidance behaviour is not logical and is dependent only on the specific meaning a situation has for an individual. If sense of self not at stake, no anxiety.**

PERCEIVED ABANDONMENT AND INJUSTICE

If I step in to help the youngster this relieves doubt but reinforces dependency. If I don't provide support the youngster is stuck and it seems like I'm doing nothing.

Parents "not acting" is not the same as parents 'doing nothing" The bind of Anxiety - damned if you do and damned if you don't.

- ▣ "To not become caught up in the importance of the symptom, such as by urgently working to remove it or becoming involved helping the child with their completion of rituals - opening doors, avoiding touch, providing reassurance) is not "burying your head in the sand"
- ▣ Clarify that when a youngsters ill-feeling is not taken up by a parent, this is not a sign of abandonment, rather confidence. Help the child appreciate this.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Temperament (Anxious v Easy Going)

Independence - Responsibility

**Skills - social, academic, daily living skills,
activity skills**

**Creativity - Play - Purpose (Play is Important
throughout Life)**

**Relationships - positive peer relationships,
social inclusion**

Health

Care (Attachment bonds)

**Safety-Security-Stability (Predictable expectations
remain predictable)**

Social Demographic Factors

TAKE AWAY POINTS

- ❑ Anxiety is much more complicated and difficult than fear; fear is very scary, sometimes dangerous but fairly straightforward
- ❑ Anxiety exists along a continuum from anxiety order ('normal' anxiety) to extraordinary anxiety (disorder); however knowing ordinary anxiety doesn't mean we know the distress of anxiety disorder;
- ❑ Managing emotions requires comfortable independence – independence activities in early development assist with emotional regulation; 'create a space' wherein independence can develop;
- ❑ The resolution to anxiety is acceptance, which is neither mastery nor resignation but an integration of the two;
- ❑ Treatment of anxiety includes "life skill" factors – such as play (creativity), social connection; recreational activity; stability, optimism, perseverance– hence treatment also occurs 'away' from anxiety encounters.

TAKE AWAY POINTS

- ❑ The fundamental strategy for managing anxiety is to value acceptance and embracing of doubt over elimination and prevention (of a possible threat). Prevention of threat becomes obsessive, demanding and futile.
- ❑ Emotional Arousal is a Pivotal Moment – Be attentive, curious and interested, ready with encouragement but firm that relief and recovery is ultimately the child's business.
- ❑ Your judgement is imperfect yet it is your best friend; use it and it will become more and more reliable. Incidentally, our impulse is not necessarily our best judgement.
- ❑ In the context of parent-child relationship, anxiety can involve a bind – damned if you act, damned if you don't. At least know that not acting is not the same as 'doing nothing'
- ❑ Anxiety is ultimately a question – initially answered by parents and ultimately in maturity by individuals in their own right. Help children manage the transition to finding answers for themselves

7 PROPOSITIONS

- ▣ One has to own anxiety and it only has one owner
- ▣ Parents are presiding and powerful educators of children/adolescents
- ▣ Anxiety is a communication, indeed a question
- ▣ Anxiety, including its management, evolves
- ▣ Anxiety has a landscape as well as a nerve centre
- ▣ Between Science and Art – will, courage, optimism
- ▣ The Art of “*doing nothing*” – acceptance as