Effects of Childhood Anxiety

- If untreated, at higher risk for serious academic underachievement, low social support, depression, substance abuse and underemployment
- Half the adults with anxiety report onset of symptoms before age 18
- Severity/impairment related to chronicity

Efficacy of CBT for Anxiety in Youth

- Review of 40 randomized controlled trials
- Time-limited, skills-building
- Efficacious treatment; large effect sizes
- 2/3 kids free of primary diagnosis
- Maintenance of gains up to 9 years
  Compton, March, Brent, et al., 2004
  Seligman & Ollendick, 2011

Efficacy of CBT for OCD in Youth

- 60-100% patients treated improved
- 50-67% improvement in symptoms
- Gains maintained for up to 18 months
  Franklin et al., 1998; March, Mullet, & Herbel, 1994; Piacentini, Gitow, Jaffer, Graae, & Whitaker, 1994; POTS Team, 2004

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

- First line treatment of choice for children
- Goal: Bring anxiety to the normal range
- Act on the Anxiety Triad
- Strategies to take control of anxiety
- Active, experiential, skill learning
Facts about CBT

- Not a cure—an effective management strategy
- Not a quick fix—may take up to 6 weeks for effect
- Improvements may be dramatic or gradual
- Must be followed as prescribed for 10-16 weeks
- Symptoms may not be completely eliminated
- No side effects
- Benefits continue even after CBT is stopped

The Anxiety Triad

Cognitions
- Overestimation of danger and threat
- Expecting the worst
- Sense of uncontrollability
- Responsibility for negative outcomes
- Underestimation of coping ability
- Need for certainty
- Perfectionism

Physical Arousal
- Tension
- Heart pounding
- Sweating
- Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- Difficulty breathing
- Hypervigilance
- Disturbed sleep

Behaviors
- Checking
- Reassurance-seeking
- Safety objects/actions/cues
- Avoidance/escape:
  In vivo & experiential

The Vicious Cycle of Escape & Avoidance

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### Parenting Behaviors

- May unwittingly fuel anxiety
- Protective and closely involved
- Walk on eggshells, avoid upsetting child
- On alert for distress, rush to fix the problem
- Hesitate to encourage child to take risks
- Feel sad, frustrated, angry, guilty

Wagner, 2005

### Caveats about Parenting

- Not *all* parents are overprotective
- Child may *elicit* parental behavior
- Direction of effect is not clear
- Reciprocal parent-child interaction
- Parents may interact differently with their non-anxious children

Wagner, 2005

### Realistic Thinking

- Finding the evidence
- Judging the accuracy of beliefs
- Examining alternatives
- Estimating realistic probabilities
- Accepting uncertainty
- Exploring the worst consequences
- Putting things in perspective

### Exposure

- To overcome your fear, you must face your fear
- Take acceptable, everyday risks
- Stop in vivo avoidance and escape
- Stop experiential avoidance


### How Does Exposure Work?

- Emotional Processing Theory
  Foa & Kozak, 1986,
  Foa & McNally, 1996

- Inhibitory Learning Theory
  Craske, et al., 2008

### Emotional Processing Theory

- Fear learning is stored in memory
- Activation of fear, plus incompatible information → corrective learning
- Fear must be activated during exposure
- Habituation in the absence of safety behavior
- Extinction of fear associations
- Initial fear activation and habituation are indices of corrective learning
### Inhibitory Learning Theory
- Fears never truly unlearned or extinguished
- New, non-fear learning inhibits, but does not replace original fear learning
- Return of fear is possible with time, surprises
- Habituation not needed during exposure
- Goal: To accept and tolerate fear, not reduce
- Exposure lifestyle, multiple contexts

### Challenges in Engaging Children
- Do not typically refer themselves
- May not have ownership of the problem
- May see others as responsible for fixing
- May be unable to see paths to change
- May be passive and defer to adults

### Elementary-Age Children
- Age, maturity, conceptual development
- Present versus future orientation
- Ability to delay gratification
- Misconceptions, myths, overvalued ideation
- Limited insight, ability to articulate
- Self-reliance and internal motivation
- Anxious, overprotective parents

### Pre-Teens and Teens
- Need for autonomy; independence
- Conflict with authority; discounting
- Poor self-management/regulation
- Denial, secrecy, shame, embarrassment
- Less willing to ask for or accept help
- Noncompliance, defiance
- Tantrums, threats, coercive control

### Parental Anxiety
- Children involve parents in avoidance/escape
- Angry outbursts if parents fail to comply
- Parents appease to avoid conflict
- Difficulty dealing with child’s distress
- Parental anxiety/OCD/other disorder
- Overinvolved, overprotective

### Therapists’ Fears About Exposure
- Child should feel better, not worse in therapy
- What’s an appropriate exposure for this?
- How far do I take the exposures?
- I’m not sure I’m doing this correctly
- I’m not sure I’m good at this
- What if it backfires?
- I don’t like it when the child is upset
- I’ll be responsible if child has a meltdown
- I won’t be able to calm down the child/parents
Rapport, Education, Empowerment

- Role of the therapist and client
- Cultivating readiness proactively
- Child-friendly CBT
- Collaborating with parents
- Incentives and rewards

The Role of the Therapist in CBT

- Warm, genuine empathic
- Enthusiastic, confident coach
- Collaborator, not healer
- Empowers, guides client to be own healer
- Flexible, creative, resourceful
- Lets go of rescue fantasies

Role of Client in CBT

- Expert in own experiences
- Active collaborator
- Not helpless victim
- Ability to change problems
- Become own therapist

Child-Friendly CBT

- Treatment readiness
- Developmental fit and flexibility
- Creativity, metaphors, analogies, games
- Personalized, concrete examples
- Frequent summaries, reviews
- Pacing of treatment
- Parent collaboration
- Incentives

Goal: Bring Down Your Feeling Temperature

Cultivating Treatment Readiness

- Cognitive: Priming and preparation
- Proactive, positive and preventive
- Key players: Child, parents, therapist
- Channel desire to get well into action
- Address the fears and misconceptions
- Dismantle treatment reluctance
- Foster hope, optimism, self-efficacy
The Keys to Readiness

A. **Stabilization** of the crisis
   - Provide support, validation, perspective
   - Discuss impact of anxiety on family
   - Remove blame and shame
   - Build alliances, reduce conflict
   - Recommend temporary respite
   - Provide coping techniques for family

Wagner, 2007

B. **Communication** about anxiety, avoidance, exposure, habituation and anticipatory anxiety
   - Facts about anxiety
   - Facts about fueling factors
   - Exposure and its rationale
   - Metaphor of the *Worry Hill*
   - Overview of steps towards mastery
   - Realistic expectations

**About Anxiety**

- Uneasy feeling, tension, worry
- Seems like there is danger or threat
- Normal and helpful
- Too much anxiety is not helpful
- How much anxiety do you have?

**About Too Much Anxiety**

*Feeling Temperature* is too high
   - Sensitive to worry
   - Worry bell is stuck
   - Mind plays tricks
   - False alarms

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Empowering Anxious Children and Their Parents

How Anxiety Gets Worse

Thoughts ➔ ANXIETY ➔ Feelings ➔ Actions

How Thoughts Affect Feelings

THE NOISE AT THE WINDOW
What’s Happening: I’m in my bed at night and I hear a noise at the window

WHEN I THINK

It’s a burglar
I feel SCARED

It’s just the breeze against the window
I feel CALM

How Anxiety Can Make You Think

- Something bad will happen
- I don’t have any control over it
- I don’t know what to do!
- I can’t make any mistakes
- It will be my fault if it happens
- I need to know for sure that it’s okay
- I can’t stand these feelings. I’ll go crazy

How Anxiety Can Make Your Body Feel

- Nervous, tense, uptight, can’t relax
- Stomach pain, diarrhea, feel sick
- Feel like throwing up, may throw up
- Heart pounding, sweating
- Trouble breathing
- Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- On edge, high alert for danger

The Brain and Anxiety

- Feeling Brain: Emergency alarm
  Gut reaction ➔ Fight, flight, freeze ➔ Adrenalin
  Learns by experience; makes connections/memories
- Thinking Brain: The big picture
  Reviews ➔ Analyzes ➔ Decides
- Feeling Brain faster, can overrule Thinking Brain
- High emotion and logic are mutually exclusive

How Anxiety Can Make You Act

- Checking: Over and over to make sure
- Reassurance: Asking over and over
- Helplessness: “I can’t handle it!”
- Avoidance: “No way I’m doing that!”
- Escape: “I’m out of here!”
Empowering Anxious Children and Their Parents

The Vicious Cycle of Escape & Avoidance

Goal of CBT: Learn to Bring Down Your Feeling Temperature

- You’re in charge, not anxiety!
- Learn to change how you think and act
- Do the opposite of what anxiety tells you to do
- Face your worries; find out nothing bad will happen
- You will get used to the scary feeling
- Teach your brain you’re brave; create new memories
- The more you practice, the easier it gets

Three Things to Bring Down Your Feeling Temperature

1. Calm your Body
2. Change your Worry Thoughts
3. Face your Fears

Change Worry Thoughts: Use Thinking Brain

Recognize and label anxiety:
- It’s just anxiety
- It’s my Feeling Brain
- The worry bell is stuck
- It’s an anxiety trick
- It’s a false alarm

Face Your Fear: You are Braver than you Think!

- Gradual exposure: Do the opposite in steps
- Anticipatory anxiety: The “antsy” feeling
- Teach the Feeling Brain it’s a false alarm
- Habituation: Get used to anxiety
- Cold water in the pool
- Ride the Worry Hill®
- Find out how brave you can be!

RIDE: Up and Down the Worry Hill®

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C. Persuasion

**Persuasion** about the 
*necessity* for change 
*possibility* for change and 
*power* to change

D. Collaboration

Between parent, child and therapist

- Therapist: Guide
- Child: RIDE
- Parent: RALLY

Realistic Expectations: Reduce Dropout

- Is it going to be hard?
- How long will it take?
- The tortoise and the hare
- Two steps forward, two backwards
- Practice takes time
- Right goal vs. wrong goal
- Liking vs. tolerating

Searching for Clues

Date/Time
The situation:.................................
I feel:...........................................
My Feeling Temperature:.....................
What my body feels:..........................
What I am thinking:...........................
What I do to feel better:......................
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Calm Your Body

- Calm breathing
- Relax muscles
- Eat healthy
- Exercise
- Get a good night’s sleep

Change Worry Thoughts: Use Thinking Brain

Recognize and label anxiety:
- It’s just anxiety
- It’s my Feeling Brain
- The worry bell is stuck
- It’s an anxiety trick
- It’s a false alarm

Worry Thoughts are False Alarms

1. What do I do when I hear the fire alarm?
2. But what do I do when I realize it’s a false alarm?
   - I don’t ignore it (it’s loud)
   - I acknowledge it, but . . .
   - I don’t need to take any action
   - I go back to what I was doing

Change Worry Thoughts to Calm Thoughts

- What am I worried about?
- Why does it bother me?
- What are the chances it will happen?
- What proof do I have that it will happen?
- What else could happen?
- So what if it happens?
- Can I be absolutely sure it won’t happen?
- How could I handle it, if it happened?

RIDE: Up and Down the Worry Hill®

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**RIDE Up and Down the Worry Hill®**

- **Rename** the thought
- **Insist** that YOU are in charge!
- **Defy** worry, do the OPPOSITE
- **Enjoy** your success, reward yourself

---

**Little Hills before the Big Hills**

1. Use Fearmometer to rate fears
2. Select lowest fears
3. Begin exposure
4. Prevent escape, avoidance, rituals
5. Wait for FT to decrease
6. Select next item, repeat steps 2 to 5

---

**Ride Up and Down the Worry Hill**

1. Wake up, get dressed and do school work at home 2
2. Get in the car, drive to school and return home 4
3. Stay in the car in the parking lot for 15 minutes 5
4. Drive to bus stop, wait for the bus, but not get in 6
5. Ride the bus to school but return home 6
6. Enter school, pick up assignments to take home 7
7. Go to class and stay for one class period 8
8. Stay in class half day, with one phone call to Mom 8
9. Stay in class half day, no phone calls to Mom 9
10. Stay in class all day, no phone calls to Mom 10
11. Stay after school, Mom is late to pick up 10

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**Worry Exposure**

- Prescribed worry time—planned, legitimate
- Worry, worry, worry your head off!
- Structure and limit pervasive worry
- Exposure to worry
- Tolerate anxiety until it habituates
- Reduce negative attention/secondary gain

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You can Choose!

- You can be in charge!
- You can:
  - choose to worry
  - choose to be brave
- Which will you choose?

Maintaining Readiness

- Frequent review; reiterate Worry Hill concepts
- Review realistic expectations
- You don’t have to like it…
- Tie into experience: It’s *supposed* to be hard
- It’s hard at first, practice makes it easier
- Promote bravery: You can do it.
- Promote persistence: Don’t give up!

Cultivating Readiness in Parents

- Collaboration
- Empathy and objectivity
- No blame, no shame

What Parents May Naturally Do

- Reassure, comfort, overprotect
- Walk on eggshells, avoid upsetting child
- On alert for distress, rush to fix the problem
- Hesitate to encourage child to take risks
- Allow avoidance and escape
- Push hard, punish, feel bad, make up
- Feel worried, sad, frustrated, angry, guilty

Cultivating Readiness in Parents

- Explore parenting experiences, feelings
- Foster parental self-care
- Acceptance of child, anxiety/OCD
- Set realistic expectations
- Promote effective parenting strategies
- Understand behaviors that delay recovery
- Disengage from child’s symptoms

Realistic Expectations for Parents: Reduce Dropout

- Change takes time
- The tortoise and the hare
- Fits and starts-two steps forward…
- The extinction burst
- The rush to judgment
- 3 things: Frequency, severity, duration
- Right goal vs. wrong goal

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Empowering Anxious Children and Their Parents

Parenting: The Framework

The 3 P’s
- Proactive
- Positive
- Preventive

The 3 S’s
- Security
- Structure
- Stability

Teaching by Example

- Increase self-awareness
- Bring down your Feeling Temperature
- Reduce hyper-vigilance to threat/danger
- Model reasonable risk-taking
- Model confidence in coping

Appropriate Attention

- Verbal—praise, acknowledgement
- You and Me Alone (YAMA) Time
- Incentives—Bravery Points or Tickets
- Unplanned rewards—inadvertent bonuses
- Planned inattention—calm, gentle ignoring
- Time out

You and Me Alone (YAMA) Time

- Planned, structured, attention
- Fill up the gas tank
- Proactive, positive, preventive strategy
- Reduce need to seek excessive attention
- Teach ability to delay gratification

Calming Space & Calming Actions

When the Feeling Temperature is rising . . .
- Emotion and logic are mutually exclusive
- Stay calm, avoid talking or reasoning
- Go to Calming Space; use Calming Actions
- Wait until Feeling Temperature comes down
- Be kind, brief and clear when you discuss

Calm Thinking & Bravery

- Ask yourself:
  - Am I asking my child to do anything unsafe?
  - Do I want my child to be fragile or strong?
- Encourage child to label anxiety
- Ask child to use Thinking Brain when calm
- Nudge one notch outside comfort zone
- Ride the Worry Hill
- Little hills before big hills

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Empowering Anxious Children and Their Parents

Here’s What You Will Learn

- Anxiety passes away and will not harm your child
- You don’t have to fix it; let your child learn to fix it
- Don’t let anxiety guide your decisions
- Your child is braver than either of you realize
- Trust your child to face challenges successfully
- You may have to RIDE the Worry Hill® too
- It will get easier with practice
- Together, you can learn to take charge of anxiety!

Parenting Behaviors that Don’t Help

- Hovering
- Reassurance
- Distraction
- Avoidance
- Criticism
- Participation in rituals
- Punishing OCD/anxiety
- Humiliation/shaming
- Pushing too hard
- Surprise interventions

The Therapist’s Tool Box

- Diary/journal
- Forms/worksheets
- Recording device
- Flip chart/board
- Calculator
- Internet device

- Teaching Tools
- Feeling Thermometer
- Worry Hill Memory Cards
- Index cards
- Bravery Stars/Tickets
- Award certificates

The Art of CBT

- Genuine empathy, compassion
- Directive, enthusiastic, confident coach
- Flexible to meet developmental needs
- Creative and resourceful
- Readiness to model exposures
- Socratic questioning skill
- Judicious use of humor
- Let go of rescue fantasies
REFERENCES & RESOURCES


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Anxiety Disorders Association of America www.adaa.org

Association for Behavioral & Cognitive Therapies www.abct.org

International OCD Foundation www.ocfoundation.org

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