

Managing Anxiety Behaviorally and Medically

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Pre-Pandemic Rates for Children and Adolescents

- 2012 – (pre-pandemic) 11.6%
- 2022 – (post-pandemic) 20.5%

- COVID-Related Stressors:
 - Social Isolation
 - Missed Milestones
 - Increased Family Tensions

- Background Stressors:
 - School Shootings
 - Political Unrest
 - War in Ukraine

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Works

- Coping Cat Program:
 - <https://www.cebc4cw.org/program/coping-cat/detailed>
- Sertraline (Zoloft) may help
- Family Involvement is Necessary
 - *What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety* (Dawn Huebner, Ph.D., 2006)
- CBT may take between 12-20 sessions (Clark Goldstein, Ph.D.)
- Toddlers may exhibit Behavioral Inhibition, a personality type that shows a tendency towards distress and nervousness in new situations.
- Positive Affect Tolerance (PAT), integrating positive emotions into daily life, may be added to CBT.

CBT Defined

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that is goal-oriented to teach different ways of thinking and behaving.
 - To change problematic or unhelpful forms of thinking
 - To explore learned patterns of unhelpful behavior
 - To challenge core beliefs and low self-esteem
 - To learn better ways of coping

Positive Affect Tolerance (PAT) Defined

- PAT involves learning to understand and integrate basic feelings in oneself and others.
- The six basic feelings include:
 - Anger*
 - Happiness
 - Scared
 - Sad
 - Embarrassed
 - Anxious
- “In children, anger is the armor of anxiety”* (Dr Randall Lemoine)

Matching Faces and Feelings

Directions – draw a line between the correct face and feeling.

1. Happy
2. Scared
3. Angry
4. Embarrassed
5. Sad
6. Anxious



Most Common Anxiety Disorders in Children and Adolescents

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
 - Pervasive worry or anxious feelings across all domains of life.
- Separation Anxiety Disorder
 - Fear in younger children of being separated from a primary caregiver.
- Social Anxiety Disorder
 - Afraid of social situations where one might feel embarrassed or judged.
- Panic Disorder
 - Abrupt surges of intense fear or discomfort.
- Specific Phobias
 - Strong fears of specific situations or objects.
- Selective Mutism
 - Children who choose not to speak even though they can.

Overcoming Anxiety

- Dr. Gary Emery (1987) offers the best introduction and overview of anxiety; therefore, I am including the following:
 1. What is Anxiety
 2. Symptoms of Anxiety
 3. Anxiety is a Mood State
 4. Appropriate and Inappropriate Anxiety
 5. Two Levels of Fear
 6. Roots of Anxiety
 7. Roots of Distorted Thinking

1. What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is an emotional reaction to a distorted and unrealistic appraisal of a situation.
- Thinking creates anxiety.
- Ideas about anxiety make it even more frightful.
- Anxiety is one of the four basic emotions (mad, sad, glad, and scared).
- Emotional problems are due to excesses in one or another of the four basic emotions.

2. Symptoms of Anxiety

- Thinking
- Emotional
- Behavioral
- Physiological
 - Examples: headache, tearful, breathless, sweaty, nausea, stomachache, faint, dizzy, racing heart, tingly, cold, and weak.

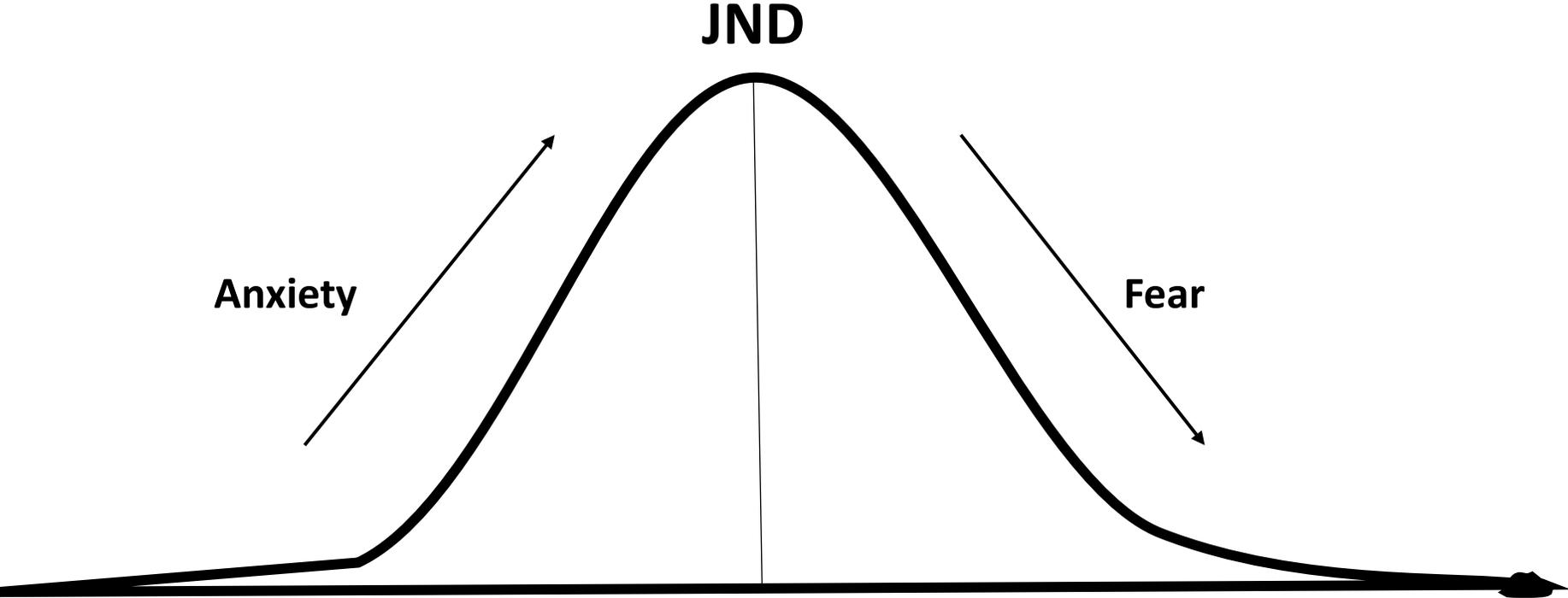
3. Anxiety is a Mood State

- What you think about and how you view the world will depend on your current mood.
- When you're in an anxious mood, your mind often wants to stay in that mood.
- With a drop in mood comes a drop in awareness.
- Focus creates energy. Thus, when you try to control your anxiety, you get more of it.

4. Appropriate and Inappropriate Anxiety

- Fear is appropriate if a real danger, which you're unable to handle, is present.
- Most of the time, when you are in a state of fear, you maximize the danger and minimize your ability to handle it.

Just Noticeable Difference



5. Two Levels of Fear

- The primary fear level is “self-signal” to yourself that you need to change something.
- The second level is fear of the symptoms of anxiety.
- Most of the discomfort you feel from your anxiety comes from the second level.
- All forms of anxiety involve a low level of awareness of what is going on.

6. Roots of Anxiety

- Your fear comes from some unknown source.
- When thinking is distorted, anxiety symptoms and motivations become activated.

7. Roots of Distorted Thinking

- Many of your beliefs you developed as a child.
- You developed self-image early in life.
- Your needs to protect your ego or self-image reveals itself in the need for approval, the need for control, and the need to feel competent.
- Your needs, for approval, control, competence, are powerful sources of anxiety.

Good Self-Esteem Reduces Anxiety

- Definition: The combination of how you perceive yourself and the value you place on the multi-dimensional self you see.
- 3 Parts:
 - 1. What we **believe** about ourselves
 - 2. How we **feel** about ourselves
 - 3. How we **behave** or treat ourselves
- Developing Good Habits:
 - Self-acceptance (as is)
 - Being nonjudgmental
 - Being pro-self

Teaching children how to accept rather than fear their anxiety

- **AWAKE Strategy:**

- **A**ccept your anxiety
- **W**atch your anxiety
- **A**ct as if you are not anxious
- **K**eep repeating the first three steps
- **E**xpect the best

RILEE Relaxation

Directions: Parents, read the following exercise aloud while your child lie comfortably with room to move.

Hi, I am RILEE, the Re-lax-a-tion Bear. When I was a Bear-in-the Box, I often felt scared and angry, and anxious. And I had to learn to deal with these very upsetting feelings. I tried all kinds of ways.

First, I tried to huff and puff and blow the box down. That didn't work. Then I tried to shout and scream and throw temper tantrums. That didn't work either.

One day, after exhausting myself, I began to relax and allow myself to calm down. That worked! Since it worked for me, I know it will work for you.

So, lie down, with your back on the ground, wrinkle your nose, wiggle your toes, and tell yourself, "I can be comfy and safe, any time, any place."

When you tell yourself "to be comfy and safe, any time, any place," you will notice a big smile on your lips, and a twinkle in your eyes; then you will begin to calm yourself down.

I was so overjoyed when I learned that I, RILEE Bear, could actually calm myself down. I thought I needed my mom or my dad or my grandma to do this for me. But I was wrong. I learned to do this for myself and so can you!

It came to me, like a bolt out of the blue, that whenever something happened, I could choose what I thought about it. Imagine that! I could actually choose my thoughts! And so can you.

Wow! What a great idea! So, when something happens, or when you feel scared or angry or nervous inside, I want you to tell yourself, "I can be comfy and safe, any time, any place."

When you feel safe, you will be safe. You will begin to relax and breathe deeply. You will feel comfy, Very, very comfy, Very, very relaxed.

Notice how your toes tingle when you relax and breathe deeply. Notice how your chest goes in and out, up and down just like a clown.

Now on the count of three, I want you to make a clown face. Here's how: I want you to take a deep, deep breath and fill up your cheeks with air, so you look just like a clown with big red cheeks. Now hold that air in your cheeks until I count to ten. Then let it out slowly, and do it again.

Are you ready? One, two, three – Breathe deep, deep, deep. Now, hold that breath in your cheeks and use your fingers to count to ten. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

Let that breath out slowly, very, very slowly. That's right! Now do it again – Are you ready? One, two, three – Breathe deep, deep, deep. Now, hold that breath in your cheeks and use your fingers to count to ten: one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

That's right, you did it! Notice how all those scary, anxious, and angry feelings go away, when you breathe deeply and tell yourself that you can keep yourself comfy and safe, any time, any place.

How wonderful it is to know that you can choose what you think and how you feel. Yes, you can comfort yourself just by breathing deeply, by breathing in those cool safe feelings, and breathing out those hot, scary feelings.

Now you know that, by breathing deeply and slowly and by choosing good thoughts, you can feel calm and comfy and safe any time and any place!

That's great! So, now let's do the opposite. Here's your chance to practice being really, really upset.

RILEE Relaxation cont.

Directions: Parents, read the following exercise aloud while your child lie comfortably with room to move.

Remember the last time something scared you, and you ran and ran to get away. Remember how you stopped because you were so exhausted. Remember you were panting, panting, panting.

I remember it well ... You see, I had climbed a tree in search of a honeybee nest ... I put my paw in the nest, but out came the bees ... Well, I never ran so fast in my life ... I climbed down the tree, scampered across the field, and plunged into the pond ... to get away from those very angry bees.

I noticed that my heart was pounding, my breathing was shallow, and I was panting, panting, panting. I put my paw in front of my mouth. My breath was so hot I thought I was on fire.

So, let's pretend that you, like me, are a honey bear ... climbing up, up, up the tree, sticking your paw in, in, in the nest, getting bit, bit, bit by the bees, scampering down, down, down the tree, running across, across, across the meadow. Diving deep, deep, deep into the pond, panting hot, hot, hot air from your chest onto your paw.

You see how east it is to make yourself scared, or angry, or anxious – and it was all your imagination! Or should I say it was my imagination. You see, the thoughts can either come from inside of you or from outside of you.

So next time you go to a scary movie notice how it works. Notice the choices you make. Notice how easy it is to make yourself scared, or angry, or anxious.

But for now, breathe deeply, put a smile on your lips and a twinkle in your eye and tell yourself, “I can feel comfy and safe, any time, any place, just like my friend RILEE Bear.”

Good Job!

Anxiety Medications for Children

- **SSRIs**

- Sertraline: 6-12 – child dose; ≥ 13 – adult dose (*Zoloft*)
- Fluoxetine: ≥ 8 years old (*Prozac*)
- Escitalopram: 12-17 – adolescent dose (*Lexapro*)
- Fluvoxamine: 8-17 – children's dose (*Luvox*)

- **Anxiolytic**

- Diazepam: ≥ 6 months old (*Valium*)

- **Other**

- Clonidine HCL ER 0.1mg: ≥ 6 years old
- Propranolol: ≥ 12 years old
- Duloxetine: ≥ 7 years old (*Cymbalta*)
- Amantadine: ≥ 1 year old (for young children dosed in liquid).

Summary

- Anxiety in children and adolescents is on the rise.
- COVID-19 has not helped.
- Anxiety comes in many forms.
- The combination of CBT and PAT is needed.
- Anxiety is experienced on many levels.
- Medication is seldom the answer.
- Good anxiety vs. Bad anxiety (JND).
- Overcoming Anxiety is not easy.
- Anxiety diminishes self-esteem.
- Anxiety must be address NOT ignored.

References

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