

The Plainview - Old Bethpage Central School District Presents:

*Managing Worries During a Worrisome Time*



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# OUTLINE

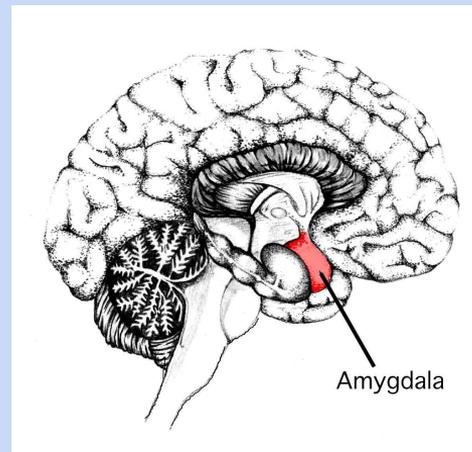
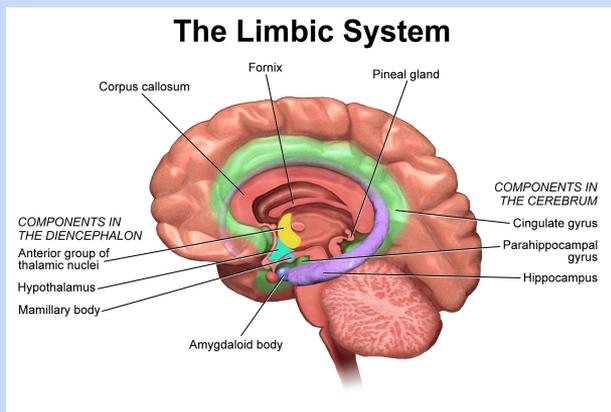
- What is anxiety
  - The anxiety cycle
  - Signs and symptoms
- COVID-19 and Anxiety
- School Avoidance
- How you can help your children
- Parental Self Care
- Resources



*PDF Presentation*

# WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is a part of our primitive, emotional brain (the limbic system) that protects us from danger. This area of the brain, especially the amygdala, is the sensor to alert us of danger. It sends a message to our adrenal glands to give us the adrenaline to fight or flee from danger.



# WHAT IS ANXIETY?

- Anxiety is a **TYPICAL** reaction to real or perceived danger.
- Anxiety is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.
- Anxiety involves difficulty tolerating uncertainty
  - Things we do to gain control/certainty: avoid, overthink, ask for reassurance, search and search
- It is uncomfortable even if there is no real danger
- Function of anxiety
  - Motivates us to avoid REAL danger
  - It is like an alarm warning us of a danger
  - Activates our sympathetic NS: fight, flight, or freeze system

# IF IT'S TYPICAL, WHEN DOES ANXIETY BECOME A PROBLEM?

- The problem of anxiety
  - Feel in danger when we are actually safe – perceived danger (may have physiological response). It is important to recognize the difference between real and perceived danger
  - Avoidance increases disordered anxiety
  - Interferes with ability to function (criteria for anxiety d/o diagnosis)



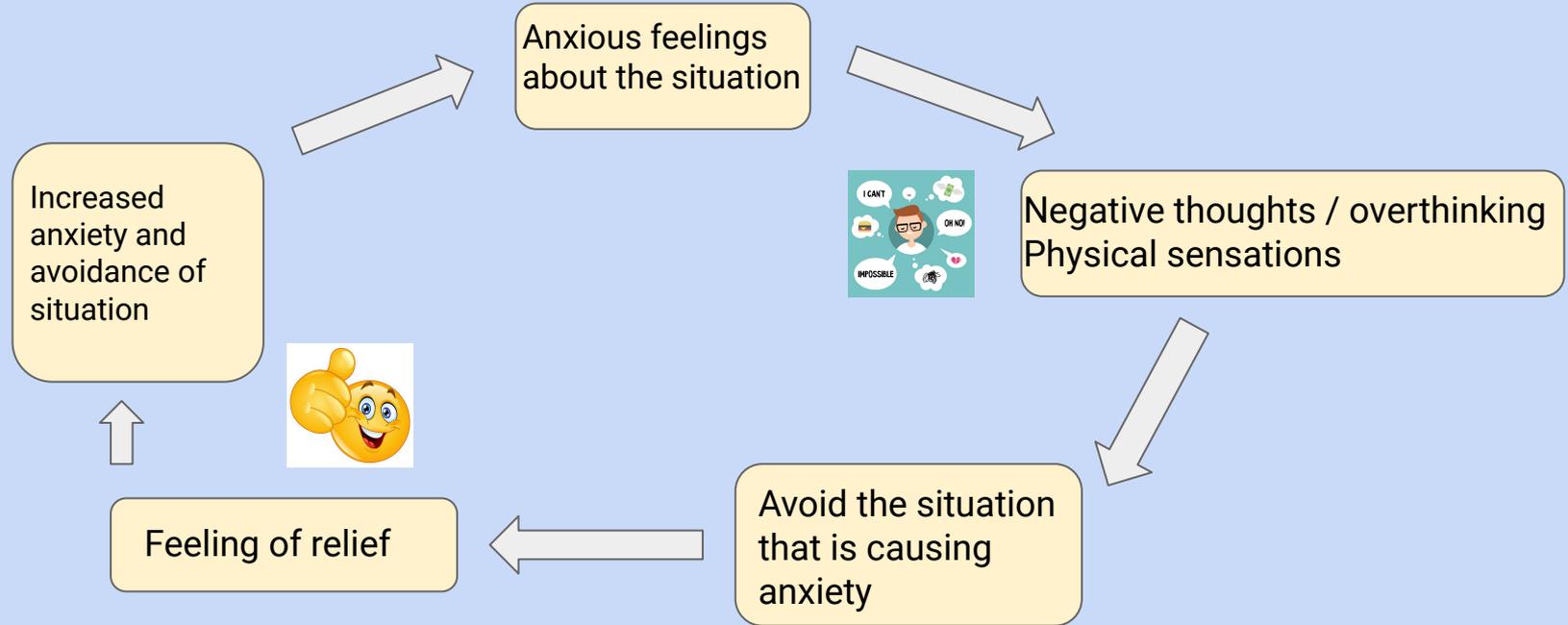
# IS *THIS* ANXIETY?

When the anxiety is strong, lasts a long time and begins to impede your child from being able to perform daily routines, that's cause for concern.

*Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) Diagnosis:*

*Excessive worry or fear, more days than not for 6 months, which creates a functional impairment in school, home, social with 3 or more symptoms (restlessness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, irritability, muscle tension, sleep disturbance)*

# THE ANXIETY CYCLE



# WARNING SIGNS MY CHILD MIGHT BE EXPERIENCING ANXIETY

- Physical symptoms: shaking, stomachaches, headaches, heart racing, rapid breathing
- Withdrawal / Isolation - Avoidance of activities and events
- Defiance and oppositionality / Irritability
- Reassurance seeking
- Struggling with sleep
- Changes in eating habits
- Desire to have things be “certain” or controlled
- Over planning situations and events
- Difficulty with attention and focus
- Having high expectations for self
- Worry thoughts

# SCHOOL AVOIDANCE

- Also called school refusal or school phobia
- Forms: Consistently “dragging their feet”, wanting to leaving early, consistently not wanting to go to school, spending a lot of time in the nurse or bathroom
- 2-5% of students every year typically (likely higher this year)
- Various reasons
  - Transportation
  - After vacation
  - Underlying anxiety disorder
  - Something difficult at school
  - Learning disability or difficulty in certain subjects
  - Peer issues
- Physical and emotional avoidance
- Often hear about physical complaints
- Often notice a big difference on weekends when it is not indicative of an underlying anxiety disorder
- *Let's differentiate anxiety and oppositionality*

# HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC IMPACTED ANXIETY

- New routines: coming back from remote learning, social disruptions, quarantines, extra time at home, lunch room changes
- Not seeing / interacting with peers as they once did
- Increase in academic demands and loss of skills due to time
  - Skills lost in certain areas
- Changes in caregivers routines
- Parental frustration
- Increase in worry about safety: sick
  - Hear students coughing in the hall or class
  - Avoidance of school nurse

# HOW CAN YOU HELP YOUR CHILD?

- Reduce Vulnerability to emotions
- Communicating with your children
- Coping Skills
- Face your worries
- Parental Self Care

*The goal is not to eliminate anxiety, but to help your child tolerate it as effectively as possible.*

# REDUCE VULNERABILITY TO EMOTIONS

- Provide structure and predictability
  - Create a routine and sleep schedule, set clear and reasonable expectations around behavior and academics
- Model healthy coping skills- label emotions, be aware of your emotions, use coping skills
- Ensure your child is:
  - Building healthy habits (sleeping, eating, physical activity)
  - Building relationships
  - Building positive experiences

# REDUCE VULNERABILITY TO EMOTIONS

- Create a space at home that will be comforting for your child when they need to manage their emotions - include a self soothe kit, create the kit with your child)
- Catch warning signs early - frequent absences or lateness, especially at patterned times, frequent visits to nurse, major family trauma, difficulty with sleep, mood irritable, difficulty getting up in the morning
- Cope ahead for challenging situations ex:role play, practice coping during calm times
- Practice mindfulness [Family Mindfulness Schedule](#)

# COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR CHILDREN

- Healthy communication at home will reduce vulnerability – check about emotionally sensitive topics, limit judgments, open ended questions, validate emotions
- “BE CURIOUS RATHER THAN FURIOUS”
- Check in with yourself first – what do I want to communicate to my child here...
- Try to understand the motivation
- Set limits **AND** Validate
- Consistency is key
- WORDS MATTER
  - **Avoid** saying “it’s not a big deal,” “dont worry about it,” etc. because THEY ARE WORRYING! – This invalidates feelings
  - **Instead:** “Its okay to be worried. You’re allowed to feel that way. I will be here to help you through it. Let’s come up with a plan.”

Sometimes it’s hard to have children speak about big feelings independently. Try reading a book about another child experiencing similar emotions, this can help them open up safely: [Children's books that address worry](#)

# WHAT THIS MAY SOUND LIKE...

Child says they don't want to go to school

I know you're feeling worried and I will help you get through this. Let's practice 5 deep breaths while we walk out the door to school.

Child says their stomach hurts every day before school

A lot of times our body sends us messages that we are worried. It seems like your belly is telling you you are worried about something. Do you know what that is? Let's talk it through.

Child says they are worried about a spelling quiz tomorrow

It's okay to feel worried. How about I practice with you so you feel more confident and let's create a plan so you can manage your worries tomorrow in school.

SOME PHRASES TO HELP SUPPORT OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR CHILD SO THAT THEY FEEL HEARD:

*I'm so happy you're talking to me about this.*

*This is so important and I'm here to listen.*

*Tell me more about it.*

*That feels really scary for you. I hear you.*

*It's not easy trying something new for me too.*



# LET'S PRACTICE...

**Your child comes to you and says that they feel sick everyday before school. This doesn't happen on the weekends.**

- *What are some thoughts you have?*
- *What might you say to them?*

*Please post responses in chat box.*



# COPING SKILLS

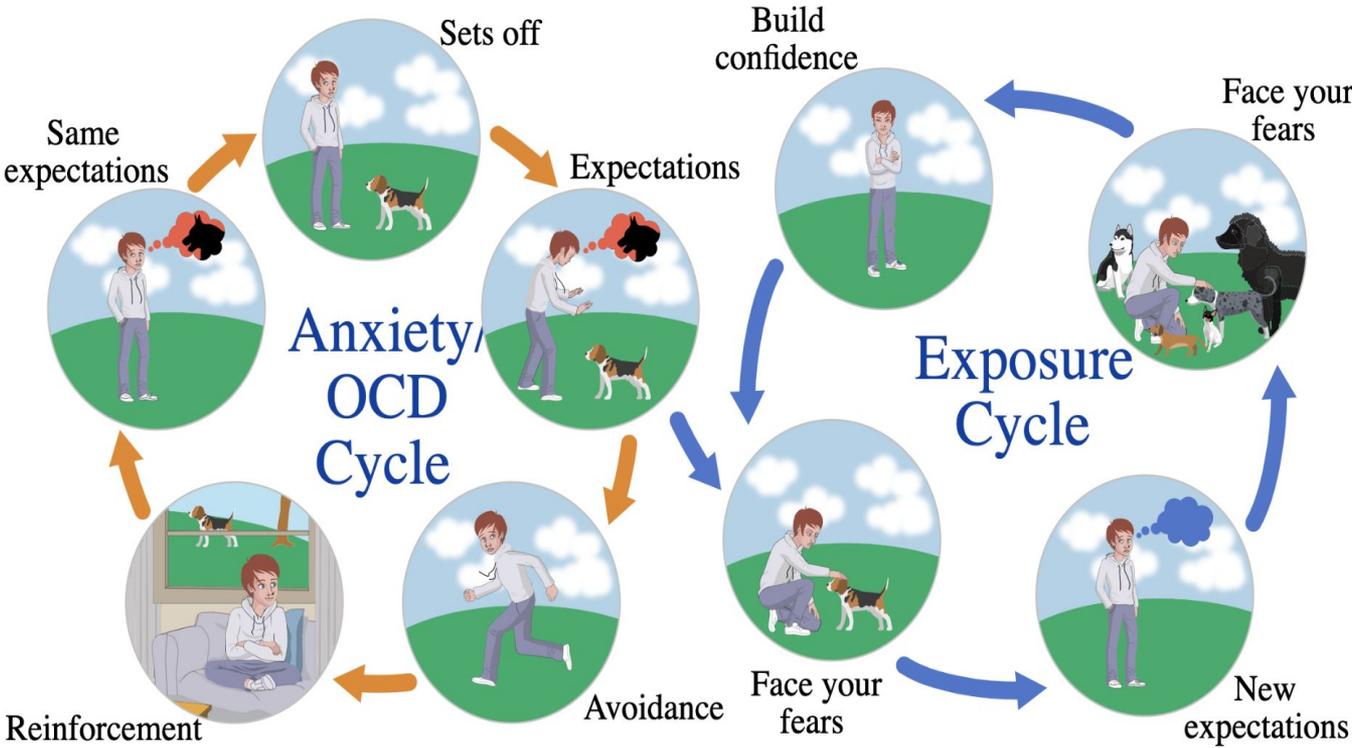
- Distraction
  - Go for a walk, read, color, games, imagery, puzzles
- Self Soothe with the 5 senses
  - Vision: Go to your favorite place, pictures, people watch, glitter jar
  - Hearing: Music, nature sounds, white noise, instrument
  - Smell: lotion, perfume, popcorn/cookies
  - Taste: favorite foods, hot chocolate, eat one thing mindfully
  - Touch: Shower, bath, pet animal, brush hair, huge, cold cloth on face, fidgets
- Breathing skills - Pretend to blow a balloon or candles, to 10, star breathing, Belly Breathing Video
- Create a coping kit
- Mindfulness
- Positive Self-Talk



# FACE YOUR WORRIES: "EXPOSURE"

- Learn to TOLERATE distress rather than get rid of it
  - Our kids can feel upset, anxious, sad and still \*do\*
- Take steps towards the feared situation/object
- Reward each step no matter how small
- Children need to feel a sense of control
- Plan and anticipate barriers
- Use network to help
- Anxiety will still be present, need to learn to tolerate it
- Manage one's own emotions: This takes a TON of patience and practice.

# EXPOSURE



# TIPS FOR SCHOOL AVOIDANCE

- Create morning and night time routines
- Talk to your child about why they don't want to go to school and problem solve
- Acknowledge worries, but continue to express the need to go to school
- Continue to bring child to school daily
- Use of rewards and consequences - small steps
- Ensure that when your child is home they are safe but are continuing to do school work
- Attempt to manage your own emotions
  - Use your communication and coping skills while engaging in exposure
- Talk to school staff

# PARENTAL SELF CARE

1. Meditation: [Take Care-Meditation clips](#)
2. Listen to music, watch favorite shows
3. Carve out time to be alone
4. Schedule time with friends or family
5. Take a break from electronics
6. Regular exercise
7. Positive Affirmations: *When I am happy, my family is happy. Together we can overcome anything.*
8. Instead of watching news that can be negative, try following good news movement: [Good News Movement \(@goodnews movement\)](#)



WHEN YOUR CHILD STRUGGLES,  
**YOU'RE ALLOWED TO**



feel all your feelings, even if they seem wrong



listen to the experts but trust your gut



love your child yet wish things were easier



be polite but advocate like a bear



be kind to yourself, even if you feel ineffective



put yourself first so you can keep on giving



set boundaries even when it's awkward



hold joy and sorrow at the same time



believe you're a superhero, perfectly imperfect

# COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- Reach out to your school staff
  - Counselor, psychologist, social worker
  - Discuss the need for a 504 or a CSE
  - Discuss interventions that school staff can partner with you on (gradual exposure, meet at door, break cards, peer mentor, follow up with teachers)
- Reach out to a mental health professional (Pediatrician, Therapist, Psychiatrist)
  - CBT treatment
- **In a Crisis**
  - 911
  - Nearest Emergency Room (Plainview Hospital, Cohen's Children's Hospital)
  - Cohen's Children's Medical Center, Behavioral Health Urgent Care (269-01 76th Avenue, New Hyde Park, NY 11040) **718-470-3148 Monday Thru Friday 9am-3pm**
  - Nassau County Mobile Crisis ph: 516-227-TALK (8255)

# NORTHWELL PARTNERSHIP

- Provides psychiatric evaluations for students
- Consultation services with staff to help identify students' needs and determine additional services if necessary.
- Care Coordination Services
  - Works with parents/guardians who are seeking behavioral health services in the community
  - Referrals provided for insurance based treatment and private care
  - Facilitates emergency services if needed.

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The goal is not to get rid of anxiety, but to help your child manage it.
2. Anxiety is NORMAL.
3. Avoidance breeds more anxiety and avoidance.
4. Validate feelings while setting limits.
5. Have a plan in place (coping plan, what to say, schedule)
6. Be open to talking through the worry with your child.
7. Notice and cope with your own feelings.
8. Reach out if you need support or don't know what to do.

*You are NOT alone.*

# CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS

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*QUESTIONS?*