MANAGING CHILDREN’S ANXIETIES
CREATING RESILIENT CHILDREN

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I CAN'T DO IT

"SMINKY SHORTS"

BY ANDREW JAMES
Questions you came with today

What do you imagine yourself doing in the coming weeks that will show that this session was useful? Turn to the person beside you and introduce yourself.
TODAY’S AGENDA

• ANXIETY - What is it?
  - Why children develop it?
  - Why focus on Anxiety
  - Prevention & Treatment

• STRATEGIES for Anxiety Management

• RESILIENCE & PARENTING
Acknowledgements

This presentation draws on multiple resources including:

• **The Cool Kids® Program**
  Macquarie University Anxiety Research Unit: Heidi Lyneham, Maree Abbott, Ann Wignall and Ronald Rapee.

• **Anxiety Presentation**  Prof Jennie Hudson Macquarie University

• **‘Friends for Life’ Program**  by Paula Barrett

• **Andrew Fuller** – Resilience

• **Beyond Blue & Kids Matter**
*What is Anxiety?*
#ANXIETY is also known as:-

Distress, worry, trepidation, apprehension, dread, fear, concern, shyness, timidity, nervousness, cautiousness...

The common thread is that when you feel these feelings, it’s because you are expecting that something bad will happen.

People with certain temperaments are more likely to have difficulty managing their anxiety and are more at risk of developing an Anxiety Disorder.

What other names do your children or others use for anxiety?
Anxiety is normal and often helpful

All of us will experience anxious moment/times.

Anxiety is important to:-

• help us survive
• keep us safe
• perform better  (Hand out)

Example:

Person crossing the street sees a fast car heading towards them (event)  The person feels anxious (feeling) and thinks, “They’re going to hit me.” (thought)  The person jumps out of the way of the car. (behaviour)
## Common fears in childhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Common fears</th>
<th>How thinking is involved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preschool 2–4 years</strong></td>
<td>- Imaginary creatures such as monsters</td>
<td>• Imagination is a major thinking tool</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Potential burglars</td>
<td>• May not distinguish fantasy from reality</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- The dark</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Early primary age 5–7 years</strong></td>
<td>- Natural disasters (e.g., fire, thunder)</td>
<td>• Able to think in concrete logical terms</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Injury</td>
<td>• Fears emphasise dangers that have a basis in reality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Animals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Fears related to TV viewing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Upper primary age 8–11 years</strong></td>
<td>- Sports and school performance</td>
<td>• Evaluates own performance by comparison with others</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Fear of failure</td>
<td>• Sense of self tied to achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Illness and death</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adolescence 12–18 years</strong></td>
<td>- Peer rejection</td>
<td>• Able to think in more abstract ways</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Fear of ridicule</td>
<td>• Able to anticipate the future in more detail</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Meeting new people</td>
<td>• Self-esteem related to peer relationships</td>
</tr>
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From the KidsMatter Primary website  
CHILDHOOD CHALLENGES

Strange things, Crowds, Making Friends, Getting Hurt, Embarrassed
Performing, Seeing Principal, Night Time, Heights, Ghosts
War, Making Speeches, Parents Going Out, Asking Questions, Getting into Trouble
Party, Bullies, Away from Home, Water
Animals, Loud Noises, Being Late, GERMS
Dogs, Feeling Sick, School, Dentist, Monsters
CHILDHOOD CHALLENGES

• Trying and Learning New things
• Managing Feelings & Meltdowns
• Making Friends
• Handling teasing, bullying
• Fitting into the Family and School environment
• Knowing Triggers (if any)
WHY FOCUS on ANXIETY

• **MOST COMMON DISORDER**
  One in three will be diagnosed with anxiety disorder

• **GATEWAY Disorder:**
  Can be the underlying cause of many other mental health issues, Eating Disorders, Substance Abuse, Links to Suicide, 85% of depressed adolescents have a history of anxiety.

• **EARLIEST ONSET** of all disorders

• **1 in 4** will have experienced a **mental disorder** by adulthood

• **RESEARCH** shows it is on the **RISE**

• **60% of school and work difficulties** due to Anxiety and depressive disorders (Andrews, 2005).
Why FOCUS on ANXIETY?

• Learning to deal with anxiety, worries & fears early in life will assist children to deal with relationship issues, tests & difficult life situations. Leads to good Emotional Health

• Emotional Health of a child is the strongest predictor of Adult life Satisfaction (UK Research)

• EQ – Emotional Intelligence strongest predictor of success at VCE

Whose anxiety is it?
Why treat anxiety
"DON'T KIDS GROW OUT OF IT"

Short Term Consequences
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor school achievement
- Fewer friends
- Poor self-esteem
- Feeling sick and unwell
- Missing out on age-appropriate activities

Why treat anxiety
"DON'T KIDS GROW OUT OF IT"

Long Term Consequences
- Continued life restricting anxiety
- High risk for adolescent depression
- High risk for abusing alcohol and drugs
- Slow to move out of home
- Less likely to achieve potential in employment
- High risk of adolescent suicidal behaviour
We only Feel Nervous when we think something bad will happen
ANXIETY is …….

BEHAVIOUR
- Flight (Avoidant behaviours) or Fight
- Aggressive responses
- Freeze

BODY
- Increased heart rate, stomach aches, agitation
- Sleep problems

MIND
- Worry = negative thoughts, poor concentration

Emotional Distress
BODILY SYMPTOMS of ANXIETY

Flushed
Blurred
Dry mouth

Neck & shoulder tension

Chest pains
Tightness in chest
Shortness of breath
Over-breathing (hyperventilation)

Pins & needles
Cold hands
Sweaty palms
Shaking hands

Headaches
Dizziness
Feeling faint
Feeling of unreality

Tightness in throat
Difficulty in swallowing

Pounding heart

Feeling of nausea
“Butterflies”
Stomach cramps

Diarrhoea
Urge to urinate

Shaky legs
If you believe the voice in your head you will find yourself in an isolated world, far away from reality.
ATTENTIONAL BIAS
#The fight/flight/freeze response

Our response to anxiety is often called the **fight/flight** response because of the main reactions anxiety provokes in us; to fight the perceived danger OR to run away from it.

All animals have this response.
Dan Siegel
BRAIN
Children more likely to **SHOW** us than tell us that they are afraid by:

- **Bodily symptoms** of anxiety
- **Avoidance**
  - Obvious (trying to escape)
  - Subtle (ways to feel safer...without avoiding outright)
- **Expressed thoughts** (danger/threat/concerns for safety)
- Look for **patterns**
- **Excessive reactions** compared to other kids of same age
- **Distress/Impact**
Tips to Identify Anxiety

• Perfectionism / Lining things up doing things in a specific way
• Seeking Assurance
• Trouble in class
• Social problems
• Behaviours that adults find annoying: whingeing, nagging

SEVERITY when behaviours cause great DISTRESS, is excessive compared to others & interrupts the child’s social life or learning then this is ANXIETY.
Types of Anxiety Disorders

• *Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
• *Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD)
• *Social Phobia (SP)
• *Specific Phobia (SpP)
• Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
• Panic Disorder with/without Agoraphobia (PD)
• Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

* Most common types
1. Only 30-40% genetic
2. Reaction of others: teachers, adults, peers
3. Certain Parenting styles can increase chance of child developing anxiety. Any environment that encourages avoidance, this increases the chances of maintaining and predicts more anxiety later in life.
4. Trauma, child abuse
Children See Children DO
How anxiety develops?

AVOIDANCE

A VICIOUS CYCLE
RISK ADVERSE SOCIETY
Bubble Wrapped kids are vulnerable.
(photo reproduced with permission: © Stephen Baccon)

• Over-protected by risk-averse parents
• Demand driven
• Focus on rights rather than responsibilities
• Not expected to contribute
• Focus on ‘me’ rather than ‘we’

RESULT of over protection

• Not independent
• Not resourceful
• Not resilient to adversity
• Not given access to authentic wellbeing
You have brains in our heads
You have feet in your shoes
You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.
Dr. Seuss
Components To Deal with ANXIETY

BODY
- Physiological
  - Awareness of body clues
  - Relaxation techniques
  - Self-regulation

MIND
- Cognitive (Thinking)
  - Positive thinking skills about self, others and the environment

DOING
- Learning
  - Problem solving skills
  - Coping behavioural skills
  - Positive role models
  - Support networks
STRATEGIES to Manage Anxiety

SHAPE BEHAVIOUR

Pay attention to courageous behaviour

Pay attention to realistic thoughts
Pay attention to physiological signs of anxiety
STRATEGIES to Manage Anxiety

COPING MODEL

Be a coping model
Strategies to manage Anxiety

- FACING FEAR to OVERCOME FEAR
Molly’s afraid of heights. Molly’s best friend is having a party at Eureka Tower and has invited Molly. Molly wants to go but is terrified. What steps can she take to challenge her fear that something bad will happen if she is up high?

Small steps, reward, repeat, sit with the uncomfortable feeling,
Strategy to deal with Anxiety
Focus on ‘What IS’ Not ‘What IFS’

If we learn to control our thoughts, we will go a long way to reducing the stress/anxiety in our lives.

Realistic Thinking

<table>
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Realistic Thinking  
(Detective Thinking)

If we learn to control our thoughts, we will go a long way to reducing the stress in our lives.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mum’s not home at the time she said she’d be home.</td>
<td>She’s been in a car accident.</td>
<td>High levels of worry, anxiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She’s been held up in traffic.</td>
<td>Low levels or no feelings of worry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>She’s stopped to get takeaway for dinner</td>
<td>Excitement, hope, anticipation</td>
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</table>
*Thinking Errors*

People who are highly **Stressed/Anxious** tend to make two errors in their thinking:

• They *overestimate how likely* it is that an unpleasant event will happen (i.e. They overestimate the probability that a bad event will happen)

And

• They *overestimate how bad* the consequences will be if the event does happen (i.e. They catastrophise the outcome).

Example; “When I go to school mum/dad might forget me and I ‘ll be left at school. I’ll be all alone.”
Strategies to deal with Anxiety

DETECTIVE THINKING

1) **Help children to identify the thoughts** behind the worry by asking questions.
   • You look worried. What is worrying you?
   • What is making you feel this way?
   • What do you think will happen?
   • What is it about this situation that’s making you worried?

2) **Name it to Tame it.** Dan Siegl

Ultimately, the child will learn to ask themselves these questions.
How to think realistically

Teach Children to recognise the verbal and nonverbal signals that tell them how they and others are feeling.

• **Name what you see:** “You’ve become very quiet. I’m wondering if you are feeling worried about this test?” “I can see you’re frowning. Are you feeling worried?” (Emotion Coaching)

• **Give children frequent opportunities to discuss the verbal/nonverbal signals given by others; in storybooks, videos, role plays, artworks etc...**
How to think realistically

Teach students to recognise that feelings can vary in their intensity.
The goal of anxiety management is to bring a strong level of emotion to a lower, more manageable level.
This is the goal of any emotion management.
Get students to draw/write down the things they feel or observe for different emotions.

I might cry or feel like crying

It’s hard to think

My shoulders slump

My heart feels heavy

“The boy in the story looks sad because he’s crying and he’s curled up.”

SAD

“This is me when I feel happy. I stand tall and smile and look right at people.”
### Event
(what is it that I am upset about?)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event (what is it that I am upset about?)</th>
<th>Thought (what do I think will happen?)</th>
<th>What is the evidence? (e.g. what are some other possibilities?)</th>
<th>Consequences (i.e. 'so what' if the worst happens?)</th>
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What is a realistic thought based on this evidence?
HOW to MANAGE ANXIETY
Strategies:-

• **Listen** and **Acknowledge/Validate**
• Change the conversation (ask rather than reassure)
• Gentle encouragement of brave behaviours
• Be a coping role model
• Keep your feelings in check
• Realistic thinking
• Overcoming fear by facing fear
• Encourage effective study habits, Schedule regular breaks, healthy meals, exercise.
9 Things Every Parent should Try to manage Anxiety

1. **Stop Reassuring** - FEEL = Freeze, Empathise, Evaluate, Let Go of guilt
2. **Highlight Why Worrying is Normal and Good.**
3. **Bring Child’s Worry to Life.** (Worry DOLL /Character)
4. **Teach Child to be a Thought Detective**: catch thoughts, collect evidence, Challenge. (Become your own debating opposition)
5. **Allow them to Worry**
6. **Help them to go from ‘What If’ to ‘What IS’**. (worriers are time travellers. Teach Mindfulness to bring back to here and now.
7. **Avoid Avoiding.**
8. **Help them to Work through a Checklist**
9. **Practice Self-Compassion**: Remember Practice self-compassion

You are not ALONE multiple factors come into play.
you did not cause this, but you can help them overcome this.
Strategies to support anxious children

Teach

• Relaxation strategies - Bubble Breathing
• Coping strategies such as ‘Worry Surfing’
• Problem Solving
• Assertiveness skills
• Strategies to deal with bullying
• Encourage help-seeking behaviours
• Books Ideas
Importance of Relaxation

- It helps to manage feelings & situations more effectively...stress, worry, anger
- Excellent way of gaining control over body
- Improves physical and mental wellbeing
- Perform better
- Reduces cortisol in blood stream. This interferes with immune system & cognitive functioning
- Introduces positive emotions - IT FEELS GOOD!
- Cognitive flexibility  (Only able to make internal changes when relaxed)
MINDFULNESS/RELAXATION

Without Mindfulness: Stimulus → Reaction

With Mindfulness: Stimulus → Mindfulness → Response
What do you do if you Suspect Anxiety?

• Raise it with others: family members, grandparents
• Monitor in different situations, different people
• Check in with teachers/after school activities leaders

Parents may have been approached by a teacher-
Seek professional help
• School counsellor
• GP
• Paediatrician
• Psychologist
*Parenting is one of the most stressful jobs there is.*
KEEP CALM AND CARRY ON
* PARENTING for RESILIENCE
Reducing anxiety

• Aim of parents & educators is to make ourselves redundant.
• We need to teach kids a range of skills to assist them to be self-regulating people.
• Safety, sociability and success are the holy grail of parenting & Teaching.
• We learn our parenting ways of being in the world from our Family of Origin (F of O)
RESILIENCE STRONG not TOUGH

- To bounce back from adversity
- Skills to deal with the inevitable ups & downs of life
Nine Things All Children Need

1. Structure
2. Consequences
3. Parent-child connections
4. Lots and lots of strong relationships
5. A powerful identity
6. A sense of control
7. A sense of belonging/spirituality/life purpose
8. Rights and responsibilities
9. Safety and support

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Anxiety Prevention Skills
Key Skills for RESILIENCE

• Self-awareness
• Self-control
• Social awareness
• Social management
• Responsibility
• Effort & Persistence
• Self-Esteem
• Problem solving
• Positive Coping strategies i.e. self soothing- Meditation, Yoga, breathing, asking for help,
• Gratitude
• Hope
HOPE
Helping Other Possibilities to Emerge

Hope comprises of:
1. Goal setting
2. Pathways thinking
   “I’ll find a way to get this done!”
3. Agency thinking
   “I will keep going. I can do this.”

References:
Snyder (2000)
Heckman a Nobel Laureate in Economics (2009) said:

Our best long term investment is human capital investment in the form of emotional, social & cognitive development.

‘EQ is a better indicator of success at VCE than IQ.’

Con Stough
Strategy to manage anxiety is to have EMOTIONAL COMPETENCE

Children must learn:

– What are emotions? Feeling the emotion is valid
– Where do they come from?
– Tuning into their bodies – self awareness
– What are the strategies and techniques I can use to manage my emotions? Mindfulness

Learning to regulate emotions is important for functioning in society. It lowers psychological difficulties and improves behaviour. It increases their RESILIENCE even when stressful events occur.
Emotional Competence

• Emotion expressivity – child’s experience of feelings how they express them

• Emotion regulation – ability to control & modulate the expression of emotion in a culturally & situationally appropriate way

• Emotional knowledge – understand own & others emotions
PARENT’S ROLE

A child’s temperament is a significant contributor to their emotionality and regulation.

However the following are central aspects of the socialisation of children’s emotion skills.

• Parents **modelling** of emotional expression & regulation

• The way they **react** to children’s emotions

• How they **coach** and teach about emotions
META-EMOTION PHILOSOPHY

• We learn about parenting (attitudes & Beliefs) from our experience of being parented.

  (Remember our parents did the best they could and learnt their style from their Family of Origin (FoO))

• These experiences shape the way we respond to emotion
Parenting Styles

Helicopter parenting
Curling parenting
Lawnmower
Free range parenting
Pussy Cat
Tiger parenting
Hippo parenting
Shoulder to shoulder parenting
Emotion Coaching Parenting

John & Julie Gottman
EMOTION COACHING STEPS

1. **TUNE IN:** Become aware of their emotion lower intensity

2. **Connect & Teach. View** their emotion as an opportunity for **intimacy** and **teaching**

3. **Accept & Listen. Validate** their feeling ‘I see you’re feeling upset’

4. **Reflect - Label** Help them use words to describe what they feel.

5. **Help** them if necessary **solve problems.** Set limits: All feelings are acceptable, but some behaviours are not.*
EMOTION COACHING

• Improves children’s behaviour
• Enables them to self-soothe, more likely to stay calm even when they are experiencing strong emotion
• Don’t disapprove of feelings but set clear limits about inappropriate behaviour
• Emotion Coaching creates a strong bond and children more responsive to parents.
Dealing with Adversity
RESOURCES

raisingchildren.net.au

Pathways to Resilience

anxietybc.com/

Kathy Walker

SMILING MINDS

HAPPY in ST KILDA