



# MIDDLE SCHOOL ANXIETY

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JANE HART + MARY DAAR  
HILLSIDE MIDDLE SCHOOL COUNSELORS

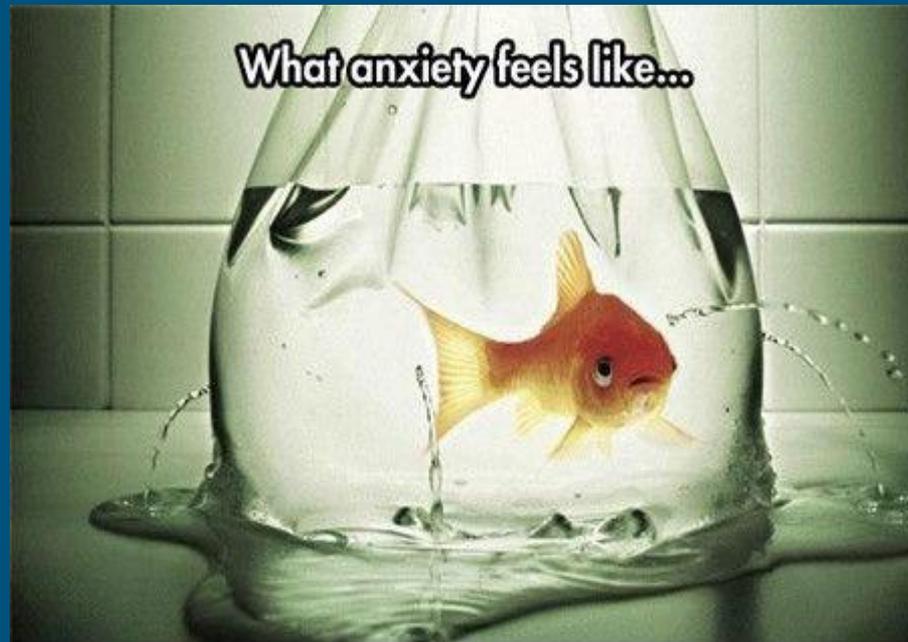


# Anxiety

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Our anxiety does not come from  
thinking about the future, but  
from wanting to control it.

Kahlil Gibran



# UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

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Fear = survival instinct when it occurs in response to a realistically dangerous situation

- Our body goes through a whole series of changes that ultimately serve to protect us
- Anxiety can also be experienced in less threatening situations.
- Athletes before a big game or race will feel some degree of anxiety which will pump them up and get them ready to compete

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=GVWRvVH5gBQ>

# WHEN DOES NORMAL ANXIETY BECOME A PROBLEM?

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When it is out of proportion to the situation, that is, when it occurs in situations where there is no actual threat or danger

- excessive
- feels uncontrollable
- is experienced as intrusive in your life
- is persistent-seeming to always be around
- causes you significant distress, or impairs your ability to go about your day-to-day life

-This is when normal anxiety becomes generalized anxiety.

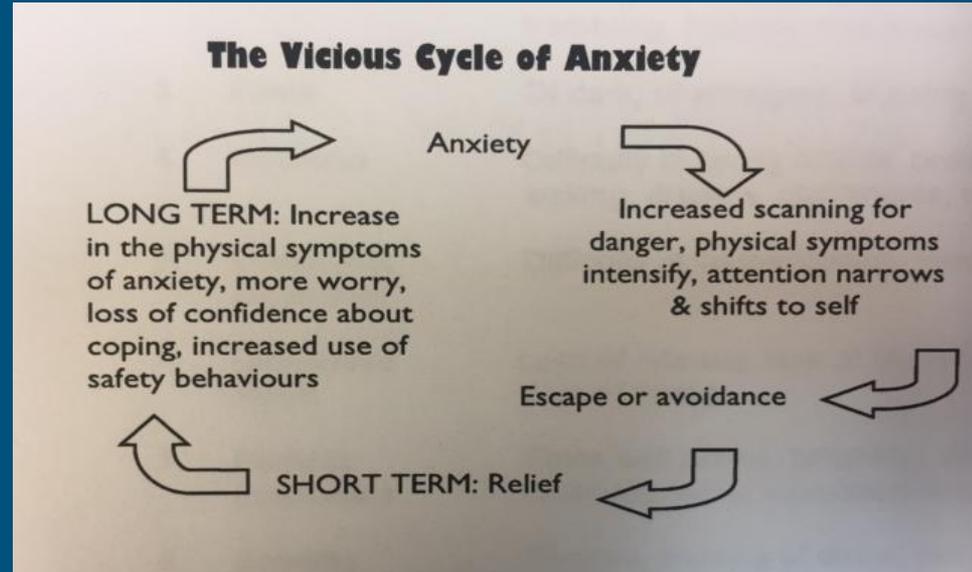
# GENERALIZED ANXIETY

## DSM 5

- Chronic worries running through their head. Occurring over and over like a broken record.
- Intrusive thoughts- no matter how much they try not to worry these thoughts keep popping back into their mind against their will
- Hating uncertainty- wanting to know what is going to happen in the future (fear of the unknown)
- Feeling restless, keyed up, on edge and unable to relax. And/or irritability.
- Sleep disturbance- trouble falling asleep & maintaining sleep, because their mind is filled with worry. Or easily fatigued.
- Change in eating habits
- Problems concentrating and focusing on a task
- Procrastinating- putting things off because it all feels too much and too overwhelming
- Avoiding situations in which they worry or get anxious and nervous

# VICIOUS CYCLE OF ANXIETY

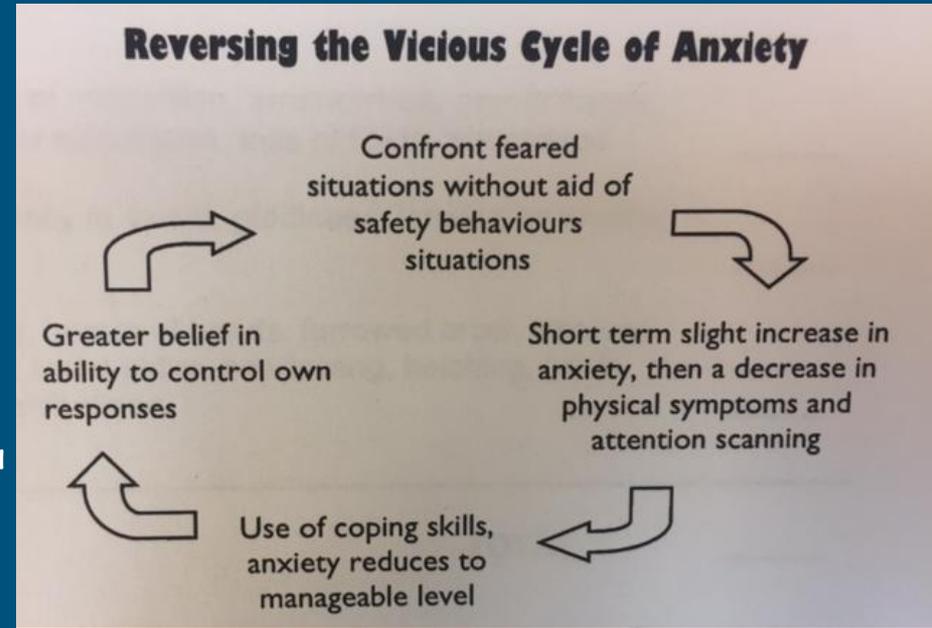
- Worrying about some potential threat
- Trying to cope with future event
- Looking for possible signs of potential threat
- Looking internally to see if you can cope
- When you notice your anxious symptoms, you think you can't cope, and therefore become more anxious



# REVERSING THE VICIOUS CYCLE OF ANXIETY

## Positive Cycle:

- Gradually confronting feared situations- graded exposure
- will lead to an improved sense of confidence
- will help reduce anxiety and allow you to go into situations that are important to you



~ Center for Clinical Interventions

# UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES

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All or nothing thinking- Sometimes called 'black and white thinking'

Over-generalizing- "everything, always, nothing, ever" Seeing a pattern based upon a single event, or being overly broad in the conclusions we draw.

Mental Filter- Only paying attention to certain types of evidence. *Noticing our failures but not seeing our successes*

Disqualifying the positive- Discounting the good things that have happened or that you have done.

# UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES continued

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Jumping to conclusions- Mind reading- imagining we know what others are thinking. Fortune telling- predicting the future

Magnification/Catastrophizing/Minimization- blowing things out of proportion, or inappropriately shrinking something to make it seem less important

Emotional reasoning- assuming because we feel a certain way what we think must be true.

Should/must- Using critical words like 'should', or 'ought', can make us feel guilty, or like we have already failed- Applying 'shoulds' to other people often results in frustration/resentment

Labeling- Assigning labels to ourselves or other people- loser, idiot, useless

Personalization- Blaming yourself or taking responsibility for something that wasn't completely your fault. Conversely, blaming others for something that was your fault.

# COPING SKILLS: BREATHING + THINKING BETTER

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When you are gradually confronting feared situations, there will be a short term increase in anxiety- this is normal- start with situations that are easier for you to handle, then work your way up to more challenging tasks allowing you to build your confidence slowly, use skills you have learned, get used to the situation, and to challenge your fears. By doing this in a structured and repeated way, you can reduce anxiety.

You can learn other skills as alternatives to avoidance and safety behaviors.

**Breathing:** anxiety is associated with fast shallow breathing contributing to the physical sensations- slow down breathing and use calming and relaxing techniques.

**Thinking:** Challenge negative thoughts with more balanced ones.

# How the **MIND** of a **MIDDLE SCHOOLER** works

Middle school students typically have an attention span of **10-12** minutes.

The brain growth that occurs between the ages of **10-15** is the greatest in human life.

Teens learn best through **interaction** and activity.

Adolescents misinterpret emotions and instructions up to **40%** of the time.

Middle schoolers retain **5-7** bits of information at a time.

Adolescents need **9-13** hours of sleep per night to function best.



## Stage 5- Adolescence (12-18 yrs old)

**Stage: Adolescence (12 to 18 years)**

Basic Conflict: Identity vs. Role Confusion

Important Events: Social Relationships

Outcome: Teens need to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Success leads to an ability to stay true to yourself, while failure leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self.

# WHAT SHOULD PARENTS DO?

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When parents discover their children are suffering from anxiety or depression (or hurting themselves), the best response is to acknowledge and validate their feelings. Don't get angry and start taking things away from them. "I'm sorry you're in pain. I'm here for you". Fadi Haddad, psychiatrist and co-author of *Helping Kids in Crisis*.

Straightforward acknowledgment of their struggles takes away any judgment. No adolescent wants to be seen as flawed or vulnerable.

Recognize how your behavior and response might make the anxiety worse.

# WHAT CAN PARENTS DO?

Talk about the real stuff. Sometimes conversations with our kids are about achievements, schedules and chores. Go beyond these.

Pay attention but don't smother them. Give teens space to grow and separate from you, but watch for changes in behavior.

Resist getting angry. When parents find out a teen has been hiding something or have a behavior issue, the response is often anger or punishment.

Don't put off getting help and treat the whole family. If you're worried, talk to a school counselor, therapist or doctor.

# COMMON CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS FOR ADOLESCENT ANXIETY

Genetic: Adolescents who have close relatives who have an anxiety disorder are at greater risk for developing anxiety than those who don't have a similar history.

Physical: Neuroimaging studies have shown some teens with anxiety disorders have atypical activity in certain areas of the brain when compared to their teens.

Environmental: Stressful events such as a death of a loved one, a move to a new area, divorce of parents, instability at home.

Risk Factors: Being female, traumatic events during childhood years, stress due to chronic illness of the child or parent, personalities that prone to worry, usage of drugs and alcohol.

# MORE TIPS FOR PARENTS

Pay attention to your child's feelings

- Stay calm when your child becomes anxious about a situation or event
- Recognize and praise small accomplishments
- Don't punish mistakes or lack of progress
- Be flexible
- Modify expectations during stressful times
- Plan for transitions
- Help them develop coping skills
- Model proper coping skills and strategies in stressful situations

# Adolescent Brain Development

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<https://youtu.be/f9Ya0mHslgM>

Brains do not fully develop until the age of 25.

The last part of the brain to develop is the prefrontal cortex which controls impulses, organization, planning, moral reasoning, emotional stabilization, concentration, and prioritizing.

Adolescents do not fully process cause and effect/risk and reward (another skill of the prefrontal cortex) so they really don't know why they did something wrong or why they got in trouble. They can be impulsive.

Kids need a lot of sleep daily to concentrate, metabolize sugar and retain information effectively.

Information is only stored in short term memory for 20 minutes. When information is connected to prior knowledge, it can be stored on long term.

# ANXIETY, DEPRESSION AND THE AMERICAN ADOLESCENT

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*The Kids Are Not All Right*, Time Magazine November 2016. Susanna Schrobsdorff.

The number of distressed young people are on the rise, experts say.

About 6.3 million teens, ages 12-17 have had an anxiety disorder according to recent data from the National Institute of Mental Health. Experts suspect these numbers are higher because many people do not seek help.

With the rise in distressed teens, experts are trying to figure out how to best help.

# THE TIMES WE LIVE IN HAVE CREATED REALLY ANGSTY PEOPLE

Adolescent minds by nature crave stimulation and their emotions are often urgent and sometimes debilitating. *So the environment or climate they have to navigate this stage of their lives is probably the biggest variable.*

Post 9/11 generation. Era of economic and national insecurity. And school violence.

Overinvolved parents.

School stress.

Over Scheduled. In some cases.

Technology and social media.

---Whitlock

# TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL MEDIA IS TRANSFORMING SOCIETY

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Technology probably plays a bigger role to increased anxiety than school stress or parents micromanaging their lives.

Kids are caught in a web of stimulus they *can't* get away from or *don't want* to get away from, and *don't know how* to get away. Janis Whitlock, Cornell Research Program on Self Injury and Recovery.

A CNN special report conducted with researchers from 2 universities in 2015 examined over 200 13 year olds, found there is no firm line between their real lives and online worlds. (Studies suggest the anxiety wrought by school pressures and technology is also affecting younger kids (elementary age)).

# OVEREXPOSED

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It doesn't, matter where they live. Information stretches to all areas of living, rural to urban. No one is isolated from the "thicket of internet drama". Daniel Chamber, director of school-based services, Helena Montana.

Teens can be exposed to things so quickly, before the adults. It makes it difficult for adults/counselors to help.

According to a 2015 Montana Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 30% of the state's teens said they feel sad and hopeless every day for at least 2 weeks in a row.

# OVEREXPOSED

Even though kids are over supervised nowadays, they still, thanks to cell phones, get immersed in emotional (sometimes painful) tangles with dozens of their friends and classmates.

Or they look at other people's lives and feel self-loathing. They don't feel good enough. They can't measure up.

Or they're caught up in discussion with people across the country/world they never met about things that have nothing to do with them.

It's hard for them to get out of their online community because sometimes their online life feels like real life.

They struggle with managing their downtime without phones/technology.

# MOBILE SOCIAL TECH REVOLUTION

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There is a big difference between the mobile social tech revolution of the past 15 years compared to how things were back in the day. If your mom told you to get off the family phone or turn off the tv, you do it. Kids are in charge nowadays. Megan Moreno, head of social media and adolescent health research at Seattle Children's Hospital.

Parents are also mimicking teen behavior. They are zoning out too. They're ignoring people. And answering calls during dinner.

Technology rules need to be established for the whole family.

# SCHOOL ANXIETY AND STRESS

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Stress itself is not a bad thing. You are truly not alive without stress.  
Brenda Bryant, PhD.

Being challenged makes you learn new things to keep your brain functioning.

In all major theories of learning, there is stress, but when stress interferes with development, there is a problem. Sometimes with too much stress kids get immobilized.

We don't need to apply pressure for kids to perform. Building on their inner motivations is more important. Karen DeFord, PhD.

# SCHOOL ANXIETY AND STRESS

Parents often demand higher standards for their kids than they themselves face. Richard Hall, PhD.

Many parents are preoccupied with seeing their children succeed and intolerant of anything other than excellence.

We as schools and we as parents need to remind ourselves sustained excellence is not natural. It is not how we, ourselves operate, so why expect it from our children.

We need to understand school is a long-term process. One immediate success or failure is not going to determine a child's life. Growth will happen, but we have to accept it is going to be unpredictable. What we can do is show constant love, support and presence. --Hall

## Middle school is a very difficult period in a child's life.

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- They are passing through the doorway of adolescence.
- They get frustrated with their inability to handle situations they used to be able to handle.
- Our kids come home stressed out and we need to let them decompress for a bit. Give them time and listen to them. They shouldn't come home to us giving them grief.
- Middle school is where peer dynamics change entirely. Quite often it is an abrupt change. It can be pretty painful.
- Teens are desperate to maintain good relationships with their peers and they don't want to goof up.

-Bryant.

---Time Magazine

## They will goof up/make mistakes

- We can help them learn from their mistakes.
- When children make mistakes or misbehave try to understand their behavior instead of merely punishing it.
- Communicate with your child. Listen, just don't talk.

Anxiety is a normal part of adolescence and teen years as these are some of the most stressful times in a person's life. Some anxiety is a normal reaction to stressful situations. It can help teens deal with tricky situations. For most individuals, anxiety is often a harmless phase that lasts for a short time and dissipates on it's own.

-----Village Behavioral Health

## Ways to help healthy stress from becoming distress

- Spend time with your kids
- Provide a stable home environment with a daily routine
- Set limitations and negotiate rules
- Good communication
- Monitor their eating habits
- Focus on the positive and use humor