

Helping Your Children Learn to Handle Their Own Anxiety

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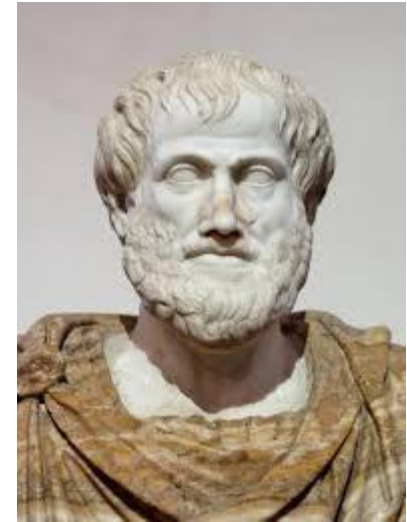
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Aristotle and the “Golden Mean”

- *Not too little anxiety*
- *Not too much anxiety*



Aristotle's Concept of the Golden Mean		
Deficiency (-)	BALANCE	Excess (+)
cowardice	COURAGE	rashness
stinginess/miserliness	GENEROSITY	extravagance
sloth	AMBITION	greed
humility	MODESTY	pride
secrecy	HONESTY	loquacity
moroseness	GOOD HUMOR	absurdity
quarrelsomeness	FRIENDSHIP	flattery
self-indulgence	TEMPERANCE	insensibility
apathy	COMPOSURE	irritability
indecisiveness	SELF CONTROL	impulsiveness

Anxiety in childhood and adolescence: *Common, under-recognized, under-treated*

8-10%



“Anxiety” A.K.A.

- Home sick
- Worry wart
- Self-conscious
- Shy
- Over-sensitive
- Fearful
- Apprehensive
- Dreadful
- Worried
- Stressed



Common thoughts and behaviors

- Hypervigilant/ “on-guard”
- Narrow comfort zone
- Withdrawal/ negative initial reaction to novel stimuli
- Feels threatened
- Avoids
- Catastrophizes
- Excessive need for reassurance
- Accommodation by parents



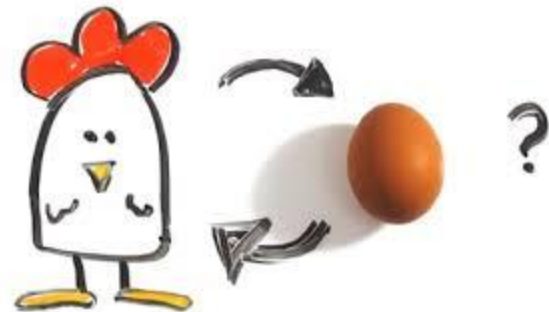
Chicken and Egg causation: *interacting factors*

- genetics ↔ environment
- child ↔ parent



“Chicken-egg” Diagnosis

- Primary anxiety with secondary symptoms
 - Anxiety causing other stuff
- Hidden primary condition with secondary anxiety
 - Other stuff causing anxiety

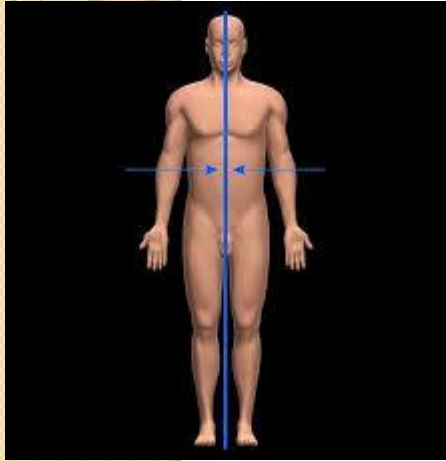


Primary Anxiety Disorders

- Separation Anxiety
- Generalized Anxiety
- Specific Fears and Phobias
- Selective Mutism
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorders
- Perfectionism
- Social Anxiety
- Situational Anxiety
- Acute/ Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Panic Attack / Panic Disorder
- Agoraphobia



Anxiety causing other stuff



Physical (“midline”) symptoms

- Headaches/ Dizziness
- Chest pain/ shortness of breath/ hyperventilating, palpitations
- Lump in throat, swallowing difficulties, vomiting
- Eating too much or too little
- Stomachaches
- Bowel/ bladder urgency/ frequency/ “accidents”



Anxiety causing other stuff

- Attention, executive and learning problems (poor school performance)
- Aggressiveness/ explosive outbursts
- Sensory Reactivity /“Processing Disorder”
- Sleep problems (initiation and maintenance)



Other stuff causing anxiety

- ADHD/ Executive Dysfunction
- Learning disability/ weaknesses
- Motor coordination deficits
- Sensory differences
- Autism Spectrum Disorder/Asperger's Syndrome/ Social skills deficits



Other stuff causing anxiety

- Tourette's Syndrome/tic disorders
- Bipolar illness
- Medication side effect
 - stimulants for ADHD
 - steroids for asthma
- Substance-induced
- Environmental stresses
- Parent (or other-adult) anxiety →

Adult anxiety (parent, relative, teacher, doctor, etc.) causing child anxiety

- Normal adult worry
- Unrealistic adult demands and expectations
- Adult worry about current medical problem
- Adult worry about past problem
 - “Vulnerable Child Syndrome”
- Primary adult Anxiety Disorder



For the sake of further discussion, let's assume...

- Other stuff has been minimized
- Anxiety is out of proportion to life situation
- Child's anxiety (not the parent's) is the main problem



General management principles

- Do not “feed” the anxiety
- “Feed” bravery and independence
- Respect the anxiety



Do not “feed” the anxiety

- Accept anxiety as a normal emotion
- Beware: anxiety is contagious
- Do not reinforce anxiety with attention
- Do not allow avoidance behaviors



“Feed” bravery and independence

- Shift problem-solving from parent to child
- Believe in your child’s abilities and resilience
- Praise self-help
- Role models of bravery



Respect the anxiety

- Be reassuring and patient
- Teach *why* anxiety can be a problem
- Teach *how* to control anxiety
- Set realistic/ achievable goals



CBT: Cognitive-behavioral therapy

- “Cognitive” because it challenges distorted/ irrational thoughts
- “Behavioral” because it changes avoidance behaviors
 - *Note: the right balance of “C” and “B” depends upon the child’s developmental age and motivation*





- **S**cared?
- **T**hinking about what?
- **O**ther things I can do or think to help myself relax
- **P**at myself on the back for helping myself calm down

A change of attitude

- Externalize the anxiety
- You control it
- It stops controlling you



Bossing Back ANXIETY

- How has ANXIETY bossed you around this week?
- How does ANXIETY mess things up at home? At school? With your friends?
- How have you said, “NO!” to ANXIETY?
- Please give an example of how you “bossed back” ANXIETY this week.
- When you “bossed back” ANXIETY, how did it feel? What did you say to yourself?



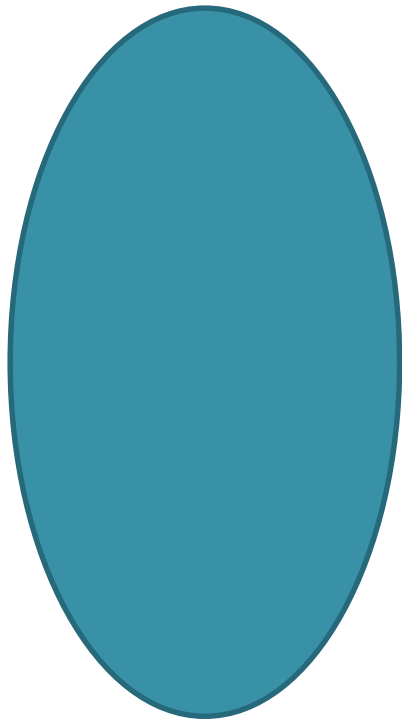
Bossing Back ANXIETY

- Who helps you boss ANXIETY back?
- How would (name your hero) boss ANXIETY around?
- Who do you most want to know about your success in writing ANXIETY out of your life story?
- What will your life without ANXIETY look like?



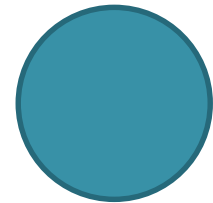
Before...

ANXIETY in control



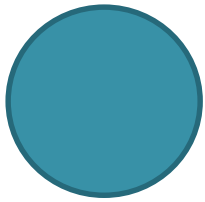
Transition Zone

You
in control



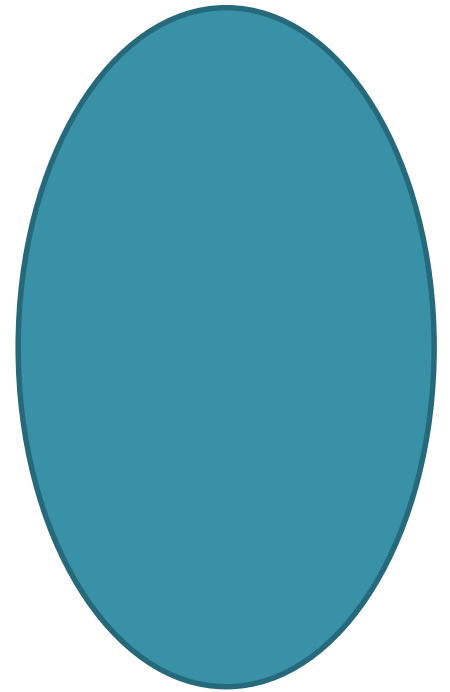
After...

Anxiety
in control



Transition Zone

YOU in control



What needs to change?

- What am I anxious about?
 - Make a list
- How anxious am I?
 - The “Fear Thermometer”



Fear Thermometer

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
no problem		I'm a little uneasy		maybe I can resist but I'm not sure		I don't think so		really hard!	NO WAY!



Anxiety Symptoms

Rank	Symptom	Temperature (1-10)	Target Date
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1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

How will I change it? →

- Realistic thinking
- Relaxation
- Exposure



Realistic thinking

- Challenging irrational thinking
- Challenging excessive anxiety



Relaxation



- Self-calming: “**STOP**”
- Ordinary relaxation strategies
- New relaxation techniques
- Practice, practice, practice



Ordinary relaxation strategies

- Listening to/ playing music
- Reading
- Writing
- Drawing
- Exercise
- Conversation
- Going to a quiet room
- Playing a game



New relaxation techniques

- Yoga
- Meditation
- Neuro-biofeedback
- Self-hypnosis
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Breathing awareness
- Calming mental imagery



Exposure

- Deliberate exposure
- Graduated exposure →
- Sufficient exposure
- Sufficient reward



Graduated exposure

- Start with the smallest fears on child's rating scale
 - “Low hanging fruit”
- Slowly increase the degree of difficulty
- Finally, the child challenges his or her worst fears



Facing My Fears: Step-by-Step

Final goal: _____

My reward: _____

Goal #5: _____

My reward: _____

Goal #4: _____

My reward: _____

Goal #3: _____

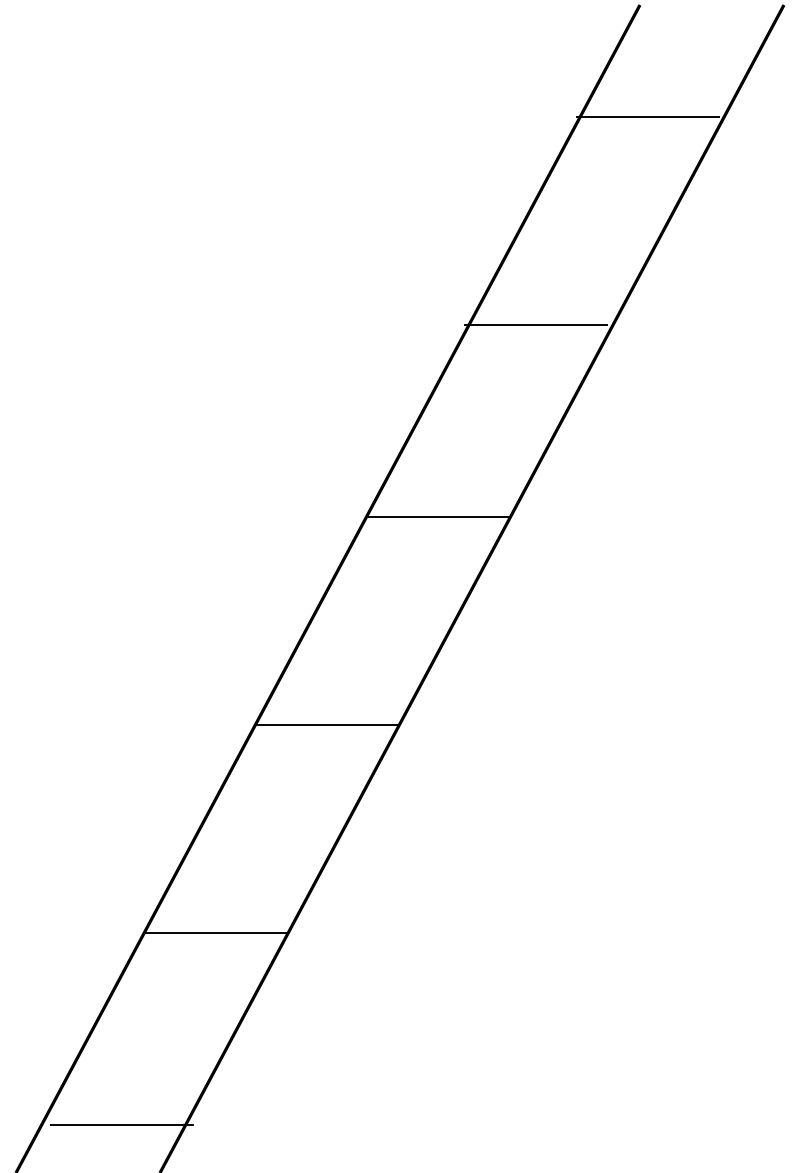
My reward: _____

Goal #2: _____

My reward: _____

Goal #1: _____

My reward: _____



What if it's too hard?

- CBT with a psychologist
- Medication with a Child Psychiatrist or Developmental-Behavioral Pediatrician
- Referral for parent therapy



Medication options

- SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors)
- NRIs (norepinephrine reuptake inhibitors)
- Tricycles anti-depressants
- Beta blockers
- Benzodiazepines



References

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