

Anxiety, fear, and the fear of fear

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Components of anxiety

- What is fear?
- What is anxiety?
 - What does it feel like?
 - Thoughts, body sensations, behaviours
 - Panic: Fight/flight
 - Fear of fear
- Emotional and physiological sensitivity
 - Intense emotions

Adolescents under stress

- Figure out who I am
- Figure out how to be independent
- Figure out how to be accepted by peers
- Figure out how to be in a romantic relationship
- Figure out my sexuality
- Plan out my future (when I don't even really know what's out there)
- Balance academic performance and extracurricular activities (jobs, sports, music, arts, etc.)

Common sources of anxiety

- Fear of failure
 - Not living up to expectations of parents/others
 - Inadequacy
- Fear of rejection
 - From peers or parents
- Fear of uncertainty
 - Not knowing, need for control
- Fear for health and safety
- Incongruence (inside doesn't match outside)
 - Hiding away emotions/core parts of self

What can anxiety look like in adolescents?

- Typical anxiety and fear
- Anger, outbursts, acting out
- Defiance
- Distancing physically or emotionally from parents
- School avoidance
- Sleep problems
- Difficulties focusing/concentrating
 - Fatigue
- Physical problems
 - Stomach aches, headaches, pain, dizziness, nausea

How to Help – Step 1:
Remember how you
wanted to be treated by
parents/adults

What to do

- Be the anchor
 - The importance of strong attachment relationships
- Understand what's going on under the surface
 - Combination of getting information from your teen and imagining their perspective
- Find the sweet spot between pushing too much and not pushing at all
- Quiet confidence
 - Don't talk too much leading into anxiety provoking situations
- Let your kids be anxious. It won't hurt.
 - Experiencing anxiety and tolerating it is very important
 - Be anxious but face the situation anyways
- Promote acceptance of anxiety
 - Avoids the battle/struggle against anxiety
 - The more you struggle, the worse it gets

- Be aware of your own anxiety and how it may be affecting your teen
- "Living" is the enemy of anxiety
 - Anxiety primarily exists in the past and future

What not to do

- Do not be an accomplice in avoiding fear/anxiety
 - Completely normal and safe to be afraid/anxious
 - The feeling isn't the problem, it's what you do with the feeling that can be problematic
- Do not try to make it go away
- Do not convey the message that "it's all in your head"
 - It isn't!
- Do not dismiss as something to get over
 - "You don't need to be afraid"
- Be careful of messages associated with "emotion regulation"

Concerning behaviours

- Breaking objects and punching walls
- Getting violent/aggressive
- Escaping to video games
- Drug and alcohol use
- Others?

Addressing Concerning Behaviours

- Attempting to understand is key
 - Minimizes defensiveness
 - Increases ability to explore negative aspects of behaviour
 - Uncovers what your teen is getting out of this behaviour (must be gaining something)
 - Openness and being nonjudgmental
- Focus on underlying emotions rather than behaviour
- The problems of taking a hard line stance
 - Know your teen
 - What if they say no?
- Be sincere and express your concern
 - But...need to park that concern in order to talk/listen
- Focus on what you CAN control
 - Attachment relationship