

# **Understanding Anxiety and Lack of Motivation in Youth**

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# Goals of this presentation:

- Give an overview of anxiety disorders and common triggers that impact youth
- Provide insight to families on the difference of anxiety and depression VS. lack of motivation
- How to encourage families to seek out help from mental health professionals



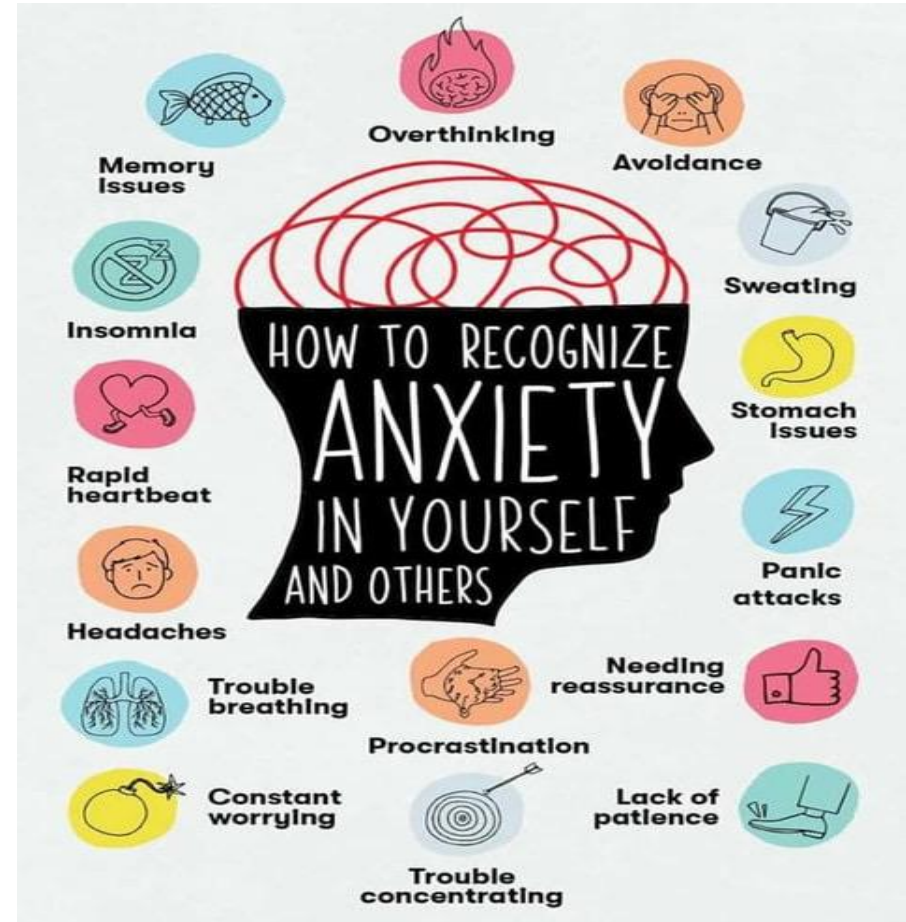
# Lack of Motivation and Mental Illness.

- The most common sign of depression and anxiety in children is the loss of interest or pleasure in doing enjoyable activities.
- Occasional anxiety is a normal part of life
- Youth with an anxiety disorder find it more difficult to control their anxiety and stay focused on daily tasks



# What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is a normal natural response to a perceived threat or negative outcome or event.
- It is common and normal for children to feel anxious about a variety of different things throughout their development.



# Generalized Anxiety Disorder

- Worry a lot about everyday things
- Have trouble controlling worries or feelings of nervousness
- Feel restless, keyed up, and have trouble relaxing.
- Have a hard time concentrating (often mistaken for ADHD)
- Easily startled
- Have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep or feel easily tired or are tired all of the time
- Report headaches, stomachaches, or unexplained pains
- Feel irritable or on “edge” (could be mistaken for ODD)
- Sweat a lot, feel light-headed or out of breath

**FLIGHT**



**FIGHT**



**FREEZE**

# Common Anxiety Triggers in Late Childhood

- Anxiety Revolves More Around Social or Evaluative Situations:
- Being Teased or Rejected by Peers
- Social Media
- Being Embarrassed
- Self-Image or Appearance
- Dating
- Class Presentations
- Taking Tests
- Fear of Death or Physical Injury



\*Source: Strategies to Support Anxious Children in the Classroom/WayAhead.org.au

# Impact of Anxiety

For some children fear and anxiety can have a significant impact on:

- School Performance
- School Attendance
- A Child's Ability to Make and Maintain Friends
- Participation in Activities
- Ability to Make Decisions
- Family Relationships

\*Source: Strategies to Support Anxious Children in the Classroom/[WayAhead.org.au](http://WayAhead.org.au)





# Common Characteristics of Children who Experience Significant Anxiety

- May Dislike Change or Taking Risks
- Tendency to Highlight Negative Consequences in Situations (“all the kids will laugh at me”)
- Avoid Situations and Things they Fear (avoid attending parties or participating in groups)
- Physical Complaints

# What is Depression & What Causes It?

- According to the American Psychiatric Association “Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or loss of interest in activities you once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease your ability to function at work and at home.”
- Childhood depression may be the result of a combination of factors. These risk factors alone may not account for the mood disorder, but they might play a role.
- Risk Factors include:
  - Physical health.
  - Stressful events. Changes at home, at school, or with friends
  - Environment. Like a chaotic or stressful home life, Family history.
  - Biochemical imbalances. Uneven levels of certain hormones may impact how the brain works.

# What Does Depression Look Like?

- Feeling Sad, hopeless, or irritable a lot of the time
- Showing changes in energy – being tired and sluggish or tense and restless a lot of the time
- Showing changes in eating patterns – eating a lot more or a lot less than usual
- Showing changes in sleep patterns – sleeping a lot more or a lot less than normal
- frequent expression of physical illness, such as headaches or stomach aches
- reduced concentration or having a hard time paying attention
- decline in performance at school
- expressing negative thinking (self-critical comments or complaining)
- Not wanting to do or enjoy doing fun things
- Feeling worthless, useless, or guilty
- Showing self-injury and self-destructive behavior

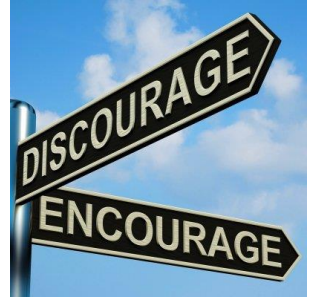


# What Does Lack of Motivation Look Like?

- sleeping in or sleeping during the day.
- not cleaning up after themselves
- not doing important school work.
- not practicing good hygiene.
- When does it become a concern?
  - When a child has a lack of motivation in tasks and hobbies that they enjoy
  - When the lack of motivation impacts them negatively over a long period of time
  - When you notice a sudden mood change in your child.



# Notice a Lack of Motivation?



- **Define Your Concerns!**
  - What Behaviors are you seeing that make you think they aren't engaged?
- **“I’m Bored” What does that really mean?**
  - What do they really mean when they are saying they are bored? Are they really bored or are they just frustrated and aren't defining they're feelings properly?
- **Talk to the teacher or parent**
  - Teachers and parent communication can be very important when determining if they are seeing the same issues and working together to address them
- **Is this normal for their learning process?**
  - In many cases when a child or teen is learning something new there can be anxiety or fear associated with it which can look like a “lack of motivation” instead of laziness.

# Ways to Encourage Motivation in Children/Teens

- **Be available for them**
  - Be around for the child, especially when younger and engage them in different activities, instead of being in front of a screen
- **Encourage communication in the family and classroom**
  - It's important to have good interpersonal communication.
- **Get Children to believe in themselves**
  - Encourage children to have a goal and pursue it.
- **Be a Role Model**
  - Children tend to imitate what they see, be it good or bad so it's imperative to set an example
- **Teach children the need to do what they don't like to do**
  - Children will learn what they want if you give in to them. Make children understand that it's necessary to do things "we don't like"

# Ways to Encourage Motivation in Children/Teens

- **Set rules and expectations**
  - Teach children in a calm, positive manner the importance of discipline, keeping to limits set, cooperation and helping each other is important.
- **Allow children to be bored.**
  - If children complain of boredom, ask them to think of something to do or entertain themselves that doesn't involve screen time.
- **Avoid telling children that they are lazy**
  - If you repeatedly tell a child that they are lazy but never show them an alternative way to thinking or behaving than you are conditioning them to believe it's out of their control.
- **Positive Reinforcement with Verbal Affirmations**
  - Focus on the behaviors you want to see and point out when you see them doing good.

# How to Help Your Child Cope at Home

- Acknowledge and normalize your child's fear and talk about it with them
- Do not minimize feelings
- Utilize active listening skills and don't rush to resolve or problem solve fears
- Show your child affection
- Be a good role model
- Share your own healthy coping skills
- Encourage them to talk about their anxieties with a professional if it is causing distress on a daily basis
- Make time each day to check in with your child
- Encourage healthy sleep, physical activity, nutrition.



# Encourage Positive Self-Talk

- Self-talk is what we say to ourselves in our heads
- Students with anxiety may engage in negative self-talk
- Examples of Positive Self-Talk
  - “I can do it!”
  - “I am brave enough to try this!”
  - “I will try my best!”
  - “It's okay to make mistakes.”
  - “It’s okay to ask for help.”



# Instilling a Growth Mindset

- The belief that your mindset can change over time
- “My abilities are not set in stone”
- “If I practice, I’ll get better”
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rUJkbWNnNy4>



# 10 Growth Mindset Statements



What can I say to myself?



INSTEAD OF:

TRY THINKING:

I'm not good at this.

I'm awesome at this.

I give up.

This is too hard.

I can't make this any better.

I just can't do Math.

I made a mistake.

She's so smart. I will never be that smart.

It's good enough.

Plan "A" didn't work.

1 What am I missing?

2 I'm on the right track.

3 I'll use some of the strategies we've learned.

4 This may take some time and effort.

5 I can always improve so I'll keep trying.

6 I'm going to train my brain in Math.

7 Mistakes help me to learn better.

8 I'm going to figure out how she does it.

9 Is it really my best work?

10 Good thing the alphabet has 25 more letters!

# How do I Know if a Child Needs Professional Help for Anxiety or Depression

- **Interference:** Anxiety becomes problematic when it significantly interferes in daily activities of the child and/or family. At school, they may be unable to complete tasks, be avoidant of class activities, or may miss class often.
- **Age Appropriateness:** Anxiety is problematic when it is not age appropriate (ex. Separation Anxiety at age 6 versus age 10)
- **Distress:** Children with problematic anxiety experience high levels of distress. Questions to consider: Is the child becoming very upset when faced with fearful situations? Are they enduring fearful activities with a high level of distress?
- **Length of Time:** Students may need more support if anxiety is constant and persists for a significant amount of time. (ex. Anxiety while away for a week at camp vs. anxiety over several weeks impacting sleeping, daily tasks, etc.)

# Resources

Refer to School Counselor or Social Worker who can assist the family with a referral to mental health resources if needed.

Mental Health, Addiction and Recovery Services Board of Lorain County  
Navigator Line: (440) 240-7025

Ohio Crisis Text Line: 4HOPE to 741 741



# Sources

<https://www.apa.org/topics/anxiety>

<https://www.nhsinform.scot/illnesses-and-conditions/mental-health/anxiety-disorders-in-children>

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