

Anxiety in Adolescents

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What is Anxiety?

- We all experience anxiety
- Anxiety is a normal part of life
- Anxiety disorders are more than temporary worries or fears
- For those with an anxiety disorder the feelings interfere with daily activities



CHRONIC
THE PERILS OF A OVERTHINKING

Physical Signs of Anxiety

- Pounding or racing heart
- Sweating or cold, clammy hands
- Feeling jumpy or restless
- Trembling, twitching, or shaking
- Having a hard time catching your breath
- Feeling dizzy or light-headed
- Having stomachaches or nausea
- Having trouble falling or staying asleep

ANXIETY FEELS LIKE...

Wearing a corset. Your chest is too tight, it's hard to breathe, and your stomach hurts. You're uncomfortable in your own skin. You seem stiff and awkward to others.



Being inside a kaleidoscope. The world is too bright, and everything keeps changing. As soon as you figure out the pattern, it shifts.



Being on stage ALL the time... and you don't know your lines.



Having a million Post-It notes in your brain of things to do, and not do, and things you wish you hadn't done. Notes are rarely thrown away, but new ones are always being layered on top.

Symptoms That Impact Emotions, Thoughts or Behaviors

- Feeling restless, nervous or tense
- Being angry or irritable
- Worrying a lot about everyday decisions
- Feeling that something bad is going to happen
- Becoming easily distracted/difficulty concentrating
- Feeling like your mind goes blank
- Finding it hard to do normal work or activities
- Focusing on what isn't going well or what could go wrong

Symptoms That Impact Emotions, Thoughts or Behaviors (cont.)

- Frequently avoiding certain places or things that trigger anxiety
- Drinking, using drugs or technology to numb feelings

"This is one of the most frustrating things about having an anxiety disorder; Knowing as you're freaking out that there's no reason to be freaked out, but lacking the ability to shut the emotion down."

-Unknown

Symptoms of Anxiety

- Alcohol or drug problems
- Anger and irritability
- Chronic pain
- Confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Dizziness
- Eating problems
- Feeling on edge
- Feelings of hopelessness

Symptoms of Anxiety (cont.)

- Flashbacks
- Gambling
- Overuse of technology
- Guilt
- Headaches
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Loss of interest or pleasure
- Nightmares

Symptoms of Anxiety (cont.)

- Noise or light irritation
- Reckless behavior
- Social withdrawal/Isolation
- Trouble sleeping

Types of Anxiety Disorders

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia)
- Specific Phobias
- Separation Anxiety
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Effects of Anxiety Disorders

- Poor school performance
- Behavioral problems
- Dropping out of school
- Poor self-worth and low self-esteem
- Petty crime
- Substance use and abuse
- Social withdrawal/Isolation

Anxiety

- According to the National Institute of Mental Health, anxiety is the most common mental health disorder, affecting nearly 1/3 of both adolescents and adults. It is typically seen as less serious than the depression that often accompanies anxiety.
- According to Village Behavioral Health, approximately 8% of adolescents between 13 and 18 have an anxiety disorder, with symptoms appearing around age 6.

Anxiety (cont.)

- Untreated children with anxiety disorders are at a higher risk to perform poorly in school, miss out on important social experiences, and engage in substance abuse.
- When kids are in the midst of anxiety there is an awareness of something not being right but they can't explain it. All they know is that they feel as though something bad might happen. Telling them there's nothing to worry about won't help.



The average high schooler has the same level of anxiety as



the average psychiatric patient did in the early 1950s.

Biology of Anxiety

- Anxiety is the brain's response to danger; stimuli that an organism will actively attempt to avoid. It is adaptive from an evolutionary perspective: fight or flight
- Anxiety isn't necessarily pathological as it can be adaptive when it helps avoid danger
- Anxiety is there to protect us from threat; in pathological anxiety the threat is often perceived and not factual but the physiological response is the same

Biology of Anxiety (cont.)

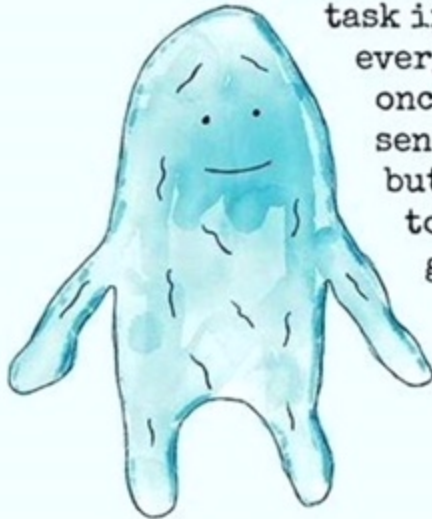
- Anxiety stems from the amygdala whose job is to keep us safe
- In the face of a threat (real or perceived) it switches on
- When the amygdala is activated, the pre-frontal cortex is de-activated. The pre-frontal cortex is the part of the brain that lets us plan, think rationally, problem-solve, etc.
- Without the benefit of the prefrontal cortex decisions may not be good ones

This is your brain on anxiety:

My adrenaline is flowing and my pulse is skyrocketing. Brain: "There doesn't seem to be a reason for this, but there HAS to be a reason, so I'll just run through every scenario until I find one that fits how I'm feeling and then fixate on that."

I have so many things to do and I feel overwhelmed. Brain: "Instead of focusing on each

task individually, we'll be thinking about everything that needs to be done, all at once, nonstop. That way, you get the fun sensation of drowning in responsibilities but none of the satisfaction of being able to settle to one job long enough to get something done and alleviate the stress.



I feel perfectly fine. Brain: "You know what would be good right now? Inexplicable crying."

#AnxietyBlob

Nanea Hoffman

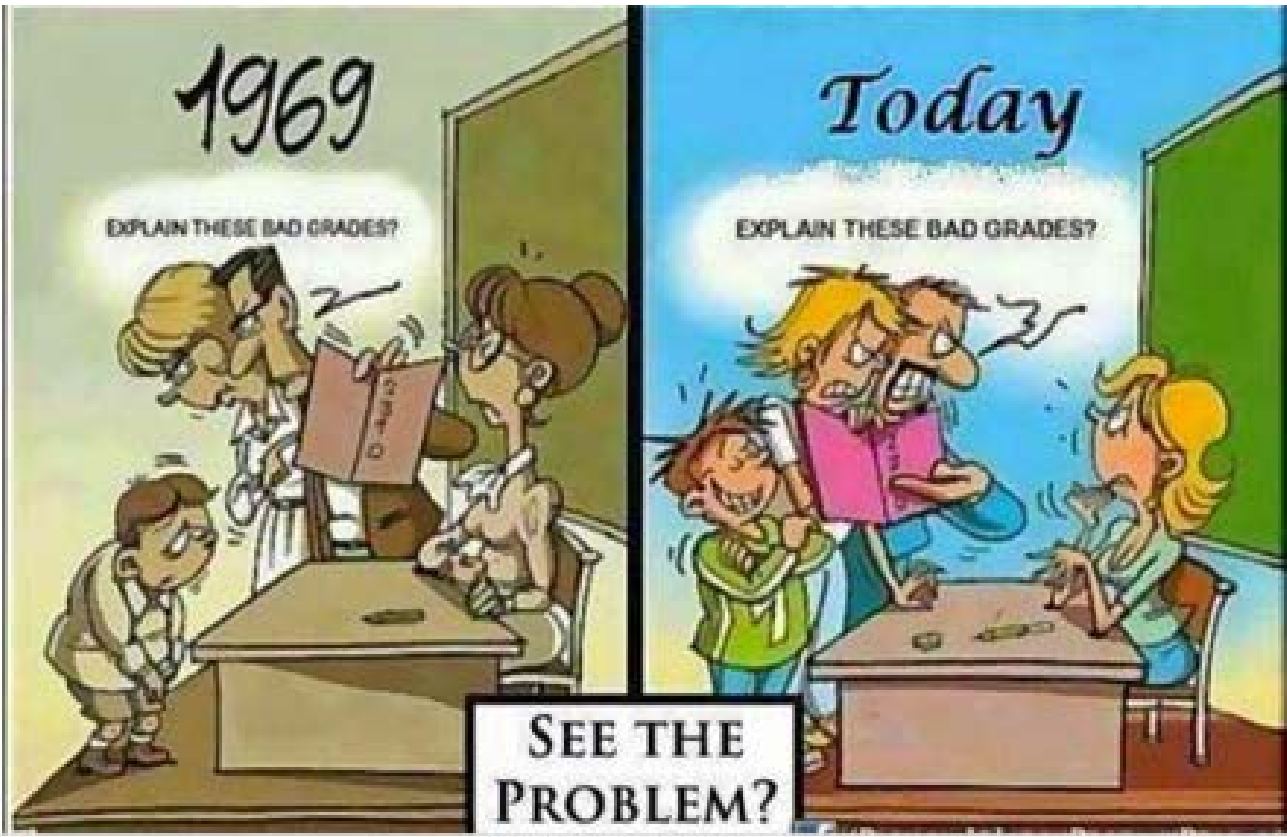
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Teenagers Raised in More Affluent Communities

- Are among the most emotionally distressed young people in America (Suniya Luthar, Professor of Psychology at Arizona State University)
- These teens are anxious and perfectionistic
- They don't get to the point where they can say "I've done enough and now I can stop"
- They feel they aren't measuring up and the pressure is relentless

Teenagers Raised in More Affluent Communities (cont.)

- Not the 'helicopter' parents any longer; kids have internalized the anxiety
- Worries: school, how friends and teachers perceive them, social media, and more recently terrorism



1969

EXPLAIN THESE BAD GRADES?

Today

EXPLAIN THESE BAD GRADES?

SEE THE PROBLEM?

Trends We Are Seeing

- Increase in children and adolescents being less resilient
- “Snowflake” generation
- Not equipped to problem-solve or adequately self-advocate
- Not allowed to be uncomfortable - rescued
- World adapting to the child rather than their learning the skills to adapt to the world; feeds into sense of entitlement
- Helicopter to Snowplow parenting
- Avoidance from what causes anxiety – school refusal

Trends We Are Seeing (con't.)

- Inability to self-soothe or self-regulate
 - Leads to substance use, overuse of technology, avoidance
- Lack of accountability on part of student and parents
- Blaming and putting the responsibility on the school or others for their child's discomfort or lack of success

What Can Boarding Schools Do?

- Admissions Process
 - Get a thorough history on applicants
 - Don't be afraid to ask questions
 - If you see a 'red flag', investigate
 - Don't accept solely parental information; often strive to place child in the most positive light.
 - Talk to counselors, therapists, etc.
 - Let families know that having been in treatment is not a rule-out

What Can Boarding Schools Do? (Admissions Process cont.)

- If your school has a therapist, have them speak with the home therapist and the applicant if appropriate
- Let families know that being in treatment is not an automatic rejection from your school
- The goal is finding a good fit. Undisclosed information will likely come out when the student is at school and becomes a no-win for everyone involved

What Can Boarding Schools Do? (Admissions Process cont.)

- Know what your school can and cannot support.
- Do you have therapists or counselors on staff or who will come to campus to work with students? Therapists can't work in isolation. Releases need to be in place to authorize therapists to have communication with administrators and teachers if needed.
- Parents often struggle with rejections more than the student

What Can Boarding Schools Do?

- Address the anxiety in parents
 - New parent orientation
 - Parents need to know what to expect with regard to communication they will receive from the school, who to talk to if issues arise, communication with their child, etc. Many are used to micromanaging and struggle with their own anxiety about ‘not knowing’.

What Can Boarding Schools Do (con't.)

- Parent weekends and webinars can offer opportunities to work with parents.
- The more preparation parents have, the more their anxiety can be contained.
- Help them put the responsibility and accountability on their child; break the rescue/enable cycle

How Can We Help?

- Teach children and adolescents a skill set to navigate the world
- Stop rescuing and enabling; teach self-advocacy
- Children and adolescents need to experience challenges and failure to understand that these will not destroy them (“what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger”)
- Watch for changes in your students

Strategies (Good for all teens)

- Have someone to talk to (therapy if needed)
- Exercise on a regular basis
- Healthy eating
- Sleep – quality and quantity
 - Regular sleep schedule
 - Bedtime routine
 - Soft music, mindfulness, meditation, etc.
 - Unplug at least ½ hour before bed

Strategies (cont.)

- Relaxation
 - Mindfulness/Meditation
 - Yoga
 - Art (painting, drawing, etc.)
 - Music
 - Journaling
 - Reading
 - Warm bath
 - Unplug from technology

Strategies (cont.)

- Set realistic goals
- Preparation and Organization
 - Organizational and time management skills
 - Be patient
 - Own what you have accomplished
 - When is good good enough; there is not always a need to be perfect

Thank You and Resources

- How to Raise An Adult; Break Free of the Overparenting Trap and Prepare Your Kid for Success Julie Lythcott-Haims
- “The number of teens who are depressed is soaring – and all signs point to smartphones”. Business Insider, November 18, 2017
- “Anxiety in Children: A Metaphor to Put You in Their Shoes”. www.heysigmund.com

Thank You and Resources (cont.)

- “Why Are More American Teenagers Than Ever Suffering From Severe Anxiety?” New York Times Magazine, October 11, 2017
- Teach Your Children Well: Why Values and Coping Skills Matter More Than Grades, Trophies, or “Fat Envelopes. Madeline Levine 2016.

Thank You and Resources (con't.)

- The Price of Privilege: How Parental Pressure and Material Advantage Are Creating a Generation of Disconnected and Unhappy Kids. Madeline Levine 2008