

PLAINFIELD PARENT COMMUNITY NETWORK





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BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

A part of Edward-Elmhurst Healthcare



Anxiety Monster: How to Turn Godzilla into Pete's Dragon

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Learning Objectives

- Define anxiety
- Define emotion regulation
- Discuss how avoidance leads to a decrease in emotion regulation and distress tolerance
- Identify connection between avoidance and accommodations
- Review emotion regulation and distress tolerance skills

Definition of Anxiety

- “A feeling of worry, nervousness or unease typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.” (Merriam-Webster’s)
- Anxiety is a normal emotion and common experience.
- It is one of the most basic of human emotions.
- In general, anxiety serves to motivate and protect an individual from harm or unpleasant consequences.

Common Anxiety Symptoms

- Heart palpitations
- Chest tightness
- Numbness/tingling
- Fidgeting
- Short of breath/heavy breathing
- Dizziness
- Blurred/distorted vision
- Nausea
- Sweating
- Stomach aches
- Muscle tension
- Nail biting
- Lump in throat
- Tapping foot/fingernails
- Shaking
- Butterflies stomach
- Having a lump in your throat
- Headaches/migraines
- Difficulties concentrating

Sources of Anxiety

- New situations or transitions
- Worries about being judged or evaluated by others
- School anxiety
- Concern about the future, world events, germs or medical health
- Separation from loved ones
- Trauma
- Fear of having panic attacks
- Performance anxiety

Signs of Anxiety

- Intense physical sensations, like stomach aches or headaches
- Staying home or isolating in bedroom
- Leaving class, frequent trips to guidance office/nurse or asking to stay home from school
- Unwilling to engage in hobbies or extracurricular activities
- Struggles with concentration/focus/retrieving information
- Seeking re-assurance from support
- Repetitive behaviors
- Sleeping difficulties
- Lack of appetite or overeating
- Constant fidgeting

When Anxiety Becomes a Problem

- Disrupts daily activities and quality of life
- Moves you away from your values:
 - ✓ Friendships
 - ✓ Family relationships
 - ✓ Role-modeling
 - ✓ Education
 - ✓ Religion/spirituality
 - ✓ Self-care
 - ✓ Hobbies/interests
 - ✓ Community life
 - ✓ Romantic relationships
 - ✓ Career

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)

- Developed by Marsha M. Linehan, Ph.D. from the University of Washington, Seattle
- A multi-modal psychosocial treatment approach
- DBT was created to be an organized, systematic approach to create structure and to enhance decision making and problem solving
- General goal: to learn and refine skills in changing behavioral, emotional, and thinking patterns associated with problems in living, that is, those causing misery and distress

Emotional Dysregulation

- When an individual is emotionally dysregulated, they are frequently emotionally intense and labile.
- They can become intensely angry, frustrated, depressed, anxious, etc. very quickly, they hold on to that high level of emotion for a long time, and it can take a very long time to come down from the emotional experience, if they ever fully recover.

Avoidance Results in Dysregulation and Lowers Tolerance to Distress.

- As an individual opts to avoid discomfort, they systematically reduce their tolerance level for discomfort, thereby making the world more and more uncomfortable, until things that were once slightly stressful are now perceived as overwhelming and completely unapproachable.
- As their tolerance level decreases, their urge to avoid intensifies, resulting in a negative self-sustaining pattern that ultimately reduces functioning over time and results in emotional dysregulation.

Are Accommodations Avoidance?

- Accommodations are a form of avoidance, particularly if they are quickly and proactively offered.
- When we accommodate too quickly or over-accommodate, it deprives the student of the opportunity to learn how to manage difficult situations, consequently making it less likely that they will be able to manage those situations by themselves in the future.
- When working with schools, often times the recommendation is to limit accommodations.

When are Accommodations Necessary

- The least amount of accommodations should be offered to allow the student to be successful.
- If the student's tolerance level is so low that they are unwilling to approach school, the most conservative accommodations should be allotted to encourage the student to enter the building and/or classrooms.
- Accommodations should be gradually reduced over time, until they are removed all together if possible.

Increasing Tolerance to Distress

- Exposure is the number one, most effective and quickest way to increase someone's tolerance level.
- Therefore, expectations should be set above the student's comfort level, while still allowing them the opportunity to be successful.
- Natural consequences for not meeting expectations should be incurred.
- If the student is shielded from appropriate consequences, their motivation for functioning often decreases.

Improving Emotional Regulation

- As an individual becomes emotionally regulated, they escalate emotionally at a slower rate and overall experience less intense vacillations in emotions.
- However, life offers surprises and the student may be faced with an event that results in a high level of emotional arousal.
- If and when this does occur, the student would implement crisis survival distress tolerance skills in order to cope with and recover from the experience.

Benefits of Tolerance Distress

- An individual with high tolerance to distress is able to be more flexible when triggers or life surprises occur.
- An individual will be better able to manage unhealthy urges and choose healthy coping alternatives.
- They will be able to remain in situations that cause high anxiety or stress, instead of avoiding or running away.

Emotion Regulation Skills

- Emotion regulation skills work towards keeping individuals at lower emotional levels.
- Goals of Emotion Regulation:
 - ✓ Understand emotions you experience and decrease the frequency of unwanted emotions
 - ✓ Decrease emotional suffering
 - ✓ Reduce emotional vulnerability

Emotion Regulation Skills

- STRONG:
 - ✓ Sleep hygiene
 - ✓ Treat physical illness
 - ✓ Resist Mood-Altering Substances
 - ✓ Once a day
 - ✓ Nutrition
 - ✓ Get Exercise

STRONG: Sleep Hygiene

- Goal of 8-10 hours of sleep per day
- No napping
- No screens one hour before bed
- No exercise three hours before bed
- Limit caffeine and sugar after lunch
- Bedtime routine
- Bed = sleep only
- Get up after 20-30 minutes of no sleeping and do a non-stimulating activity

STRONG: Treat Physical Illness

- Take prescriptions medicine as directed
- Be aware of side effects
- Do not take other people's medicine
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Rest
- Go to doctor after 3-5 days of illness with no relief

STRONG: Resist Mood-Altering Substances

- Limit: caffeine, sugar, pop, candy, desserts, coffee, over the counter medications
- None: alcohol, energy drinks, illegal drugs, nicotine, vape

STRONG: Once a Day

- Engage in activities that are enjoyable and meaningful on a daily basis
- Move towards values
- Balance work and play
- Accumulate positive experiences
- Build Mastery to build a sense of accomplishment

STRONG: Nutrition

- Follow food pyramid or “my plate” guidelines
- 3 full meals or 5 small meals per day
- Protein for breakfast to increase focus and concentration
- Water intake: half your body weight in ounces

STRONG: Get Exercise

- 60 minutes of activity per day
- Engage in fun activities
- Stay hydrated
- Exercise releases endorphins: increase mood and decrease stress

Distress Tolerance Skills

- Distress tolerance emphasizes learning to bear pain skillfully to manage crisis situations.
- Goals of Distress Tolerance
 - ✓ Moving body towards values while carrying any discomforts lightly
 - ✓ Survive emotional situations
 - ✓ Become free of having to satisfy the demands of any unhealthy urges
 - ✓ Let go of realities you can not control

Distress Tolerance Skills

- Distraction based techniques
- Self-Soothe with your five senses
- Crisis kit
 - Object related skills
 - Index card of non-object related skills

Distraction based techniques

- **Activities:** exercise, hobbies, games, sports, dance, jumping jacks, bike ride, jump rope, walk dog, play with animals, yoga
- **Contributing:** volunteer, make a gift, surprise someone, chores, cook/bake, help team mate, coach, babysit, call friend/talk about them
- **Thoughts:** reading, homework, puzzles, paint, ABC game, word searches, Sudoku, crosswords, count backwards by 13, 20 questions, I spy, extreme connect the dots pages, hidden pictures
- **Shock the Senses:** cold shower (touch), spicy food (taste), loud music (sound), spices (smell), optical illusions (sight)
- **Imagery:** relaxing scene, imagine coping, fantasy, nature, memories, vacations, family, friends, sport plays

Self-Soothe with Your 5 Senses

- **Vision:** flowers, candle/watch flame, food, art, pictures of family/friends/pets, star gaze, walk/drive mindfully, you tube videos, books, dance performances, television, movies, celebrities, nature
- **Hearing:** listen to soothing music, sounds of nature (waves, birds, rainfall, leaves rustling), sing your favorite song, play musical instrument, friends/family voices, audio books
- **Smell:** favorite perfume or cologne, lotion, spray fragrance in the air, scented candles, potpourri, bake cookies/bread/cupcakes, cook favorite meal, mindfully walk in nature, wax melts
- **Taste:** favorite meal, soothing drinks (herbal tea, hot cocoa, chocolate milk), treat yourself to a dessert, mints, gum, water, hard candy, chocolate.
*remember to eat and/or drink mindfully
- **Touch:** bubble bath, pet dog/cat, fresh clothes from dryer, get a massage, soak your feet, put lotion on, cold compress on forehead/back of neck, soft material, brush hair/run fingers through hair, hug family member/friend, fidget toy/stress ball/bendy stick, small stuffed animal

Crisis Kit: Objects Related Skills

- Crosswords/word searches/Sudoku/logic puzzles/Extreme dot-2-dots/Hidden pictures
- Pictures of family/friends/pets/nature
- Favorite smelling lotion/perfume/cologne
- Chap stick/lip gloss
- Gum/mints/candy
- Fidget toy (stone/squishy toy/cloth/coins)
- Ear buds/playlist of high energy songs/soothing songs
- Deck of playing cards
- Silly putty/Play-doh/thinking putty
- Pen/paper/journal
- Coloring pages/markers/crayons
- Cinnamon stick/tea bags/wax melts
- Book/magazine/jokes/poetry
- Shell for ocean sound plus fidget
- Inspirational quotes/lyrics/poems
- Travel sound machine
- Water bottle

Crisis Kit: Index Card of Non-object Related Skills

- Deep breathing
- Observe thoughts
- Be gentle with others
- ABC game
- 20 questions, I Spy, tic tac toe
- DBT phrases: ride the wave, get out of your future, move towards values
- Count backwards by 7's from 1,000
- Exercise: jumping jacks, high knees, push-ups
- Imagine calming scenes, nature, moving towards values
- You Tube videos of animals or babies, watch clips of movies or television shows
- Notice 5 things with five senses
- Cook, bake, eat mindfully

Workbook Recommendations

- The Expanded Dialectical Behavior Therapy Skills Training Manual by Pederson
- The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Anxiety by Forsyth and Eifert
- The Self-Compassion Workbook for Teens by Bluth

Book Recommendations for Parents

- Parenting your Anxious Child with Mindfulness and Acceptance by McCurry
- Parenting a Child Who Has Intense Emotions by Harvey and Penzo
- Parenting a Teen Who Has Intense Emotions by Harvey and Rathbone

Contact Information

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