



When worrying takes over: Helping kids with ADHD overcome anxiety and build resiliency

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Emotions make things happen!



Worry vs. Anxiety

- ▶ Worry: how we think about something
- ▶ Worry: expecting a negative outcome
- ▶ Anxiety: physical response based on negative thoughts
- ▶ Anxiety is a condition of over-responding to a fear or worry.



Worry vs. Anxiety

- Anxiety involves experiencing a natural emotion with excessive intensity at an inappropriate time.
- Anxiety reflects all or nothing thinking and expecting the worst.
- Worriers have good imaginations; they turn 'What if's' into believable situations.



Productive vs. Poisonous Worry

- ▶ Productive worry is worry about doing things.
- ▶ Productive worry is motivating.
- ▶ Poisonous worry is worry about things you can't control.
- ▶ Poisonous worry is debilitating.
- ▶ When worry takes over, engaging the thinking brain puts it back in place.

Facts about Anxiety in the U.S.

- ▶ Higher for U.S. females (38.0%) than for males (26.1%) 1/8th US children and teens have an anxiety dx and their parents have taken them to see a provider.
- ▶ 75-80% of kids with anxiety diagnosis have another diagnosis.
- ▶ Top predictor of depression in kids is untreated anxiety.
- ▶ 35% of kids with ADHD have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder.



How does anxiety work?

- Physical: bodily response to triggers
- Cognitive: worried, racing thoughts
- Psychological: distorted beliefs



Anxiety and ADHD

- ▶ Intense feelings flood capacities of developing pre-frontal cortex and directly impact executive functioning skills.
- ▶ Working memory is related to the management and expression of emotions.
- ▶ People with strong working memory are less reactive to events and more capable of assessing emotional situations than those with weaker working memory. (Schmeichel BJ, Volokhov RN, Demaree HA, 2008).
- ▶ Is “35%” accurate?

Perfectionism and Anxiety

- ▶ Perfectionism can be motivating and/or debilitating.
- ▶ Perfectionism can help kids create a comforting order to how they do things.
- ▶ Perfectionism is an attempt to limit mistakes and reduce future shame.



Common Mistakes Parents Make with Worried Kids

- ▶ Overplaying genetics.
- ▶ Pushing too hard or getting angry.
- ▶ Allowing inappropriate behavior.
- ▶ Making irrational accommodations.



What are common worries for kids with ADHD?



What is atypical anxiety?

- ▶ Does a child or teen's behavior seem atypical for their age?
- ▶ Is your child's reaction out of proportion to the actual danger?
- ▶ What, if anything, is happening at home or at school that could be contributing to their emotional state and behaviors?
- ▶ What is the frequency and consistency of these behaviors? How do they resolve themselves?

What kids with ADHD say about anxiety:

- ▶ *“What I mean by anxious is, I remember ever since I was little, I would have really irrational fears of bad things happening, or things not working out.” Evan, age 17*
- ▶ *“My worries start as a hair clip in my stomach and then become a swirling in my head.” Maya, age 10*
- ▶ *“My mom may worry about things that she has no control over like the weather but I worry about things I have to do and I will forget them.” Joaquin, age 16*



A New Approach to Anxiety for Kids with ADHD

- ▶ Manage your own reaction to their concerns.
- ▶ You can't eliminate uncertainty but you can teach effective tools to manage it.
- ▶ Instead of reassurance, use validation.
- ▶ Avoiding anxiety makes it stronger.



A New Approach to Anxiety for Kids with ADHD

- ▶ Change your relationship to worry.
- ▶ Teach different coping skills based on collaboration.
- ▶ Identify the goal: “I want _____; so I’m willing to _____.”
- ▶ Overcome anxiety amnesia.



Stop Reassuring and Start Encouraging

- ▶ Reassurance gives kids short-term relief but increases long-term anxiety.
- ▶ Manage your own anxiety in the face of their agitation.
- ▶ Stay neutral and compassionate without fixing.
- ▶ Help them distinguish between signals and noise.
- ▶ Encourage them to take on what scares them instead of avoiding it.



The 5 C's Solution to Managing Anxiety

- ▶ self-Control: Interrupt anxious thinking with breathing techniques.
- ▶ Compassion: As much as possible, think about the situation or the fear from your child's perspective. If you don't understand what that is, ask for clarification.
- ▶ Collaborate: Work together on creating solutions to reduce the power and influence of their worry. Brainstorm things they can say when the worry rears its ugly head.
- ▶ Consistency: Encourage regular routines in sleeping, eating and exercising.
- ▶ Celebration: Acknowledge courageous behavior.

Creating Collaborative Action Plans

- ▶ Work with your child or teen without judgment on a mutually identified goal
- ▶ Use a gradual approach.
- ▶ Focus on changing the relationship to anxiety not eliminating it.
- ▶ Notice and praise efforts towards the goal.



Exercise: Doing something different

- ▶ What is something that your child or teen worries about?
- ▶ How have they dealt with this concern in the past?
- ▶ What ways can you remind them of past successes that nurture courage and confidence now?
- ▶ What upsets you when they're anxious? What do you do that's helpful or unhelpful?
- ▶ How can you manage your reactions differently?



Practical Tools for Responding Differently

- ▶ Identify the goal.
- ▶ Name and talk to the worry.
- ▶ Review times in the past when a similar situation was handled successfully.
- ▶ Think about the larger picture.



Moving Forward

- ▶ Be an ally by asking your child or teen how you can help.
- ▶ Work on smaller goals first.
- ▶ Build confidence from successes.
- ▶ Model doing something that challenges you.



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