### Session Goals

- Identify anxiety in the classroom.
- Explain ADHD and its relationship to anxiety.
- Describe strategies to help children cope with and manage anxiety in the classroom.
What’s Causing Anxiety in Our Children and Teens?

Health
• COVID-19 Pandemic
Social Media
School Performance and Testing
Sports and Extra-Curricular Activity Performance
Perfectionism
• Electronics versus creative play
• The “polished world”
• Comparison to others in the class
Lack of Resilience
• Failure breeds strength
Sensory Overload

... and so much more!
**Stress**
Refers to the feeling of emotional or mental strain or tension

*Unhealthy Stress*
- Major life transitions
- Traumas
- Physical symptoms

*Healthy Stress*
- Daily hassles
- Responsibilities
- Helps us feel motivated

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**Anxiety**
Refers to the feeling of fear, dread, or panic

*Unhealthy Anxiety*
- Feels unmanageable
- Impedes functioning
- Causes us to question ourselves

*Healthy Anxiety*
- Helps keep us safe
- Can serve as a tool to let us know that we’re doing something right or wrong
- Feedback system
Yerkes-Dodson Law

Performance vs. Pressure

- Optimal Performance
- Increased attention & interest
- Strong anxiety & impaired performance
- Sleep disturbance
- Complete breakdown
Autonomic Nervous System

IT’S AUTOMATIC!

- We had to “run from the tiger” to survive. This engages the Sympathetic Nervous System and produces adrenaline and cortisol
  - Fight, Flight or Freeze
- The Parasympathetic Nervous System produces acetylcholine
  - Helps us recover from a panic attack
  - Like a “parachute,” we can float away from stress
ANXIETY: FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE

3 main types that will show up at school:

• 1. Generalized Anxiety: the “worry wort”
• 2. Panic Attacks: physical symptoms and “freeze” (usually sudden onset)
• 3. Phobia: specific focus for anxiety when otherwise the child is ok (e.g., test anxiety)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Signs of Anxiety</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Procrastination (flight)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Difficulty Concentrating (freeze)</td>
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<td>Somatic Complaints (fight)</td>
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<td>Tearfulness (fight)</td>
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<td>Meltdowns (fight)</td>
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<td>Stubbornness (fight)</td>
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- e.g., headaches and stomachaches, heart pounding, sweaty palms
More Common Signs of Anxiety

- **Avoidance/Ignoring** *(flight)*
- **Perfectionism** *(control = fight)*
  - Electronics versus creative play
  - The “polished world”
  - Comparison to others in the class
- **Irritability** *(fight)*
- **Argumentative** *(fight)*
- **Running Away/Hiding** *(flight)*
- **Staring into Space** *(freeze)*
ADHD AND ADD

The official diagnostic term is:
“Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder” (ADHD) with one of three subtypes:

• Predominantly Hyperactive/Impulsive Type
• Predominantly Inattentive Type
• Combined Type (68%)
The Executive Function Switch

The “ADHD Switch”

When the switch is up...
HYPERACTIVE

EXECUTIVE FUNCTION
(Command Central)

When the switch is down...
INATTENTIVE
ADHD = WAGON WHEEL APPROACH TO TASKS

**LADDERS**
- linear
- logical
- task-sequencing
- “hunters”

**WAGONWHEELS**
- circular
- creative
- task-switching
- “gatherers”
ADHD and Emotion

- Characterized by excessive and rapidly shifting emotions
  - With an inability to modulate these emotional responses
  - This is very different from bipolar disorder
- Sometimes, this is seen as general irritability or moodiness
- Sometimes involves extreme responses of an internalizing nature
  - Depression
  - Anxiety
  - Somatization (e.g., headaches, stomachaches)
- Sometimes with extreme externalizing responses
  - Anger
  - Aggression
  - This often is described as Oppositional Behavior and sometime even "ODD"
Executive Functioning Deficits: Developmental Delay

By age 7, most children with ADHD have a 2 to 3-year delay in executive functioning. During the Preschool and early Elementary years, the delay is often in excess of 1 year.

The executive functions include:
1. Self-Management to Time
2. Initiating
3. Planning and Organizing Thinking/Problem-Solving
4. Working Memory/Cognitive Flexibility
5. Organization of Materials
6. Shifting from Task to Task
CHILDREN AND TEENS WITH ADHD

Often experience low self-esteem and increased frustration as work becomes more complex, especially when success is tied to future opportunities (e.g., “If you don’t do well on this test, you won’t get into the middle school/extra-curricular activity/college of your choice.”) This often results in:

• Apathy, especially regarding school
• Increased sadness
• Irritability
• Anxiety
• Somatic complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches)
• Anger outbursts
• Negative behavior (e.g., acting out, girls becoming more flirtatious, boys becoming “the class clown,” when older….drinking, drugs)
REMEMBER – IT’S ALWAYS NOW

That’s why traditional consequences don’t work.
- Past behaviors have evaporated from awareness.
- Future rewards are not consciously present.
- Often, children will be overly emotional when consequences are implemented because they “forgot” what they did.

That’s also why reinforcers need to be at the point of presentation.
- To foster motivation, the child needs to connect present behavior to a sense of accomplishment before they can move on.
- This is also tied to the “shift” feature.
SO, WHAT’S A TEACHER TO DO?
SOCIAL LEARNING THEORIES

- Lev Vgotsky’s Theory of Socio-Cultural Learning describes a hierarchy with a “more knowledgeable other” (MKO) who comes alongside a child to facilitate learning with less anxiety.

- Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory suggests we observe and model behaviors, attitudes and emotions from persons with more experience.

- Coming alongside and helping children experience hard or stressful situations will foster resilience. Resilience creates a layer of protection the next time an anxiety-provoking situation occurs.

- The resilient child then becomes a role model for other children who struggle with similar issues.
Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS) influence our behavior. Some common ANTS include:

- Catastrophizing
- All or Nothing/Black or White
- Jumping to Conclusions
- Personalization (taking everything personally)
- Shoulds (perfectionism)
- Emotional Reasoning (“If I feel that way, it must be true.”)
- Overgeneralizing
- Labeling (“I’m such a loser.”)
Avoidance Feeds Anxiety

- Avoidance = FLIGHT
- Full blown phobias can develop when people continuously circumvent the things they fear.
- Sheltering children from stressful tasks does not help them develop resilience. Instead, help children address their fears by coming alongside them and modeling ways to effectively cope.
- It’s OK to talk about the avoidance you see
  “It looks like you have difficulty getting started on math worksheets.”
Manage Avoidance

- First, help children begin to think more about the source of anxiety.
  - For example, why are they afraid of a test? What is the purpose of a test? What happens if they don’t do well?
  - Or, if they are afraid to try to make a new friend, ask them how it feels when they make a friend.
- Next, help them move toward the threat, in small steps, rather than assisting them in avoiding.
  - Help them find a new routine for approaching the task, such as 3 deep breaths and then start.
- Finally, circle back after they have attempted the task.
Simple Relaxation Strategies that Work

- Circle in Palm
- “Hand” Writing
- Deep Breathing (pretend there is a balloon behind your belly button)
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (squeeze the lemon)
- Imaginal Thinking (“Let’s pretend we are at the beach.”)
- Visualizing Success

What are things you have found to be successful?
Manage Sensory Input

Sensory Issues relate to the 5 Senses. Have ways to encourage relaxation through each of the senses.

- **Taste**
  - have mints, hard candies, etc. available for those who want them
  - have flavored waters available

- **Touch**
  - have weighted lap blankets, plush animals, pieces of felt, etc.
  - allow PJs or other soft clothes on test days

- **Sight**
  - lower lights when possible
  - desk partitions
  - cheerful pictures

- **Hearing**
  - soft music
  - headphones

- **Smell**
  - felt with essential oils
  - hand lotions

**These are often based on personal needs, so be aware of what works for each individual and have options.**
Model Healthy Stress Management

- It is okay for children to see you sweat. Make mistakes. Celebrate them!

- Use stressful situations as opportunities to model handling anxiety in a healthy way. It’s OK to say, “I feel a little worried, too, but I know it will be alright.”
  BUT... don’t freak out!

- Remind them of ways they have successfully weathered storms, too. Focus on telling them how you overcame and succeeded.

- Engage the parasympathetic nervous system: meditate, practice yoga, teach relaxation breathing, read, sing...
Manage Perfectionism

Model what to do with failure
• “That was my favorite mistake!”
• Be open about failure (e.g., “Well, THAT didn’t work!”)
• Openly brainstorm what to do when things go wrong
• Hand-make things
• Creative art vs. crafts

Celebrate effort not just success: ex. Put the “not so great” art on display and talk about its virtues
Questions

Let’s Talk

[Image of a question mark and a speech bubble with the text “Let’s Talk”]

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