

Managing Anxiety Full Day Program

Presented by Lynn Lyons, LICSW
lynnlyonsnh.com

Problems when addressing anxiety and its pal depression:

- Too much focus on eliminating symptoms
- Interventions that focus on **content over process**, which maintain or increase anxiety over time
- This results in...

...missed opportunities to

- ✓ shift frameworks
- ✓ introduce new perspectives
- ✓ **TEACH SKILLS**

THE BIG PICTURE Critical Cognitive Skills:

- *tolerate (and normalize) discomfort*
- *externalize/react differently to thoughts*
- *learn by doing, failing, & succeeding*
- *handle the uncertainty of life*
- *be more flexible (malleability!)*
- *problem solve (vs. ruminate)*

The Four Questions

1. What resources does this child/family have and how will I use them?
2. Where is the gap/missing piece that sustains the symptom pattern?
3. How can create an experience that will offer a shift in the pattern?
4. **Am I (or is anyone else) *doing the disorder?***

How does anxiety operate...?

And what does it want from us?

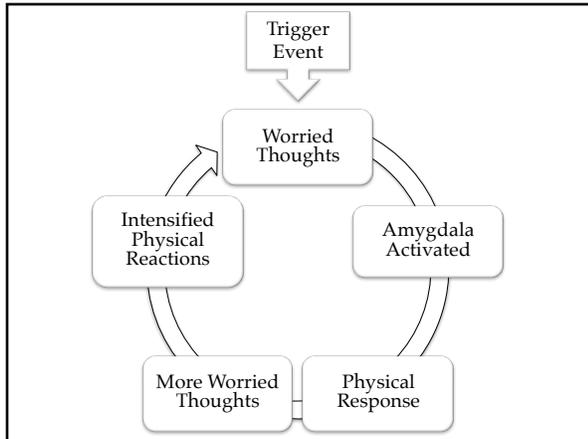
FIRST & CRITICAL!

EXPLAINING THE RATIONALE

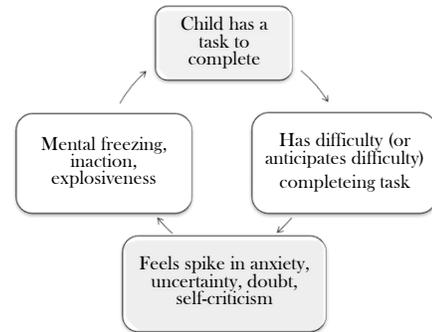
FRONTLOADING
with
psycho-babble-free
psycho-education

Anxiety Demands TWO Things:

- **Certainty:** “I have to know what’s going to happen next...and I want to control it!”
- **Comfort:** “I want to feel safe and comfortable...or else I want out!”



And when we add LD or ADHD to the mix:



Critical Concepts as we face anxiety...

- **CONTENT** is far less important than **PROCESS**
- We are eliminating **NOTHING**
- We have to teach an **OFFENSIVE** rather than a **DEFENSIVE** position
- Playful **CONNECTION** is the opposite of what anxiety demands

Content vs. Process?

Content-Based Interventions
versus
Process-Based Interventions

Let's focus on
HOW WORRY OPERATES

↙ **CONTENT**

- What can we do about **THAT** worry?
- How can we get rid of **THAT** worry?

VERSUS

- How does *worry operate*?
- How are we going to interact with worry *when it arrives*?

↖ **PROCESS**

The Content Trap

Content (not good)	Process (good!)
• Focus on & talk about how to fix SPECIFIC problem	• Focus on HOW worry operates & what it's up to
• Reassure about that SPECIFIC problem	• Cue "worry-managing" strategies
• Give data, stats, rational information	• Be general: "That sounds like worry to me..."
• Go over plans & specifics repeatedly	• Prompt independent, internal reassurance & problem solving



It's a paradox...

The more you try to get rid of a worried thought or symptom, the **STRONGER** it gets.

We are NOT eliminating or avoiding physical symptoms

We are perceiving & managing them through a different lens

Safety Crutches

- Reduce, mute or prevent anxiety symptoms
- Increase perception of personal control
- Child feels more secure
- Can serve useful functions & be developmentally appropriate

Excessive reliance

- Strengthens anxiety through avoidance behavior
- Limits range of functioning

This includes...

- Distraction
- Thought stopping
- Calming and breathing exercises
(when emphasis is on elimination)
- Thought replacement

We need an offense!

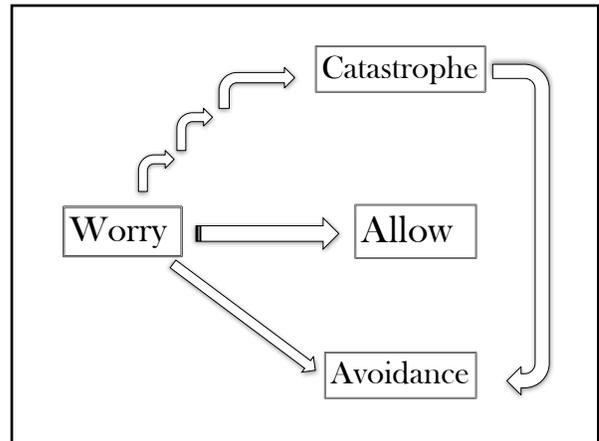
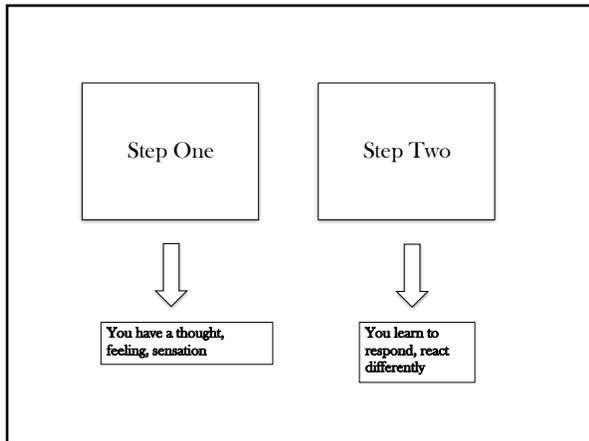
Action over Avoidance

- Worry says STOP. Worry is not a big fan of moving forward.
- Anxiety demands a defensive stance.
- **BUT...**we must learn to take action when we are worried...**BRING IT ON!**

If you will stop telling your alarm center that there's danger, it will learn on its own not to push that danger button

CRITICAL ATTITUDINAL SHIFT!

If I'm uncomfortable or unsure or nervous as I'm learning something new,
I'm on the right track...



Playful Connection!

- Family/Adult CONNECTION MEANS:**
- Openness: parents acknowledging their own patterns when possible
 - Modeling of connection by other adults
 - Humor
 - Warmth
 - Consistency

- Social CONNECTION MEANS:**
- Face to face interaction
 - External focus
 - Engagement in social causes or activities
 - Building social skills through stepping in

- Per Jean Twenge's article in *The Atlantic*
- More screen time equals more:
 - Loneliness
 - Depression
 - Suicidal thinking and behavior

Patterns that Make Sense ...& DON'T WORK

- Reassuring, rescuing & overprotecting
- Providing certainty
- Identifying child as “worrier” because it “runs in the family,” overplaying genetic card
- Requiring family members, friends, & schools to accommodate the anxiety (in the absence of skill-building)

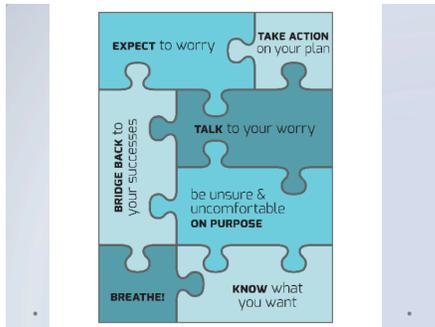
CBT techniques that I don't use:

- What's the worst that could happen?
- Let's examine the likelihood of that happening...what are the odds?
- Scheduling or setting aside “worry time” (sometimes also known as “therapy”)



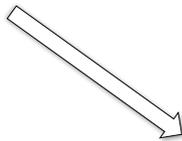
We do this one with kids a LOT!

Let's Use This Knowledge & Put It Into Action



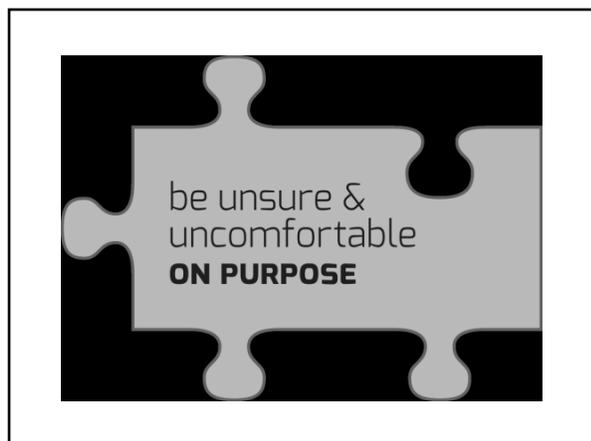
We want to demote anxiety & worry...

• CRISIS



- Normal
- Part of Growing
- Even Annoying!





Being uncomfortable & uncertain...

- is price you pay for moving into new territory
- in order to grow you need to move into new territory
- handling uncertainty & discomfort will reset alarm system & allow you to do what you want to do

Step into unknown territory and...

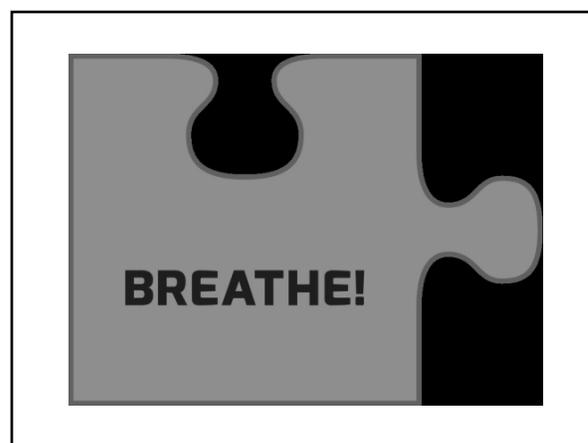
- **Stop** saying, "I've GOT to know that everything will turn out just right"
- Start saying, "I'm WILLING to NOT KNOW how things are going to turn out"
- **Stop** saying, "I've got to feel comfortable"
- Start saying, "I'm WILLING to feel UNCOMFORTABLE"

These are messages to try out

- "I'm willing to feel uncomfortable."
- "I'm willing to feel unsure, & to not know what will happen."
- "I'm willing to grab onto my courage & do it."

This stance in action

- "I'm going to play outdoors – & I'm willing to not know if I'll be stung by a bee."
- "I'm going to learn to play the guitar – & I'm willing to feel anxious about sounding terrible & being laughed at."
- "I'm going to go to gym – & I'm willing to not know if it will be loud or kids misbehave ."
- "I'm going to spend the night at my friend's house – & I'm willing to not know if I'll get scared & have to come home. & I'm willing to stay up all night."



How do
calmness and relaxation
fit in to this approach?

**REBOOT
RESET**

And an OPPORTUNITY that is often missed...

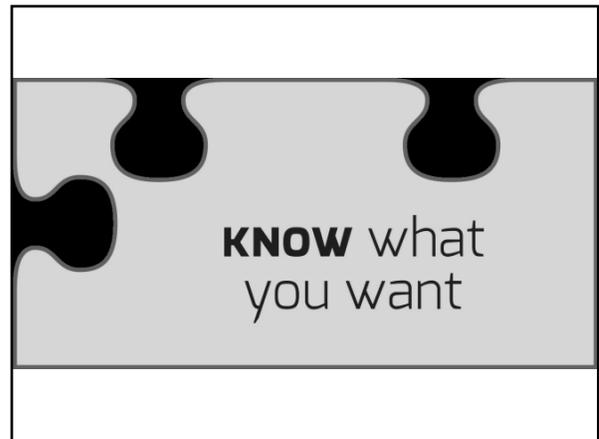
Physically-based interventions can
serve as “re-boot”...
not a complete treatment process.

Relaxation PLUS

Example: Heavy Hands

1. Breathe easily through your nose
2. Relax your face (or smile)
3. Imagine your hands getting heavy
4. Count from 10 to 1, & let each finger get even heavier
5. As hand gets heavy, you're turning off your alarm system & *preparing to activate your plan*

(Advantage: Can do this anywhere without others noticing so very versatile)



Know what you want

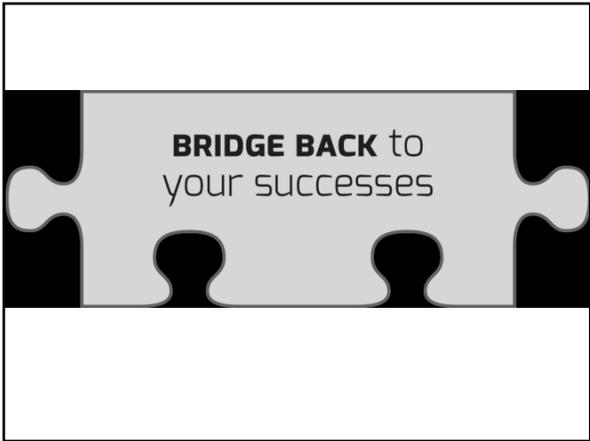
Reaching a goal requires finding a
“WANT-TO” & then figuring out steps
that will get you there

Important Points:

- Rewards are short term
- Rewards happen when they practice and “step in”
- WHY you are rewarding is clearly explained
- Never “in a row”

How to get what you want

- Deliberately choose to do what's hard & uncomfortable
- Worry must show up if you are to learn a new way to manage it
- Trying new things is a good way to get worry to show up
- Pick goals that you really want to accomplish
 - you'll feel more motivated to face your worries



BRIDGE BACK to
your successes

Bridge back to your successes

- anxious people (kids, teens, adults) suffer from amnesia
- learn from new experiences & create pattern of remembering (reminder bridges)

Helping kids connect to the **PROCESS** of *moving toward mastery*:

- What can you do now (automatically) that you couldn't do a few years ago?
- Can you remember something that was *really* challenging when you first tried it but now seems simple?
- Make a list of accomplishments that make you proud.
- What can you do now that you worried about....?



TAKE ACTION
on your plan

Take action on your plan

- pieces of puzzle are assembled
- a written, step-by-step plan
- emphasis is on problem solving
- movement away from **CONTENT** of each worry & focus on **PROCESS**

Experiential Ideas: Flexibility

- Wall of Flexibility
- Ten Good Things or What Went Well
- Family “Unexpected Things (or Mistakes) of the Day”

Experiential Ideas: Flexibility

- The Spaghetti Challenge
- The Opposite Game
- Closet and Photo Album Investigation

Experiential Ideas: Parts

- What I Know/What I Don't Know Game
- Drawing, Talking to, Directing the Parts
- Global language and the language of PARTS
- Finding Books that Support the Skill

Experiential Ideas: Action

- Reward Systems for taking action and being uncomfortable on purpose
- Boxes of stepping into the anxiety/worry
- Practicing and Role Playing
- Finding Books that Support the Skill

Parents, Therapist, and School...

...Everyone on the same page

Accommodation

Anything done in service of avoidance, without any teaching or skill building

- adjusting family routines or schedules
- school accommodations with no “weaning” plan
- allowing “unacceptable” behavior & referring to it as “anxiety”
- medication with no therapy/skill building

Working in/with Schools and 504 Plans

- Is this plan accommodating the anxiety?
- Does this plan address the teaching of skills that reduce anxiety?
- Is there a weaning-off component to the plan?
- What role will visits to the nurse have?
- What is the role of the nurse in the plan?
- Does the plan specifically address physical symptoms?

School Refusal

avoidance &/or positive reinforcement received for staying at home



reduce anxiety



become powerful motivating conditions for child to continue to refuse to go to school

Components of a strong plan...

- Emphasize use of skills IN the classroom
- When child needs to leave classroom, have plans for use of skills in order to return quickly
- School staff & parents should be “speaking the same language” to child
- Getting child into school is essential
- The danger of the “pick-up plan”

Traps to watch out for...

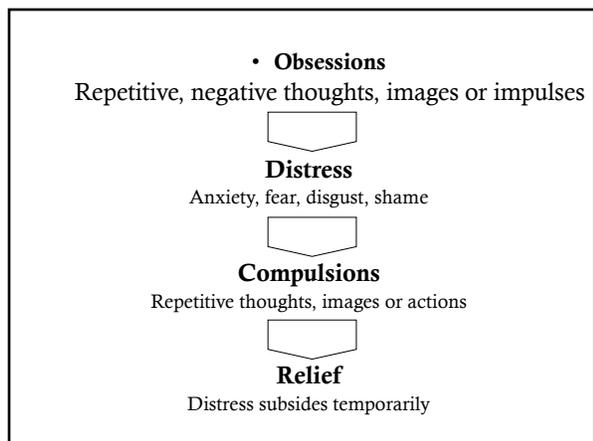
- Accommodations with no weaning off plan
- Creating “escapes” that are warm, safe, & cozy... and support avoidance
- Diminishing anxiety by creating certainty (giving child schedules & warnings of change throughout the day)

Here's the Symptom Pattern...

R igid	R eally
G lobal	G ood
C atastrophic	C oping
P ermanent	P atterns
I nternal	I n
A voidant	A ction

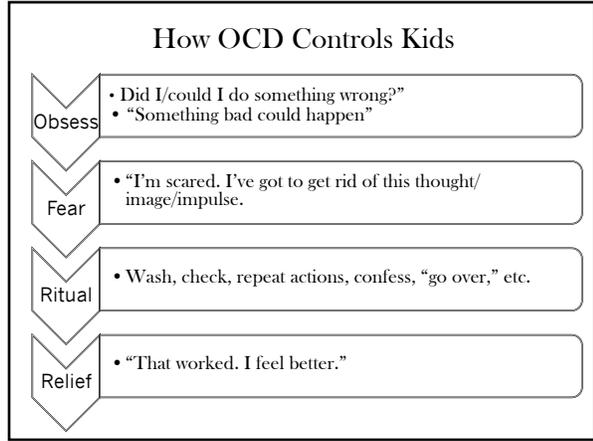
Seven Patterns

- **Rigid**, demanding certainty
 - Flexible, able to tolerate uncertainty
- **Global**, with black and white thinking
 - Parts, differentiation, connection/disconnection
- **Catastrophic**
 - Problem solving, strength-based
- **Permanent**
 - Temporal, malleable, with positive expectancy
- **Internally** focused (on feelings, thoughts)
 - External focus
- **Avoidant**
 - Active, on offense



SAME Critical Concepts...

- **CONTENT DOESN'T MATTER!**
- We are eliminating NOTHING
- We have to teach an OFFENSIVE rather than a DEFENSIVE position
- Playful CONNECTION is the opposite of what OCD demands



Entanglement

The process of "fashioning meanings and warning signals out of passing mental detritus."

--Seif & Winston (2016)

- Types of Obsessions
- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contamination • Sexual thoughts • Fear of doing something awful...something against your values (What if I impulsively act on that thought I had?) • Doing harm through carelessness or irresponsibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrupulosity/religious obsessions • Perfectionism: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exactitude, symmetry, fear of throwing things out b/c might be important, forgetting important information • Getting a disease (health concerns) • Lucky numbers, signals, etc. |
|---|--|

- Types of Compulsions
- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Washing • Checking • Repeating | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental/internal compulsions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counting • Cancelling or undoing • Praying • Mental reviewing • Confessing or seeking reassurance |
|--|---|

Handling OCD

Do NOT pay attention to the content

Accept obsession when it pops up
• "It's fine I just had that thought."

BE WILLING to make yourself uncertain

BE WILLING to be anxious & stay anxious

Problems at School:

- School unaware of diagnosis
- Lack of information/knowledge in general about OCD
- Staff unknowingly reinforces OCD (particularly perfectionism)
- OCD intrusive thoughts treated as dangerous
- Accommodations are avoidance-based and content-based

The ultimate goal...

Psychological Autonomy

Normal movement toward physical & psychological independence

Adults → shift from overprotecting to promoting competency = decrease in childhood anxiety

Don't remove hurdle...
teach them to jump over it!

Information Stuff

- Website: lynnlyonsnh.com
- Email: Lynn@lynnlyonsnh.com
- Facebook: Lynn Lyons Psychotherapist, Anxiety and Children
- To get my newsletter: Go to FB page and click on EMAIL SIGN UP, or email me and ask.
- Phone: (603) 225-4147