Anxiety: Friend or Foe?

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Anxious much?
Anxiety the Friend

• Apprehension...activates self-protection
  – In the immediate sense, designed to alert us to, and protect us from, danger that is upon us

  – Fight or flight: keeps us safe from harm; aka *the stress response or the fear reaction*
Activating Fight or Flight
Stages of Fight or Flight

– **Alarm stage** – stress hormones are secreted into the bloodstream the moment a danger is perceived

– **Hormone peak** – shortly after the full hormone burst has entered the bloodstream

– **Duration** – period of time stress hormones are active

– **Recovery** – once we realize the danger has passed, the body stops producing stress responses, the stress hormones that haven’t been used up are expelled from the body, and the body enters into the recovery phase (recovery from the stress response changes)

– **End** – when the body has completed the recovery phase and returns to the normal state
"I've had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened."

~ Mark Twain
## Situations prompting anxiety & worry

- Interviews
- Speaking in class/small groups
- Dating
- Casual social situations
- Meeting unfamiliar people
- Initiating or maintaining conversations
- Accidents of all sorts
- Being alone
- Boredom
- Conflict
- Deadlines
- Silences
- New situations or environments
- Community & world events
- Having to trust others
- Finances
- Family relationships
- The news
- The unknown
- Health and medical appointments, issues
- The future

- Assertive behavior
- Authority figures
- Being observed by others
- Exams
- Making independent decisions
- Being wrong
- Performance situations
- Being the center/focus of attention
- Being embarrassed
- Lateness
- Sexual interactions
- Travel
- Changes in routines/plans
- Having certain knowledge
- Health issues
- Uncertainty
- Elections
- Witnessing conflicts, crime, bullying, someone being harassed
- Career/Work
Anxiety the Foe

• Apprehension...always present and unrelenting
  – Fight or flight occurs seemingly without a reason
  – Worrying never ends....and life is filled with negative “What if’s.....”
When is Anxiety a clinical problem?

- Impairing emotion
- Anxiety/Stress Disorder

Slide courtesy of Carolina Zerrate MD & Rebecca Erban PsyD

https://iveronicawalsh.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/fofbraindiag.jpg

NewYork-Presbyterian Youth Anxiety Center
Anxiety as a disorder?

• Avoidance

• Functioning declines

• Distress

• Duration
Anxiety Disorders

- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Phobia
- Separation Anxiety Disorder
- Specific Phobia
- Panic Disorder
- Agoraphobia
- Selective Mutism

- Also related: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
DID YOU KNOW?

Social Anxiety is the third largest mental health problem in the world today.
Risks for anxiety

- Age/stage/life transitions
- Increased expectations
- Novel environments
- Academic/work pressure
- Personality style
- Greater independence

- Cognitive style
- Social relationships
- Physical health and status
- Traumatic events/loss
- Social isolation/loneliness
- Family history of mental health problems
- Past history of anxiety
### 12 Month and Lifetime Prevalence for DSM-IV Anxiety Diagnoses: 18-29 yo cohort (n=9282)

<table>
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<th>12 Month</th>
<th>Lifetime</th>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ag w/o panic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any anxiety d/o</td>
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<td>1.0</td>
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</table>

Prevalence of Mental Health Service Utilization Among College Students and Non-College-Attending Individuals

In college, n=998
Not in college, n=1325

Blanco et al., 2008, Arch Gen Psy
People with no experience of anxiety can say things like...

- Life’s too short to be sad.
- Just have confidence.
- Take the plunge.
- Get some guts!
- Why can’t you just cheer up?
- It’s all in your head!

But finding the courage isn’t that easy to do.
Effective Therapies for Anxiety:
most widely studied, empirically supported

**Medication**
- SSRI’s, most common

**Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (CBT)**
- Examining patterns to the anxiety
- Psychological education
- Cognitive restructuring
- Exposure
- Relapse prevention
Mindfully Keeping Calm

• Goal: Develop tolerance of normal, expected levels of anxiety; engage in healthy habits

• Deep breathing
• Progressive Muscle Relaxation
• Mindfulness exercises
• Yoga
• Exercise
• Sleep hygiene
Core Beliefs in Anxiety

• Stem from anxious apprehension:

• *That terrible thing can happen (again) to me but I can’t predict when or where so I must be prepared at all times and yet I don’t have the skill, knowledge, ability to deal with it!*
Core Predictions in Anxiety

• Anxiety-provoking situations WILL invariably lead to:
  – Embarrassment
  – Humiliation/Rejection
  – Loss of control
  – Catastrophe
  – Loss of social status
  – Death/Physical Illness
MORNING! Remember that STUPID thing you said yesterday?

OOF... that was bad

NNH...?
Core goals of cognitive restructuring

1. Provide corrective information about anxiety and threat
3. Identify automatic thoughts and treat these as hypotheses
5. Develop means to dispute ATs with realistic evidence
7. Develop rational responses to automatic thoughts
Challenge your thinking

- How would an objective observer view this situation?

- What alternative explanations are there for this situation?

- What if you saw a friend struggling . . . What would you think or do?
Thought Listing Ratings During Behavior Tests: Adolescents

From Albano et al., 1995
Critical for managing anxiety:

Practice, practice, practice! aka EXPOSURE

and

NORMALIZE THE ANXIETY
Avoidance in Anxiety

Due date approaching for assigned paper → Nervous, self-doubt

Choose to avoid, put off writing → Froze, go on line or out with friends, skip class

Reduces distress immediately but then makes problem worse
Impact of escape:
- remembers situation at the height of anxiety
- prevents habituation
- no experience of mastery
- escape is reinforced

Impact of sticking with it/exposure:
- remembers success that comes with habituation or tolerance
- learns anxiety passes on its own
- willing to approach increasingly challenging situations
- feeling of mastery
- reinforcement for hanging in

From Chansky (2004)
Key *skills* to overcome anxiety

- Self soothing
- Delay of gratification (ouch!)
- Affect regulation strategies
- Positive health behaviors (exercise, diet, sleep hygiene)
The 5 Ps of Problem Solving

**PROBLEM:** What’s the problem?

**PURPOSE:** What’s my goal?

**PLANS:** What are some plans?

**PREDICT & PICK:** Which is the best plan?

**PAT ON THE BACK:** How did it work?
Virtual Reality for Social Anxiety

• Headset Health created scenarios
• Dorm room scenario
• Joining a group conversation
Asking for help.....

• Is a healthy and courageous action that can lead to relief and solutions.

• A way to get support and comfort.

• At times, a life saver.
Helping others

• Listen, actively and reflectively
• Don’t assume, ask for clarification
• Keep your calm
• Hold off on the jokes & don’t judge or criticize
• Know your limits to prevent resentment
• Suggest options for help
  – Provide names & contact for therapists
  – Offer to accompany to (the door of) a clinic/ER
Managing Anxiety

- Takes responsibility to seek/follow through with treatment
- Keeps up with self-care
- Meets responsibilities
- Anticipates next steps
- Effectively problem solves
- Healthy reliance on supports  
  – Family, close friends, mentors
- Increase in proactive behavior
- Recognizes when to seek help
Self-help, on-line & campus resources

• AnxietyBC
  – https://www.anxietybc.com/

• Active Minds
  – http://www.activeminds.org/

• The Jed Foundation
  – https://www.jedfoundation.org/

• All For 1
  – http://www.allfor1-us.org/
3 Columbus Circle, Suite 1425
New York, NY 10019
Phone: (212) 342-3800
www.anxietytreatmentnyc.org