



Parent Information Session

Anxiety in Children

Presenter Jenny Wilson- Psychologist

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Why are we here?

- To learn about the role of anxiety in your child's behavioural presentation
- To learn strategies to help prevent the escalation of your child's anxiety
- To learn about other forms of anxiety management for yourself and your child

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Please stand!

Sit down if.....

- You have never felt worried and apprehensive about a situation
- You have never had difficulties falling asleep or staying asleep
- You have never felt withdrawn and just wanted to be left alone

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Sit down if...

- You have never lost your appetite
- You have never felt agitated
- You have never felt like having a drink, cigarette, peaceful cup of coffee or a bar of chocolate or two
- Woke up with unexplainable mood swing- just a tried as you were before bed, after what you thought was a full nights sleep

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Still standing?

You know what it's like to experience
anxiety

What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is an unpleasant emotional state which is characteristic of apprehension, dread, distress and uneasiness
- Anxiety is the body's natural defence against what it ***perceives*** as danger, discomfort or situations beyond our control-
- It alerts us to be aware and prepare to defend



Anxiety Disorders



- Anxiety is an extremely common symptom throughout the Autistic spectrum and for people with Neurodiverse conditions
- Although it is not a primary illness it is the result of environmental factors in this client group
- How they experience and interact with their social world is often the trigger of anxiety

How do we recognise it?

3 types of symptoms:

- Psychological – thoughts, worries and fears
- Physiological – increased adrenalin (flight, fight or freeze)
- Emotional – changes in behaviour, mood swings

What does it look like in adults?

- Mood swings
- Withdrawal
- Disturbed sleep
- Change in appetite
- Addictive behaviours
- Feeling tired all the time
- Very irritable or angry
- Feeling out of control
- Sense of dread- apprehensive

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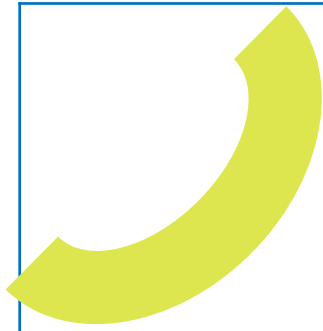
What does it look like in children?

- Changes in behaviour
- Emotional outbursts
- Withdrawn
- Changes in language use
- Changes in volume of voice
- Refusal to co-operate
- Increase in repetitive behaviours

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What does it look like in children continued...?

- Physical or verbal attacks
- Impulsive behaviours (greater risk taking)
- Screaming
- Sensory overload (increased sensitivity)
- Preoccupation with obsessions (more anxious the more intense the interest)



DISORDER
TENSION
AWARENESS
NERVOUS
DEPRESSION
STRESS
FEAR
DESPAIR
AGITATION
INSOMNIA
SCARED
DEPRESSION
WORRY
PTSD
ANXIETY
FRUSTRATION
WITHDRAWAL
OVERWHELMED
FATIGUE
PANIC
FAILURE
NEGATIVE
MOOD
HEADACHE
LONLINESS
NEGATIVE



Anxiety



- Behaviours which may appear naughty or socially inappropriate may be the child's only way of expressing their anxiety.
- They may be responding to how they are experiencing their social world

Types of anxiety associated with this client group

- Separation anxiety
- Social phobia
- Generalized anxiety
- Social reticence (can be misinterpreted as shy)

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Anxiety disorders

If untreated the child may develop an anxiety disorder such as:

- Phobias
- Panic attacks
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Challenging Behaviours you may observe



Children with Neurodiversity can display difficult behaviours underpinned by anxiety

- Difficulties understanding social interaction, leading to frustration, anxiety and behaviours aimed at avoiding the situation
- Repetitive behaviour (aim to create predictability)
- Rigid thinking
- Hyperactivity
- Social and communication difficulties
- Defiance
- Aggression

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Challenging for who?

- The person working on a time schedule
- The person who is exhausted
- The person who has different expectations of the child's ability / disability – Unaware of the role anxiety plays in the behaviour
- The person with similar difficulties to the child

Anxiety is contagious



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Activity 1

Lets take some time to think about the kind of
anxieties
you observe in your child

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Group Activity

Thinking about your child...

How do you recognise anxiety in advance?

Discuss within your group the signs that indicate to you that your child is becoming anxious.

You have 15 minutes for this activity

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Why are they doing that?

There are always good reasons for the behaviour...the challenge for us is understanding what that is.

Once we have this answer, we are half way there to managing their anxiety

Iceberg Metaphor

We see the tip of the Iceberg
(Behaviour)
But is underneath???



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Sensory Impairments

- Problems with hearing or vision can result in anger and frustration
- Your child may be hyper or hypo sensitive to sensory stimuli



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Is it the child or the environment that needs changing

- We need to go through the process of looking at the relationship between behaviour and the environment.
- That is, to understand how the environment in which the individual lives, works or recreates can influence the individuals behaviour.

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Environment

- Is it too hot, too cold, too noisy, too bright,
- Is it a friendly, tense, depressing atmosphere.
- Do individuals have a choice or control / too much choice or control
- Are there appropriate activities
- Are individuals valued and validated in this environment
- Do they have a sense of achievement
- Do they know what is expected of them – are we clearly communicating this?
- Are there consistent routines in place

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Remember...

- The problem is not the person
- The problem is understanding and responding to the behaviour
- Is it the behaviour that challenges us or the situation the person finds themselves in.
- Challenging behaviour can be caused by a number of different factors.

Usually it's the behaviour that gets them noticed and not the anxiety

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Prevention rather than cure?

Open forum discussion

What kind of strategies/approaches do you think
may be useful to put in place for the child?

What have you tried?

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Common referrals to CAMHS

Is this a mental health presentation or a symptom of the Condition?

- Sleep disorder
- OCD
- Generalised anxiety
- Social Phobia/ school refusal
- Query personality disorder
- Pica
- Behavioural problems

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Positive Programming

changes the persons repertoire to deal better with the environment.

- “skill teaching”- Mindfulness / Grounding
- *Teaches the individual more effective and socially acceptable ways of getting their needs met and coping with daily stresses.*

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Stimulus Control

- Using 'traffic light system'.
- Deep breathing.
- Discrete hand movements as cues in public.
- Self reinforcement – “I shall be ok”, “This is right”
- Scaling chart/thermometer
- Distraction
- Time limited special interest

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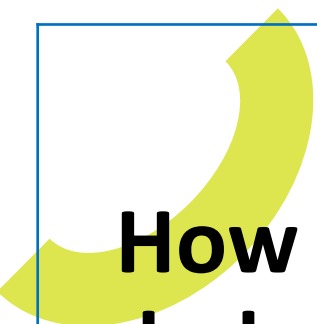
Management of Anxiety

- Recognise symptoms –
emotional, behavioural, cognitive, physical
- Recognise triggers
- Scaling with the child
- Relaxation- de-escalate or physical activity

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Techniques

- Grounding
- Mindfulness
- Physical exercise
- Scheduled chores
- Communicating, Validating and Letting go – Using beginning, middle and ending of the story
- Now and next schedule

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How do we reinforce and solidify behaviour modification- Instead of “don’t do that”, teach what they can do instead

- Share with school, whole family and other carers
- Social story
- Comic strip conversations
- Visual clip story boards- personalised to the child
- Review (with the child) when the behaviour is modified

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Providing alternatives

- Careful use of language (short, simple and precise)
- Use of visual aids
- Advanced warnings
- Routines
- Use of humour
- Distraction

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Leading by example

- Plan for behaviour
- Stay calm
- If it works do more of it
- Don't make idle threats

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Final word

- Your Child's behavioural presentation is not due to poor parenting or having a bad child. They are reacting to how they experience the world around them.
- They have a condition, that requires a specific style of parenting, teaching and mindful environmental manipulation

Please go ahead and share what you learnt today!!

Resources



You are the expert on your child and know them better than any healthcare professional. With the right resources, you can help them to manage the emotions that come with their diagnosis.

- Young Minds parents helpline on www.youngminds.org.uk
- Parents Action for Children on www.parents.actionforchildren.org.uk
- Mind general parent's mental health support for their child- www.mind.org.uk
- National Autistic society (NAS) www.autism.org.uk – Not just for people with Autism- The website has useful resources on managing anxiety and Neurodiversity
- Ambitious about Autism –parents toolkit www.ambitiousaboutautism.org.uk
- Jessica Kingsley Publishers- Largest UK publishers for books, DVD's and SEN friendly resources

