

THREAD COUNSELING GROUP 2024

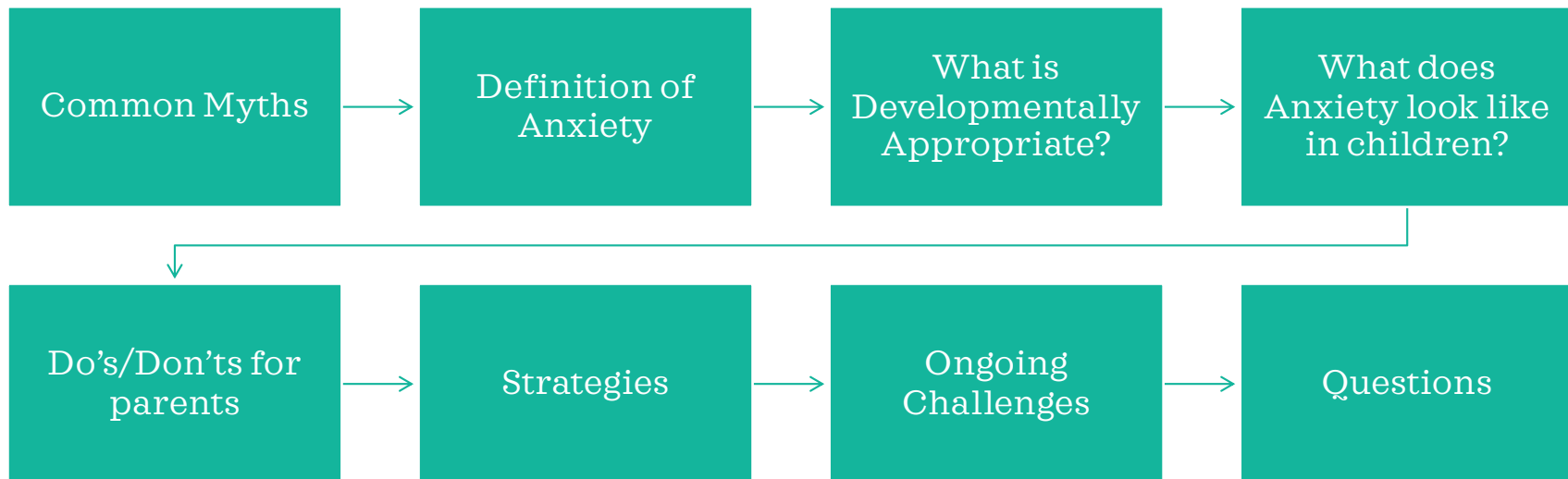
Childhood Anxiety

DR. AHOU LINE, PHD, LPC, RPT

KRISTINA MCCOOK, MS, LPC, RPT



Agenda





Common Myths

Myths about Childhood Anxiety

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Anxiety in children is a result of poor parenting.

If they want to, a child can stop being anxious.

Anxiety means that something bad must have happened to the child.

Anxious children are shy.

All anxiety looks the same.

Anxiety is just a child being dramatic.

(Berness, 2020; Wildenhaus, 2023)

Definition



“Apprehensive uneasiness or nervousness usually over an impending or anticipated ill.”



“An abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physical signs (such as tension, sweating, and increased pulse rate), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it.”

(“Anxiety,” 2024)

What We Know

Anxiety disorders are the most prevalent mental health condition among children in the U.S. with more than 30% experiencing an anxiety disorder by the time they turn 18 (Allen et al., 2020).

4 out of every 5 children with anxiety will not receive treatment (Allen et al., 2020).

If a child experiences anxiety, it does not mean they have an anxiety disorder.

Parent involvement in counseling treatment leads to stronger outcomes for all presenting concerns but especially anxiety (Line et al., 2023)

What is Developmentally Appropriate?

Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intense Emotions• Struggles to regulate emotions when tired, stressed, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Temper tantrums - decrease with age• Frequent nightmares• Fears/Phobias
Elementary	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easily overwhelmed with choices (early)• Performance Anxiety• Easily Disappointed• Worries, often about serious things - death, natural disasters, wars (later)• Sensitivity or avoidance of situations in which they believe they will fail	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Frequent Nightmares, fears at bedtime (early)• Sensitive to criticism, rejection• Cries easily, but will hide tears out of embarrassment• Concern about peer relationships and acceptance (later)• Gets feelings hurt easily
Preteen/ Teens	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excessive concern with belonging to a group• Overly sensitive about appearance, performance, criticism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unpredictable moods• Lack of motivation in academics• Changing personal characteristics/interests to fit in with peers

(Ray, 2015)

What Anxiety May Look Like

- Intense fears
- Stomachaches/headaches
- Body pain
- School perfectionism
- Struggling with social relationships
- Nightmares
- Bedwetting
- Temper tantrums
- Difficulty concentrating
- Poor performance in schoolwork
- Irritability
- Difficulty sleeping or waking
- Muscle aches and tension (jaw pain)
- School refusal
- Frequent crying
- Mumbling
- Declining social invitations
- Shortness of breath
- Fidgeting
- Difficulty with teachers
- Clinginess
- Poor eye contact

(Vanover & Mennona, 2023)

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Additional Warning Signs for Teens:

- Notable changes in sleep, weight, eating habits or other everyday patterns
- Withdrawing more than usual from friends, family and community
- Academic struggles that seem different or more intense
- A whole new set of friends you've never met before
- Obsession with a certain goal ("My life will never be the same if..")
- Loss of interest in the things they usually love or quitting activities that they enjoy
- Canceling plans with their closest friends with little or no explanation
- Running thoughts or worries that won't leave them alone
- Refusing to talk about what's bothering them
- Signs of drug, alcohol or other substance use
- Signs of self-harm

(Teen Mental Health: How to Know When Your Child Needs Help, n.d.)

Dos and Don'ts for Parents

Don't	Do
Tell them to "get over it" or use logic and reasoning to tell them their concerns are unfounded	Reflect their feelings and accept that anxiety is often unsubstantiated
Accuse them of being manipulative, dramatic, ungrateful, or attention seeking	Acknowledge their efforts with gentle encouragement
Compare their anxiety to yours	Model healthy behaviors/coping skills

Dos and Don'ts for Parents

Don't	Do
Try to take their anxiety away from them or avoid everything that makes them anxious	Set positive and realistic expectations
Ask leading questions	Ask open ended questions
Reinforce their fears (scary movies, negative news loops, etc.)	Be mindful of what you consume

Strategies

- Build Feeling/Emotion Language with kids
- Model the behaviors you want to see.
- Normalize the emotional experience
- Validate and Reflect Feelings

"if you don't listen to the little stuff when they are little, they won't tell you the big stuff when they are big"

Reflecting Feeling

Validating and respecting your child's feelings does not mean you are agreeing with them.

- ❖ Statement: *I don't want to go to school. I hate it there.*
Response: *You are anxious about going to school today.*
- ❖ Statement: *I wish I didn't have to go to the doctor. Last time was horrible.*
Response: *You wish you could avoid it forever and last time scared you.*
- ❖ Statement: *I don't want to see my friends. They don't even call me.*
Response: *You are feeling really left out.*

Ongoing Challenges

- Long term impact of COVID
- Stigma related to mental health support
- Impact of technology/smart phones on development
- The hope that children will “grow out of it”
- Identifying children in need of support



Questions?
