Intelligence, Creativity, Compassion...
“Having an anxiety disorder is like being stuck in that moment when you realize you’ve leaned too far back in your chair, but have not yet fallen.” – teenage patient
Adaptive Anxiety vs. Disordered Anxiety

Adaptive Anxiety
- Keeps us safe
- A response to real danger
- Prevents the repeating of mistakes

Disordered Anxiety
- Results in functional impairment
- Equivalent to a “false alarm”
- Leads to unnecessary avoidance
Why this is so important

Children and Adolescents

- Median age of onset 11 – earliest of all forms of psychopathology
- 8% of children between ages 13 and 18 currently have an anxiety disorder
- 31.9% will have an anxiety disorder between the ages of 13 and 18
- 8.3% will have “severe” anxiety disorder
- Only 18% of these teens receive treatment
Adolescents Girls

- 38% of girls will have at least one anxiety disorder between the ages of 13 and 18, (compared with 26.1% for boys)

- Compared with 4.2% of girls will have ADHD, 10.2% with have a substance abuse disorder, 3.8% will have an eating disorder
It Didn’t Use to be This Way

- Teens are 5 to 8 times more likely to show symptoms of an anxiety disorder compared with teens during WWII
- Depression in teens increased by 37% between 2005 and 2014
- College freshmen report highest stress and lowest mental health in 25 years
Anxiety during COVID-19 Era

- Reality-based fears
- Uncertainty/unpredictability
- Likely ongoing disruptions to routine
- Trauma
- Classroom illnesses
- Online education as easy avoidance
Anxiety during COVID-19

- Continuity
- Connectivity
- Creativity
Psychoeducation regarding Stress and Anxiety

- What is anxiety and stress?
- What is “normal”
- Review of basic coping skills
Emerging Data

13 to 18-year-olds during pandemic:

- 334% increase in intentional self-injury
- 119% increase in overdoses
- 93.6% increase in GAD
- 89.7% increase in adjustment disorders
- 83% increase in MDD

- FAIR health white paper 3/2/21
Medical Claims ages 13-18

- FAIR health white paper 3/2/21
Importance of Resilience

“You can be scared and brave at the same time”

- Foster connections
- Altruism
- Structured Routine
- Take breaks and have unstructured time
- Practice self-care
- Acceptance of change

- Move towards goals
- Nurture a positive self-view
- Practice an optimistic outlook
- Learn about yourself
Tolerance of Uncertainty

“Anxiety’s Kryptonite”
Tolerance for Uncertainty
“Anxiety’s Kryptonite”

- A skill we all have
- Cognitive Reappraisal
- Acceptance model
Self-Efficacy

“I can handle what comes.”
“It’s not less of a car. You’re just driving it on the wrong surface”
Learned Optimism

- Adversity
- Belief
- Consequence
- Disputation
- Energization
What anxiety can look like

- Inattention
- Absenteeism
- Defiance
- Incomplete work
- Irritability
- Isolation
Our thoughts are the widow through which our emotions see the world.
Cognitive Reappraisal of Anxious Arousal

“Don’t believe everything you think!”

- Body is doing the right thing at the wrong time
- Perspective of “curious observer”
- “In this moment…”
- Metaphor of fire alarm
Fire alarm at the top of the Empire State Building
“Behind the Scenes Footage of Your Own Scary Thoughts”
Cognitive Elements of Fear Reduction

“Don’t believe everything you think.”

- Education regarding reality of danger
- Education regarding fear response
- Reframe anxiety as “false alarm” that is an annoyance (e.g., oversensitive fire alarm that sounds when you burn toast, etc.)
- Label the anxiety disorder as a “bully”
Handling Strong Emotions

“Thoughts are not evidence and feelings aren’t facts.”

▪ “Don’t believe everything you think”

▪ “Thoughts happen”

▪ “Right now I’m having the thought that…”
“Stop swatting the butterflies.”
Cognitive Coping Strategies:

“Just because I feel scared doesn’t mean anything bad is going to happen”

- Discuss importance of self-talk

- Create “Coping Cards”
  - Individually tailored to fear cues
  - Review appropriate situations in which to use each card
  - Pop-quizzes with rewards for successful recall
Coping Card

Examples

▪ “Fear is temporary and harmless”
▪ “Scary thoughts can’t hurt me”
▪ “Just because I feel scared doesn’t mean anything bad is going to happen”
▪ “Just because I am scared doesn’t mean I can’t do it”
▪ “Just because I feel sick doesn’t mean I’m going to throw up”
▪ “I am stronger than my fear”
The way to respond to anxiety is just as counterintuitive as diving into the wave that’s about to hit you.”
“I’ve given you what you want. Now go away and never beg again.”
“The Protection Trap”

- 40% of parents of children with anxiety disorders have also had an anxiety disorder

- Parents are often complicit with child’s avoidance and are overly cautious and perceive the child’s experience of anxiety as dangerous

- Silverman (1996)
“Model what you want the child to feel.”
“No good caregiver would just give their child the answer. They need to learn how to solve it.”
“Water the seeds, not the weeds.”
Ray Charles
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