Mental Health, Bullying, and School Refusal

December 4, 2019
Jonathan Dalton, Ph.D.
Center for Anxiety and Behavioral Change
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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adaptive Anxiety</th>
<th>Disordered Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keeps us safe</td>
<td>Results in functional impairment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A response to real danger</td>
<td>Equivalent to a “false alarm”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prevents the repeating of mistakes</td>
<td>Leads to unnecessary avoidance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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
Where Does it Come From?

- Doing well in school ........... 43%
- Family finances ................. 31%
- Getting into good college ...... 29%
- The way I look/weights ........ 26%
- Managing extracurriculars .... 12%
- Friends .......................... 11%
- Family conflict .................. 7%
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
- Suicide rates have tripled for ages 10-14 from 1960s to 1990s. Still getting worse today
Depression
Major Depressive Episode

Past Year Prevalence of Major Depressive Episode Among U.S. Adolescents (2017)

Data Courtesy of SAMHSA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Al/AN*</th>
<th>2 or More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teen Depression Facts

Past Year Severity of Major Depressive Episode Among U.S. Adolescents (2017)
Data Courtesy of SAMHSA

- Without severe impairment: 29%
- With severe impairment: 71%

Past Year Treatment Received Among Adolescents with Major Depressive Episode (2017)
Data Courtesy of SAMHSA

- Medication Only: 2.4%
- Health Professional AND Medication: 17.9%
- Health Professional Only: 19.6%
- No Treatment: 60.1%
Suicide

- 17.9% of teens 15-18 had suicidal ideation last year
- Suicide was the second leading cause of death for those between 10 and 14 in 2017
Bullying

- unwanted, aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. The behavior is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time

- Can be verbal, social, physical
Effects of Bullying

- Approximately 1 in 5 kids reports being bullied
- Students who experience bullying are at increased risk for poor school adjustment, sleep difficulties, anxiety, and depression (Center for Disease Control, 2017).
Effects of Bullying

- Students who experience bullying are twice as likely as non-bullied peers to experience negative health effects such as headaches and stomachaches (Gini & Pozzoli, 2013).

- Students facing peer victimization are 2.2 times more likely to have suicide ideation and 2.6 times more likely to attempt suicide than students not facing victimization (Gini & Espelage, 2014).
Increased Risk

- Students with specific learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, emotional and behavior disorders, other health impairments, and speech or language impairments at higher risk (Rose & Gage, 2017).

- 74.1% of LGBT students report being verbally bullied and 36.2% of LGBT students report being physically bullied in the previous year (National School Climate Survey, 2013).
Common Antecedents

- Death or illness in parent or caregiver
- Change of class or school
- Traumatic events at school (including bullying)
- Prolonged absence from illness
School Refusal

- What is is
- Why it matters so much
- What do we do about it
Consequences of School Refusal

- Duration of school-refusal correlated with short and long term psychopathology in the individual including:
  - lowered academic achievement
  - occupational difficulties
  - family/marital discord
  - poor social relationships

Kearney (2001)
Long-Term Sequelae in Children with School Refusal

- Did not complete high school..........45%
- Adult psychiatric outpatient care......43%
- Still living with parents at 20-year follow-up.........................14%
- Married at 20-year follow-up..........41%
- No children at 20-year follow-up......59%

- Flakierska-Praquín et al. (1997)
Treatment Works!

“Ultimately we know deeply that on the other side of every fear is freedom” – Marilyn Ferguson

- Treatment success rates for anxiety disorders with CBT (exposure therapy) range from 60% to 90%
- Treatment response rate for Depression is 85% (meds + CBT)
- Tragically low utilization rates (18% compared with 79% for ADHD)
Avoidance and Fear are Teammates
Anxiety Reduction

- Education
- Cognitive Reframing
- Behavior Change
Our thoughts are the window through which our emotions see the world.
Fire alarm at the top of the Empire State Building
Coping Cards

“Just because I’m scared…”

- I am stronger than my fear
- Scary thoughts can never hurt me
- I know I can do this because...
- Just because I’m scared doesn’t mean I can’t do it
- It’s ok to be scared
- Just do it anyway
- Anxiety is temporary and harmless
“Stop swatting the butterflies.”
“Anxiety is the Baskin Robbins of mental disorders”

- Panic Disorder
- Separation Anxiety Disorder
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- Social Phobia
- Specific Phobia
- Selective Mutism
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder *
“Behind the Scenes Footage of Your Own Scary Thoughts”
“Imagine trying to learn calculus right now”
Self-Oriented Perfectionism

- Very different from appropriately high standards
- Risk factor for eating disorders, depression, suicide
- Self-worth derived from achievement and productivity
- Tend to function well in low stress environment
“The perfect igloo can kill you.”
Teaching “Optimalism”

- Optimal – “Best or most effective”
- Failure as feedback
- Adaptable and flexible
- Accepts natural variation
- Balance as goal
- Success is not linear
Flexibility is Strength
“It can be hard to let go of what you know.”
Accommodating vs. Enabling
“The Protection Trap”

Anxiety is Temporary and Harmless; Avoidance can Ruin Lives

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

- Good parents are motivated to reduce a child’s distress. This often leads them to become complicit with child’s avoidant behavior
“Here is some food. Now go away and don’t ever beg again!”
Psychoeducation

“Here is the owner’s manual for you nervous system”

- “Good package deal”
- Acquisition, maintenance, and extinction of fear response
- Importance of decreasing avoidance
- Concept of exposure
- Outlasting fear
“No good parent would just give their child the answer. They need to learn how to solve it.”
“Model what you want the child to feel.”
“Water the seeds, not the weeds.”
Which is the Path to Success?