

Anxiety Problems in Teens in Schools: Strategies to Help

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VCU

Disclosures of Potential Conflicts

Source	Research Funding	Paid consulting	Equity
PracticeWise, LLC		✓	
NIDA	✓		
NIMH	✓		
IES	✓		

Objectives

- Provide background on anxiety in teens
- Describe a few DSM anxiety disorders
- Describe evidence-based *psychological* treatments for childhood anxiety disorders
- Provide tips for parents
- If time, we can talk about WHY

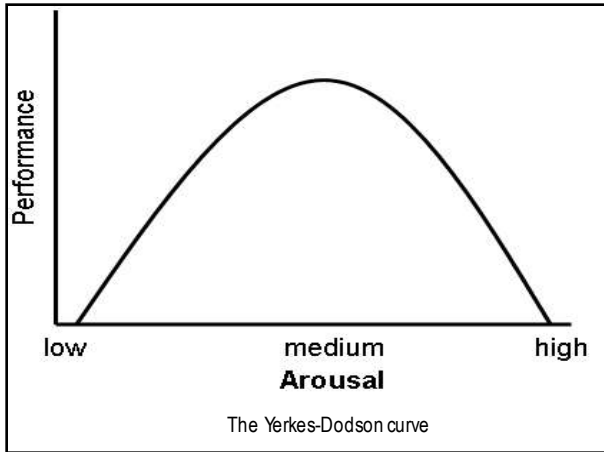
Background: Wherefore anxiety?

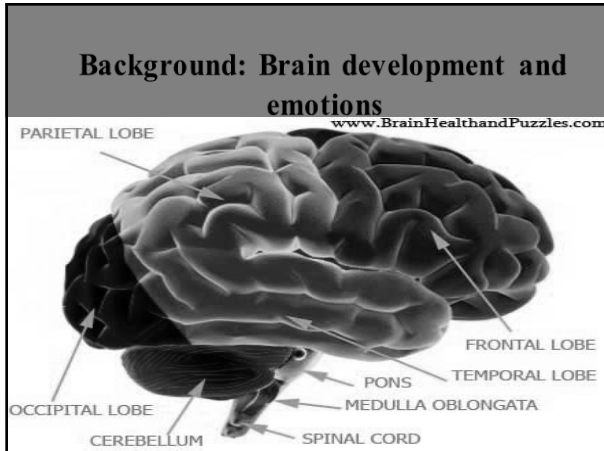
The two faces of anxiety

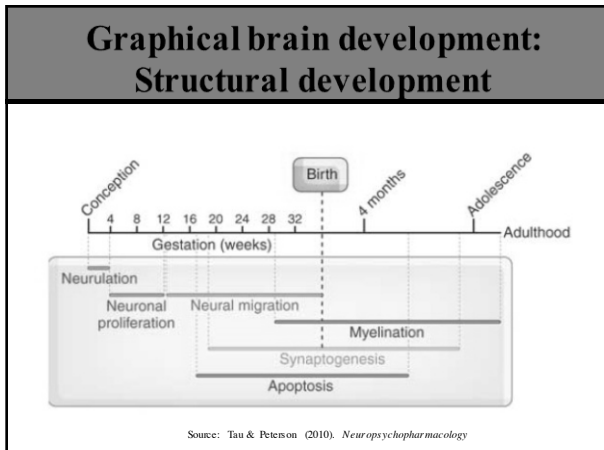
BENEFITS	RISKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Can motivate performance▪ Can save us in high-danger situations▪ Can help us identify what matters to us	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Too much has physical health risks▪ Too much has mental health risks▪ Too much can decrease performance

The two faces of anxiety

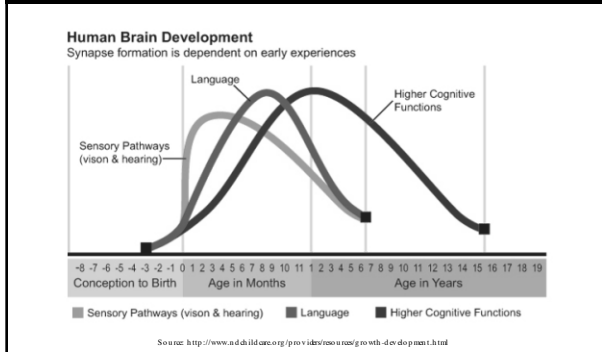
BENEFITS	RISKS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Can motivate performance▪ Can save us in high-danger situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Too much anxiety associated with physical health risks▪ Too much anxiety associated with mental health risks▪ Too much anxiety will decrease performance







Graphical brain development: Functional development

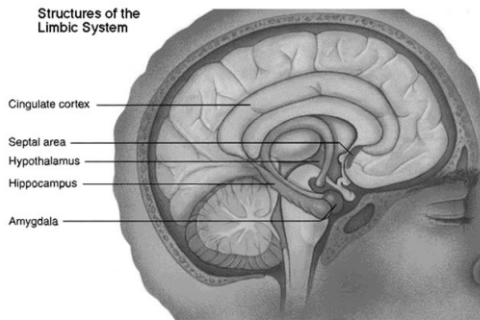


Important early take home message

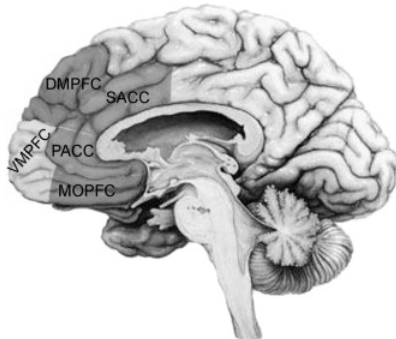
- Zero to three is IMPORTANT
- AND
- Lots of brain development occurs later
 - Well into adolescence (and beyond)

Brain “emotion” and “reason”

The brain's "emotion center": The limbic system



The brain's "reason center": Prefrontal cortex



Sidebar: Emotion regulation and teens

- Are teens "all gasoline, no brakes"?
 - Mostly in heated situations
- Imbalance model of brain development
 - Motivational and emotional connections develop earlier than prefrontal control
- Thus, in HOT situations, adolescents are more challenged
 - As connections in PFC develop, things get better

Casey & Caudle (2013)

It's not a logical reasoning problem



Fig. 1. Hypothetical graph of development of logical reasoning abilities versus psychosocial maturation. Although logical reasoning abilities reach adult levels by age 16, psychosocial capacities, such as impulse control, future orientation, or resistance to peer influence, continue to develop into young adulthood.

For example...

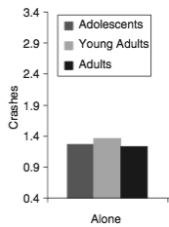


Fig. 2. Risk taking of adolescents, young adults, and adults during a video driving game, when playing alone and when playing with friends. Adapted from Gardner & Steinberg (2004).

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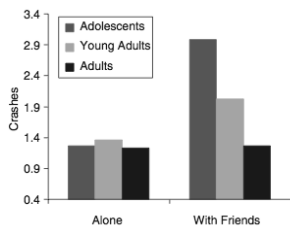
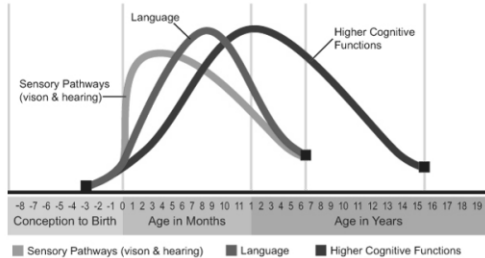


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Reminder

Human Brain Development

Synapse formation is dependent on early experiences



Source: <http://www.ndchildcare.org/providers/resources/growth-development.html>

Disorder round up

Social Anxiety

- Fear of scrutiny/embarrassment in specific or global social situations
- Exposure almost always causes anxiety
- Avoidance or endurance with intense distress

Generalized Anxiety

- Excessive AND uncontrollable anxiety and worry about **numerous** events and activities
- Occurring more days than not
- Accompanied by physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, muscle tension, trembling)

Panic Disorder (PD)

- Panic attacks for no discernible reason
- PLUS apprehension of future attacks
- With or without agoraphobia

What is a panic attack?

- Discrete period of intense fear or discomfort with 4+ of the following
 - Palpitations
 - Sweating
 - Trembling/shaking
 - Shortness of breath
 - Chest pain
 - Nausea
 - Fear of dying

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

- **Obsession:** recurrent intrusive unwanted thoughts that appear irrational and uncontrollable to the individual
 - And/Or
- **Compulsion:** repetitive behavior or mental act that person is driven to do to reduce distress caused by obsession(s)

First steps

- ✓ If problem seems persistent and impairing, refer for assessment
 - ✓ Remember anxiety and stress=normative (life as a mammal involves stress)
- ✓ Consider consulting a professional
 - ✓ We can recommend some
- ✓ If helps seems like a good idea, what treatments to consider?

Treatment of anxiety disorders and PTSD

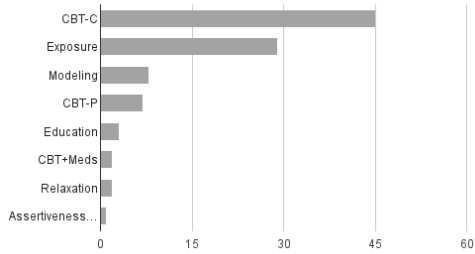
- Evidence from randomized controlled trials*

*Aggregated and reported by PracticeWise, LLC

Anxiety treatments

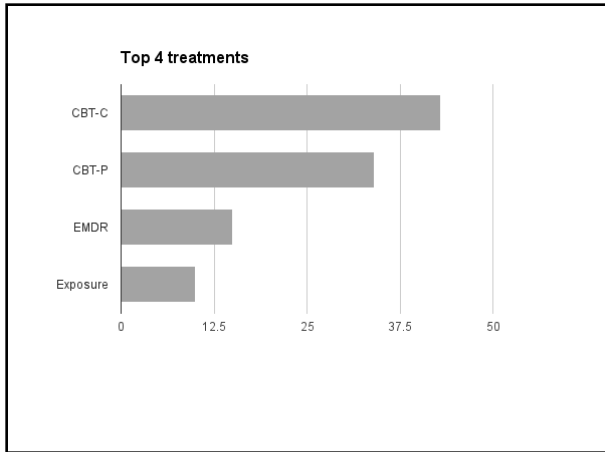
- 85 Papers
- 115 protocols

Top 7 treatment approaches



Trauma treatments

- 19 papers
- 21 protocols



Cognitive-behavioral treatment (CBT)

- Supported by 25+ studies
- Involves
 - Skills training
 - Exposure
- Many variations
 - Individual, family, group

Basic CBT Approach to Anxiety

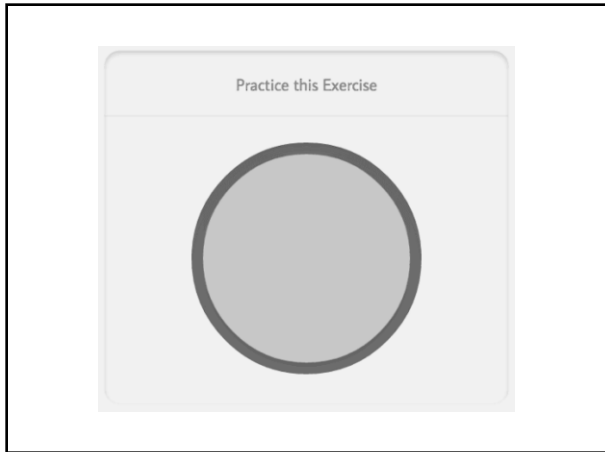
- Education about anxiety
- Monitoring
- Exposure
- Anxiety management skills

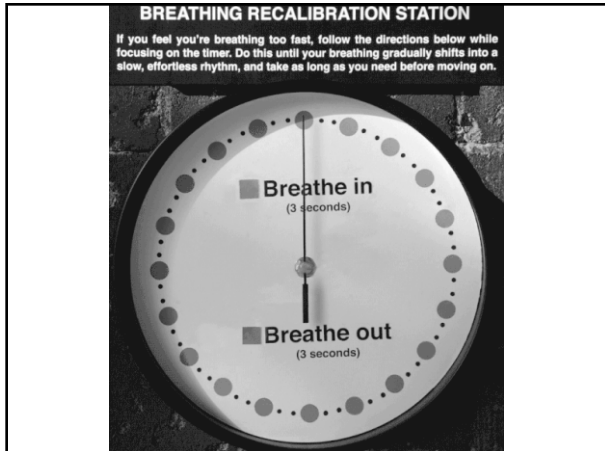
What can I do now?

A few strategies to consider

- Relaxation
- Mindfulness
- Activity selection

**Synchronize your
breathing for relaxation/
anxiety control**






Relaxation

- Free MP3s at
 - <http://relax.practicewise.com>
- Free app:
<http://t2health.dcoe.mil/apps/breathe2relax>

Activity selection

- Build your activities list
 - Consider
 - Past activities
 - Social activities
 - Mastery activities
 - Changing channel activities
 - Activities that help others
- Activities don't have to be extensive or expensive to work
- Include ratings pre and post 

Helpful tips for building an activities list

- Two+ of the following...
 - Free
 - Easy access
 - Social
 - With family
 - With peers
 - Outdoors
 - Prosocial/helping others
 - High activity level (exercise)

Other Tips for Helping Kids Learn to Manage Anxiety

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Set clear expectations and structure ✓ Focus on and praise <i>effort</i> rather than <i>outcome</i> ✓ When possible, encourage and reward "exposure" to new or feared situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Normalize anxiety ✓ Coping modeling approach to safe but anxiety-provoking situations ✓ Know treatment options
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Hey, Bailey, & Stouffer, 2001

Questions?

Thanks for your attention!

Contact:

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- Therapy for adults, adolescents, and children
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- anxietyclinic.vcu.edu

The After Party

Why do these problems happen?

Why do kids develop anxiety problems?

- Genetics?
- Learning?
- Anxious thoughts?
- Family?

Are the problems genetic?

- Temperament (inhibition)
- Anxiety sensitivity may be heritable

Do they learn it?

- Stressful experiences
- Remember Pavlov's dog
- Rewards and punishments
- Modeling

Is it the way they think?

- **Anxious (vs. depressed) thinking**
 - **Self-blame:** "Guesses" that involve "you" being at fault for something
 - **Selective abstraction:** "Guesses" that involve "you" only noticing some of the clues (the "bad" ones)
 - **Forecasting:** "Guesses" that involve "you" predicting bad outcomes for future events
 - **Catastrophization:** "Guesses" that tend to imagine very bad things happening
 - **Overestimation:** "Guesses" that tend to anticipate a high likelihood (much higher than is true) of negative outcomes

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How does the family influence?

- Modeling
- Parental control/autonomy-granting
- Parental expectations
- Opportunities for approach and reward
- Warmth/support

Quick activity for today

- Take initial rating
- Do activity
- Take post ratings
