Treehouse Pediatrics

Basics of Anxiety

*Anxiety is a whole body reaction to a **perceived** threat...*

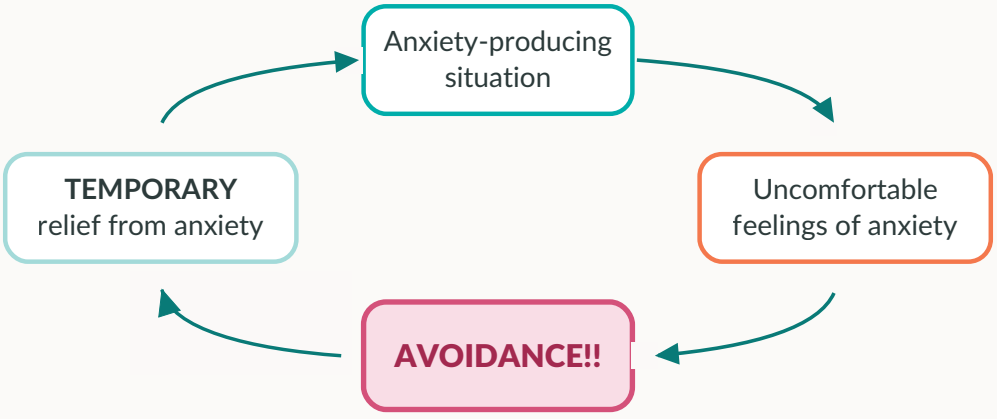
Body	Thoughts	Actions
Heart pounding	Seeing danger everywhere	**AVOIDANCE!**
Muscle tension	Worrying all the time	Clinging to safety
Sweating	Images of bad events	Outbursts/tantrums
Trembling/Shaky	Predicting the worst	Repetitive rituals
Upset stomach	"What if" thoughts	Checking/rechecking
Trouble breathing	Overly critical of yourself	Reassurance-seeking
Dizzy/lightheaded	Overgeneralizing	Difficulties sleeping
Chest tightness	Personalizing everything	Over preparing/rehearsing

Our brain reacts to perceived threats with the following responses:

1. **Fight** *Ex: protecting your loved one if they are in danger*
2. **Flight** *Ex: running out of the way when a car is coming at you*
3. **Freeze** *Ex: freezing when someone jumps out and scares you before responding*
   (this response often happens before or after fighting or fleeing)

Feelings of anxiety are both COMMON & NORMAL! It becomes a problem when it prevents you from doing things you would like or need to do...

The Cycle of Anxiety



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Psychological Treatments for Anxiety

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

An evidence-based therapy based on the idea that our thoughts influence our feelings that influence our behaviors

Behavior:

- **EXPOSURE, EXPOSURE, EXPOSURE**
  - Facing fears is the most effective way to disrupt the cycle!!!
  - For kids, it is easier to engage in systematic exposure by slowly working up to the most anxiety-provoking situations with praise/rewards along the way to build self-efficacy!
- **Coping skills to relax the body:**
  - Deep breathing (e.g., balloon breaths, cupcake breaths)
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation (e.g., lemon squeezers)
  - Grounding
  - Mindfulness

Cognition:

- Become aware of and restructure maladaptive thoughts and interpretations of anxiety-provoking situations

Help from parents

- **Praise BRAVERY!!**
  - This can be verbal praises and/or bravery stickers that add up to tangible rewards
  - We want to focus on increasing bravery (versus decreasing anxiety, which will happen naturally)
- **Do not allow avoidance or escape!**
  - **Ultimate Goal:** face fears more than avoiding them!!
- Your child's anxiety may also cause you anxiety but you both can make it through, I promise!!

Keep your child emotionally regulated by...

- Getting a good night's sleep
- Having regularly scheduled healthy meals
- Consuming adequate water
- Allowing times of fun and socialization with friends and family

While medication does not address the underlying causes of anxiety, it can help ease the uncomfortable feelings associated with intense anxiety... if you are interested in discussing medication options, please schedule an appointment with your pediatrician.

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