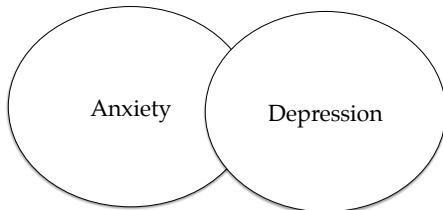**Managing Anxiety At School and Home:**
An Umbrella Approach to Managing Worry

Presented by Lynn Lyons, LICSW

lynnlyonsnh.com

THINK PREVENTION!

Broad based SKILLS that are the
opposite of the patterns we see with
worry, anxiety and depression

Let's Think Prevention:
Anxiety and Depression
Overlapping Cognitive Patterns:

Anxiety   Depression

Critical Cognitive Skills:
How can we teach children to:

- *tolerate (and normalize) discomfort*
- *externalize/react differently to thoughts*
- *learn by doing, failing, & succeeding*
- *handle the uncertainty of life*
- *be more flexible (malleability!)*
- *problem solve (vs. ruminate)*

Positive Expectancy...

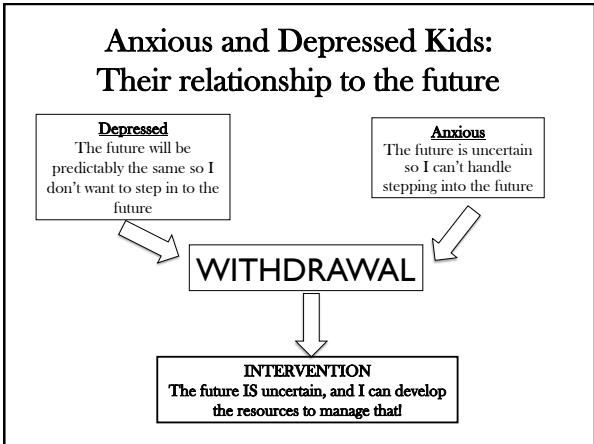David Yeager and colleagues asked and answered the question:

How will high school students cope socially when they are told that people have the potential to change "socially relevant traits"?

From the NYT article by Jan Hoffman entitled
Teaching Teenagers to Cope With Social Stress

"At the beginning of the school year, students participated in a reading and writing exercise intended to instill a basic, almost banal message to help them manage tension: People can change."

http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/30/
health/teenagers-stress-coping-skills

Anxious and Depressed Kids:
Their relationship to the future

Depressed
The future will be predictably the same so I don't want to step in to the future

Anxious
The future is uncertain so I can't handle stepping into the future

WITHDRAWAL

INTERVENTION
The future IS uncertain, and I can develop the resources to manage that!

Anxiety Demands TWO Things:

■ *Certainty: "I have to know what's going to happen next... and I want to control it!"*

■ *Comfort: "I want to feel safe and comfortable...or else I want out!"*

School Refusal

avoidance &/or positive reinforcement received for staying at home

⇩

reduce anxiety

⇩

become powerful motivating conditions for child to continue to refuse to go to school

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When you are addressing anxiety in school:

Are you ...

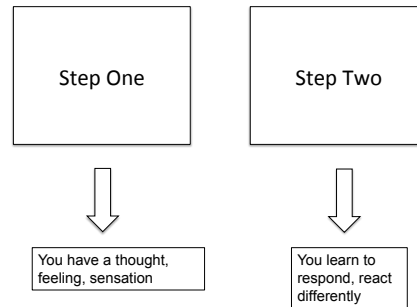***Supporting THE DISORDER?***

Parents, Therapist, and School...

...Everyone on the same page

CRITICAL ATTITUDINAL SHIFT!

If I'm uncomfortable or unsure or nervous as I'm learning something new, I'm on the right track…

| Step One | Step Two |

You have a thought, feeling, sensation

You learn to respond, react differently

Being uncomfortable & uncertain…

- is price you pay for moving into new territory

- in order to grow you need to move into new territory

- handling uncertainty & discomfort will reset alarm system & allow you to do what you want to do

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These are messages to try out

- "I'm willing to feel uncomfortable."

- "I'm willing to feel unsure, & to not know what will happen."

- "I'm willing to grab onto my courage & do it."

504 Plans

Patterns that *Seem to Make Sense* …& DON'T WORK

- Reassuring, rescuing & overprotecting
- Plans that are avoidance-based vs skill-based
- Providing certainty; removing sources of anxiety
- Requiring family members, friends, & schools to accommodate the anxiety

Accommodation

Anything done <u>in service</u> of avoidance, without any teaching or skill building

- adjusting family routines or schedules
- school accommodations with no "weaning" plan
- allowing "unacceptable" behavior & referring to it as "anxiety"
- medication with no therapy/skill building

Working in/with Schools and 504 Plans

- Is this plan accommodating the anxiety?
- Does this plan address the teaching of skills that reduce anxiety?
- Is there a weaning-off component to the plan?
- What role will visits to the nurse have?
- What is the role of the nurse in the plan?
- Does the plan specifically address physical symptoms?

Teachers, Counselors & School Nurses

- Emphasize use of skills IN the classroom

- When child needs to leave classroom, have plans for use of skills in order to return quickly

- School staff & parents should be "speaking the same language" to child

- Getting child into school is essential

- The danger of the "pick-up plan"

Dear _____:

We are currently working on Peter's worry, particularly the difficulty he has been having staying in class. His pattern has been to complain of a stomach ache, go to visit the nurse, receive a Tums, and then return to class about 10-15 minutes later. As you know, Peter has been doing this at least twice a day for the last month.

Peter, his parents, and I have been working on a new plan, with a goal of helping Peter recognize his worry, manage the physical discomfort he feels, and stay in the classroom if possible. Peter has been taught several tools to do this, and he has been practicing them. He's doing very well, but we need your help.

If Peter asks to go to the nurse, please remind Peter of his tools (including _____). Cue Peter to use them, and allow him the time and space to do so. It shouldn't take him long, and he knows what to do.

Peter does not want other kids to know about this, so please plan with him about how you might cue him privately. A secret word or signal, or a private moment, would be great. Of course, if Peter for some reason is not able to manage his worry, even after prompting and practicing, he may go to the nurse. He won't be there long… she has a plan, too!

It is important that we all use the same language with Peter, and that we all support his efforts. We are referring to Peter's discomfort as "worry," and it is important that we move away from using the term "sick," especially when talking about his stomach ache. Key for Peter is the phrase, "I feel uncomfortable right now, but I can handle this."

Peter knows all about this plan, and is motivated to experiment with it in the classroom. We so appreciate your support along the way.

Ideas for the Classroom
Planting the Seeds of Prevention

The Cognitive Skills…

How will school (and life) be better when you can:

Increase Flexibility

Compartmentalize

Problem Solve

Access Internal Resources

Connnect/Disconnect as needed

The Cognitive Skills…

How will school be better if you can:

Increase Flexibility vs Stay Rigid

Compartmentalize vs Globalize

Problem Solve vs React Impulsively/
Emotionally Focused

Access Resources vs Remain Passive

Connect or Disconnect (Depending…)

Evaluate and Manage Emotions

(Instrumental to all of the above)

The Three Frames…

1   Experience is variable (rigidity v. flexibility)

2   The value of parts (global v. compartmentalized)
- Sequencing
- Compartmentalization
- **Connection and disconnection (signals and noise)**

3   Actions counts (passive v. active)
- Problem solving
- Accessing resources
- Doing stuff!

What does it sound/look like?

Rigid	Flexible
• It has to be this way	• I can adapt
• Nothing is going to change	• I'll get used to this
• Ya, but…	• Change is tricky at first
• I'm afraid to do it differently	• I'll see what happens
• My way or the highway	• I can see your perspective

What does it sound/look like?

Global

- Nothing ever goes my way
- No matter what I do, things don't change
- I can't get anything done
- People don't like me
- I've never been able to do that

Parts

- I take the good with the bad
- I'm struggling with this part of the project
- You can't please everyone
- Let me just get this part done; take it a step at a time

What does it sound/look like?

Active

- What do I need to do?
- What have I done before?
- Who can I ask for advice?
- What do other people do?

Passive

- I've never done that before.
- I'm not good at those things.
- People don't know/want to help me out.
- I don't know where to look.
- Why bother?

What does it sound like?

Problem Solving

- What should I do first?
- I'm going to work on a plan.
- I need more information.
- I know enough to move forward.
- I can continue to learn as I go…my past mistakes can help.

Emotionally Focused Ruminative/Impulsive

- I can't do anything until I'm sure.
- Who needs a plan?
- If it feels good, do it! Live for today!
- This doesn't feel right.
- I need to think about this more.
- What if…?

The Importance of Experiential Learning

- Talking (alone) may not change neural pathways
- Allows for novelty
- Experiential learning is more memorable, and needed to create powerful reference experiences
- More work and creativity is required, but engagement is greater and progress much quicker

Experiential Ideas: Flexibility

- Wall of Flexibility
- Ten Good Things or What Went Well
- "Unexpected Things (or Mistakes) of the Day"

Experiential Ideas: Flexibility

- The Spaghetti Challenge
- The Opposite Game
- Closet and Photo Album Investigation
- Wall of Flexibility
- "Unexpected Things (or Mistakes) of the Day"

Experiential Ideas: Parts

- Drawing, Talking to, Directing the Parts
- Global language and the language of PARTS
- Finding Books and Movies that Support the Skill
- Examples of Comparmentalization (Teens)

Experiential Ideas: Action

- Reward Systems for taking action and being uncomfortable on purpose
- Ladder of stepping into the anxiety/worry
- Practicing and Role Playing
- Finding Examples of Taking Action
  - Solving a problem through action versus passivity

Helping kids connect to the PROCESS of *moving toward mastery*:

- What can you do now (automatically) that you couldn't do a few years ago?

- Can you remember something that was *really* challenging when you first tried it but now seems simple?

- Make a list of accomplishments that make you proud.
  - Holding a pencil? Writing some letters? Saying the alphabet?
  - Learning to walk?
  - Sleeping in your own bed?

Information Stuff

- Website: lynnlyonsnh.com

- Email: Lynn@lynnlyonsnh.com

- Facebook: Lynn Lyons Psychotherapist, Anxiety and Children

- To get my newsletter: Go to FB page and click on EMAIL SIGN UP, or email me and ask.

- Phone: (603) 225-4147