

Practical Strategies for Reducing and Managing Anxiety Disorders

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Topics Covered

- Healthy stress vs. anxious moments vs. anxiety disorder
- Causes of anxiety
- Classroom demands that impact anxiety
- Anxiety impacting school functioning
- Interventions for managing anxiety
- Communicating with families
- Creating plans to manage anxiety

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Stress



- Normal and activating
- Locus of control\*\*
- Perception of ability to cope, utilize resources\*\*

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### Anxious Moments



- Speed bumps
- Threat is unclear (very turbulent plane ride)
- Typical in many situations: new experiences, performance

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### "Normal Anxiety"



Protective



Motivating



Helpful

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### "Disorder"



INTERFERENCE



PARALYZING



"STUCK"

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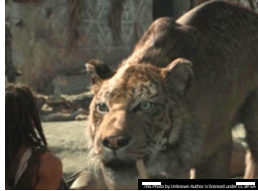
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### Anxiety and Cavemen

- The world was a dangerous place
- When they left the safety of their caves, had to be "on the lookout"
- Main goal = survival



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### Fight or Flight or Freeze

- Fight
  - Temper tantrum
  - Lash out (physically or verbally)
- Flight
  - Avoidance (i.e., bathroom, nurse, staying home)
  - Escape (i.e., bathroom, nurse, office, hallway, locker)
- Freeze
  - Shut down
  - Go blank
  - Withdraw

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### Anxiety Disorder

- Hypervigilant and misread cues = "False Alarms"
- Meets specific criteria
- Causes impairment in functioning (gets in the way of being a \_\_\_\_ year old)
- Patterns, consistency, duration

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### Causes of Anxiety (Risk Factors)

- Genetics
- Wiring/Temperament
- Modeling/Social Learning
- Classical Conditioning
- Trauma
- Combination

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### Wiring/Temperament



- Startle response
- Slow-to-warm up
- Introversion
- Behavioral inhibition
- Emotional reactivity
- Negative affectivity (neuroticism)
- Perseveration

APA, 2013; Dragon & Dragon, 2014; Fox & Pine, 2013

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### Modeling/Social Learning

- Albert Bandura, 1977
- Anxiety develops through learning that occurs from observing others
- Learn to avoid, no opportunity to test and invalidate
- Bees/spiders, math, dentists' offices, germs, etc

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## Classical Conditioning

- Watson, 1920s
- Looking at whether emotional responses could be classically conditioned (like Pavlov's dogs)
- Little Albert

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## Trauma

- ACEs studies
- *Potentially* traumatic events

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## Combination

Genetic  
predisposition,  
activating event

Genetic  
predisposition,  
modeling/social  
learning

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## Is Anxiety on the Rise and Why?

- Qualitative data
- Statistics seem to support increase, but unclear
- Social media?
- Increased pressures?
- "Helicopter" parents (or worse – "Lawnmower" parents!)?
- Decreased stigma, increased diagnostic awareness

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## Anxiety Disorders

- Excessive *fear* (emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat)
- Excessive *anxiety* (anticipation of future threat)
- Related behavioral disturbances
- Specific disorders differ in the types of situations or objects that induce fear, anxiety, avoidance behavior, and cognitive ideation

• DSM-V, 2013

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## Types of Anxiety

- Generalized Anxiety
- Separation Anxiety
- Selective Mutism
- Specific Phobia
- Social Anxiety
- Panic Disorder

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## Each Disorder

Some specification of a time period

Clinically significant impairment or distress

Not better explained by another mental health disorder

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## Generalized Anxiety

- Excessive anxiety and worry most days about multiple events or activities
- Difficult to control the worry
- Anxiety and worry associated with at least one of the following:
  - Restlessness, feeling keyed up or on edge
  - Easily fatigued
  - Difficulty concentrating, mind going blank
  - Irritability
  - Muscle tension
  - Sleep disturbance
- Not attributable to physiological effects of a substance or other medical condition

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- Homework
- Grades
- Getting in trouble
- Following rules
- Upsetting classmates
- Recess worries
- Remembering stuff
- School violence

## Common Worries

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- Completing homework in reasonable amount of time
- Trouble sleeping (reviewing day, anticipating next day)
- Attending in class
- Performance on tests
- Interacting with peers
- Behavior in school
- Behavior at home, afterschool

### School Related Challenges

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### Separation Anxiety

- Developmentally *inappropriate and excessive* fear or anxiety concerning separation from attachment figures

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### Functional Consequences of SAD

- Limited independent activities
- School avoidance/refusal
- Even when "in" school, frequent attempts to be picked up/go home, have parent stay
- Not going away to college
- Stressors on parents (job absences, limited social life, sleep)

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## Selective Mutism

- Consistent failure to speak in specific social situations when there is an expectation for speaking (i.e., at school) despite speaking in other situations
- Interferes with educational or occupational achievement or with social communication
- Not attributable to lack of knowledge of, or comfort with, spoken language required
- Not better explained by a communication disorder and does not occur exclusively during ASD

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- Participation in class
- Showing mastery, asking questions
- Social relationships
- Getting needs met (i.e., illness, bathroom, help with materials)
- Can be demanding of 1:1 attention from teachers
- Can be demanding of 1:1 attention from specific classmate

## School Related Problems

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## Specific Phobia

- Marked fear or anxiety about a specific object or situation
- Fear or anxiety may be expressed by crying, tantrums, freezing, clinging
- Phobic object almost always provokes immediate fear or anxiety
- Active avoidance or endured with intense fear or anxiety
- Fear/anxiety disproportionate with actual danger

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### Common Phobias in School Children/Teens

- Animals (including insects, bees)
- Weather
- Blood-injection-injury
- Choking
- Vomiting
- Loud sounds
- Costume characters

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### Social Anxiety Disorder (Social Phobia)

- Marked fear or anxiety about social situations in which individual is exposed to possible scrutiny by others (social interactions, being observed, performing)
- Anxiety must occur with peers, not just adults
- Fear of acting in a way or showing anxiety symptoms that will be humiliating, will lead to rejection, will offend others
- Social situations almost always provoke fear or anxiety which may be expressed by crying, tantrums, freezing, clinging, shrinking, failing to speak
- Social situations are avoided or endured with intense fear or anxiety
- Fear is out of proportion to actual threat and *sociocultural context*

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- Reading aloud
- Participation in class discussion
- Answering/asking questions
- Eating, drinking during school hours
- Interacting with peers (i.e., for social/leisure purposes or group work)
- Presentations
- Posted work, grades, behavioral standings
- Attending in class
- Taking tests, exams in group

### Related School Challenges

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- Racing, pounding heart
- Sweating
- Trembling, shaking
- Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering
- Feelings of choking
- Chest pain, discomfort
- Nausea, abdominal distress
- Feeling dizzy, unsteady, light-headed or faint
- Chills or heat sensations
- Numbness or tingling
- Derealization (feelings of unreality) or depersonalization (being detached from self)
- Fear of losing control or "going crazy"
- Fear of dying

### Panic Attacks

= Abrupt surge of intense fear or intense discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes, and during which time 4 or more occur

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### Panic Disorder

- Recurrent, unexpected panic attacks
- At least one panic attack is followed by 1+month of one or both:
  - Persistent concern or worry about additional panic attacks or their consequences
  - A significant maladaptive change in behavior related to the attacks (avoidance of behavior/situations that might trigger an attack)
- Not attributable by physiological effects of a substance or medical condition

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- Entering specific classrooms
- Entering specific areas in school (i.e., cafeteria, assemblies)
- Speaking in class, presenting
- Taking tests, exams in quiet room
- School trips
- Attending in class
- School refusal

### Related School Challenges

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Related  
"Conditions"

- OCD
- Body Focused Repetitive Behaviors
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
- ADHD
- Depression
  - Frequently co-occurs
- Giftedness

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### Stress-Contagion Theories

- Oberle, Schonert-Reichl (2016): students' morning cortisol levels significantly varied between classrooms; teacher burnout significantly reduced the unexplained variability – suggests teachers' job related stress is linked to students' physiological stress regulation
- Chicken or the egg?

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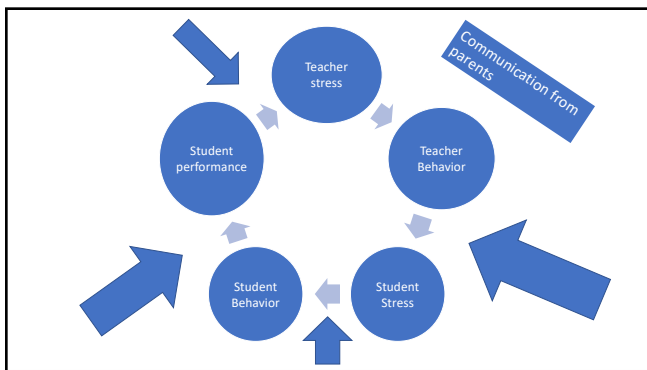
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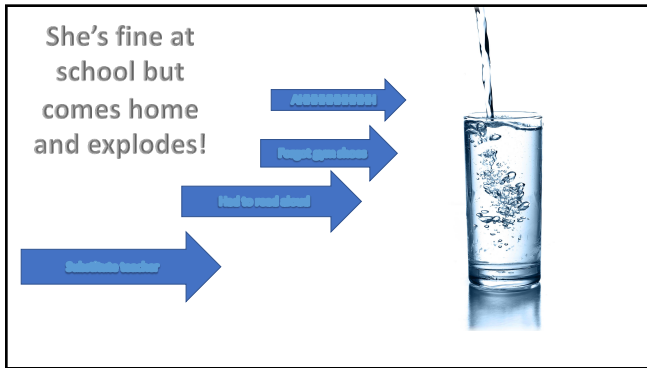
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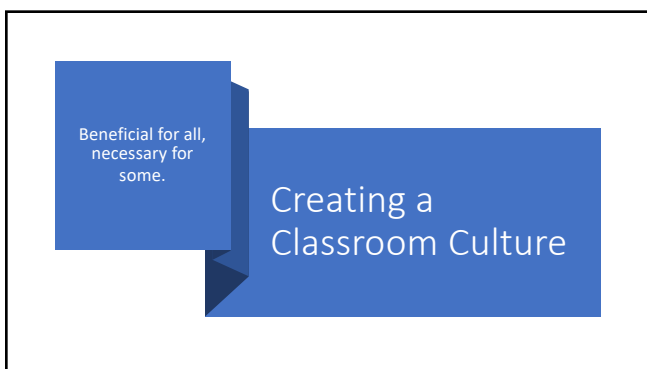
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### Cultivating “The Yes Brain” – Siegel & Bryson



Empathy



Resilience



Balance



Insight

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### Develop and Communicate Priorities

- Make a mantra (and BELIEVE it!)
  - “We are problem-solvers;” “we are risk-takers;” “we are respectful and kind to others and to ourselves;” “we make mistakes and we learn from them”
- Present it (to kids and parents) and teach it (to parents and kids)
- Repeat it
  - Just because and in teachable moments
- Reflect on it
  - Personally and with students
- Make sure your messages are consistent with your mantra

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### Consistent Messages

- Comments on report cards
- Attitude towards tests and grades
- What do you give attention to? What do you celebrate?
- How do you respond to requests/approaches?
- Attitude toward homework
- Feedback about mistakes
- Focus on awareness – “I wonder what’s happening here?”
- How you structure classroom time

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### Use Language Intentionally

- Reflect on what went well
- Ask if any areas of improvement were noted
- Generate ideas about how to improve/what plans can be made/what can be tried
- Test reflections – what do you think this score can be attributed to?

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### Teach Problem Solving Skills

- Define the problem
- Brainstorm possible solutions
- Evaluate possibilities
- Decide on approach
- Try it
- Evaluate it and repeat if necessary
- Find teachable moments – academic, social, classroom decisions, classroom behavior
- Model it

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### Teach Feelings, Normalize Range

- Younger children – story books specific to this
- Older children – discussions from text
- Teachable moments
- Model
- Prompt wondering about feelings
- “Sometimes students feel...”
- “You might be feeling...”
- “...and that’s ok...”
- “...and if so, you can...”

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### Lessons/Prompts to Address Feelings Specifically

- Describe a time when you felt \_\_\_\_\_.
- What kinds of things were you thinking that made you feel \_\_\_\_\_?
- What did you do when you felt \_\_\_\_\_?
- Did doing those things change the way you felt? How so?

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But what do I do if  
the answers scare  
me?

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Don't Panic!

- Be "the pilot"
- Validate and thank
- Express concern and desire to help
- Collaborate to decide who to bring in
- Utilize resources (i.e., school counselor, hotlines)
- Be the bridge
- Check in – don't have to "get into it"

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## Teach Perspective Taking

- How could you look at this from someone else's point of view?
- How could you look at it from another point of view?
- The Farmer's Luck
- Zoom

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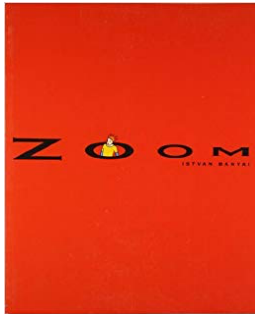
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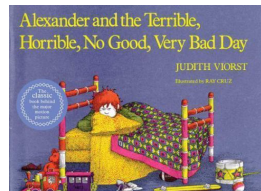
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### Teach Emptying the Cup

- Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day
- We all have to practice recognizing when our cups are getting full and how to empty them little by little
- Go wild with it!



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\*Locus of control

\*Perception of ability to cope & utilize resources

## Interventions

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Keep in Mind

- Brain is not in "thinking" mode
- Have a plan (sometimes that alone helps significantly!)
- Default checklists
- Sense of control, involvement

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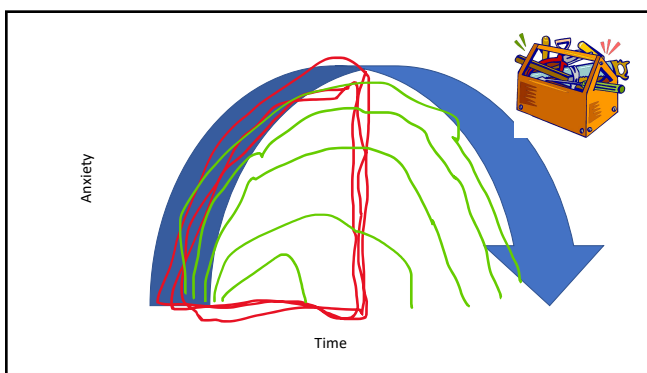
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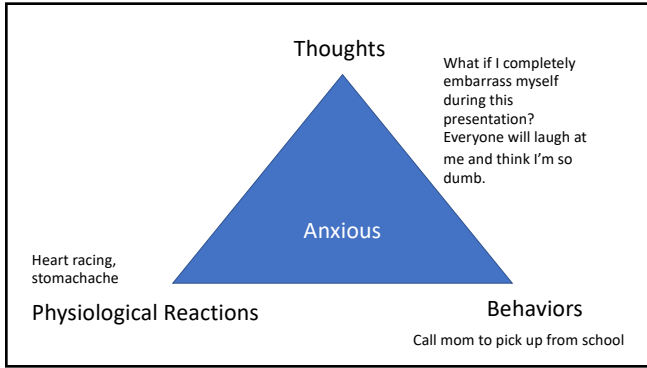
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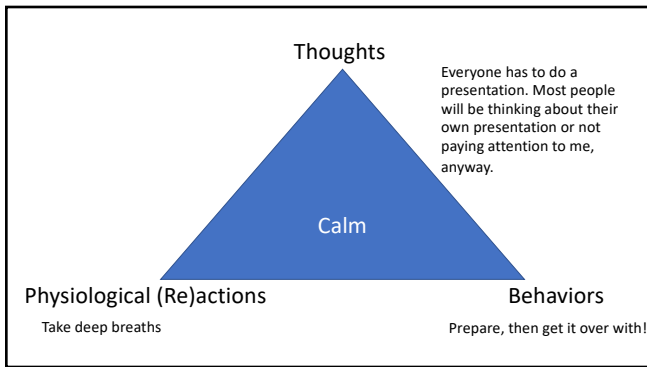
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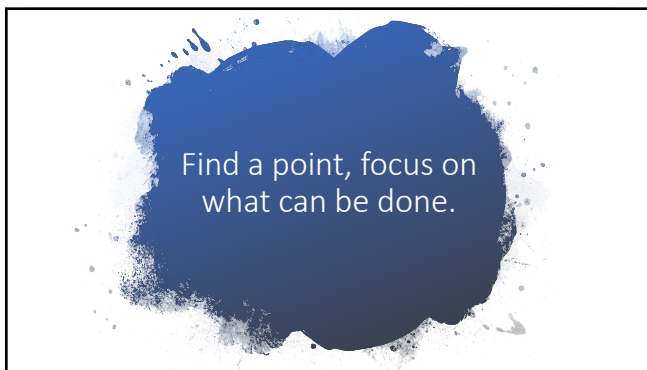
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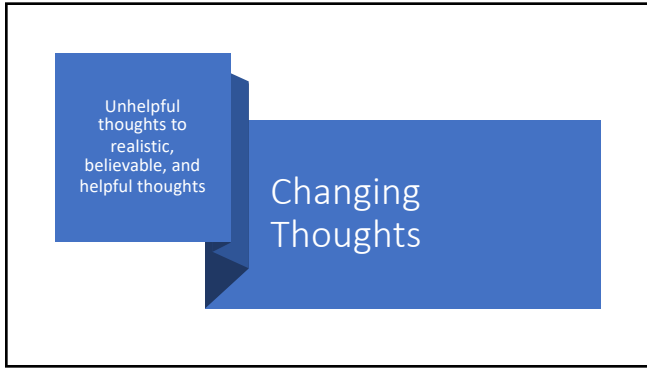
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Unhelpful thoughts to realistic, believable, and helpful thoughts

## Changing Thoughts

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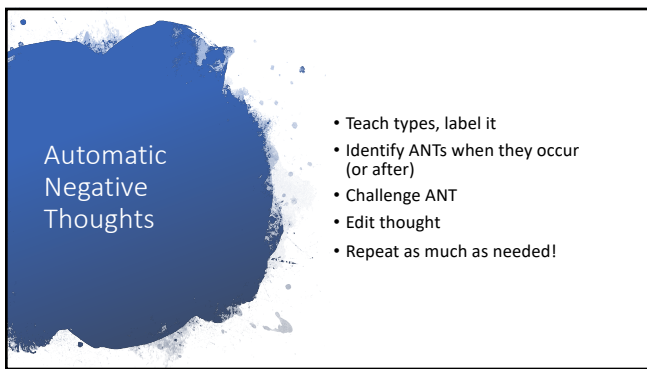
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## Automatic Negative Thoughts

- Teach types, label it
- Identify ANTs when they occur (or after)
- Challenge ANT
- Edit thought
- Repeat as much as needed!

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### Writing assignments, worksheets, reflections challenging ANTs

#### Challenging Negative Thoughts

Depressive, anxious, and fearful thoughts often have the effect of making negative thoughts. These thoughts are usually based on distorted or exaggerated perceptions of reality. Challenging negative thoughts can help you change your thinking and behavior. Challenging negative thoughts can help you change your thinking and behavior.

Answer the following questions to assess your thought:

- Is there substantial evidence for my thought?
- Is there evidence contrary to my thought?
- Am I attempting to interpret the situation without all the evidence?
- What would it be like if I were about the situation?
- Focus of the situation probably have it different?
- Will this matter a year from now about this paper from court?

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### Teachable Moments

Point out ANTs in texts, characters; point out helpful thoughts

Analyze, ask questions, wonder how thinking impacted future behaviors; question what might have happened had the thinking been different

Point out ANTs as they come up in class, edit into more realistic and helpful thoughts

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### Flipside Challenge

- When someone catches a “zooming in on the negative” ANT, they call out “flipside challenge!”
- Others are challenged to find the flipside (i.e., positive)
- \*Be sensitive to perceived criticism

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## Managing Thoughts

So they don't take over or  
lead to feeling  
overwhelmed

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## Get Out Of Your Head and On Paper

- Index cards
- As fast as your thoughts come, dictate or write worry thoughts on index cards
- Once "all" thoughts are on cards, sort them
  - A thought I can edit
  - A problem to solve
  - A worry I'll probably have for awhile and I'll just come back to it later

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## Schedule Time To Worry



- Create a "worry time"
- Any question can be asked, any worry thought can be discussed
- Outside of "worry time," do not give worries any attention
- Make worries wait - say to yourself, "ok, I'll think about that at worry time." You can write it down if you want and put it in a "worry box."
- Set a timer to review and sort worry thoughts
- Move on to something else
- If you don't need to fill up "worry time" going over worry thoughts, use it for something fun (at least for a little bit!)

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### Your Brain is Like YouTube

- Thoughts are like videos
- X out and click on a new one
- Expect pop ups, buffering, ads



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### Calming Your Body What Relaxes You?

## Changing Physiology

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### Changing Physiology

- Deep breathing
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Guided Imagery
- Muscle Relaxation
- Aromatherapy
- Acupressure
- Exercise
- Music

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### Breathing

- Diaphragmatic or "belly" breathing
- Balloon breaths
- 4-7-8 breathing

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### Movement

- Yoga
- Stretching
- Go Noodle
- Music and movement
- Moving like different animals
- Natural opportunities



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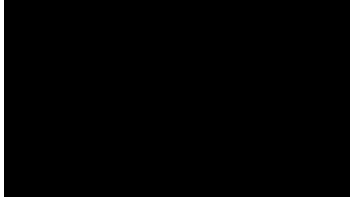
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## Meditation and Mindfulness

- Finding Your Peace
- Listening to the chime
- Listening for sounds around
- [www.gozen.com](http://www.gozen.com)




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## Guided Imagery



Utilize all senses



Create your own  
script



Many recordings  
easily found online

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## Muscle Relaxation

- "Tense" and "relaxed" are mutually exclusive
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Train your muscles to tense and relax
  - Scripts for young children
  - Scripts for teens/adults
- Autogenic Muscle Relaxation: Train your muscles to relax
  - "Letting Go"

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Music



BACKGROUND MUSIC      "MOOD MUSIC"      FOR ASSOCIATIONS      CAN USE WITH VISUALIZATIONS

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Behaviors to decrease anxiety

Changing Actions

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Grounding Techniques

- 5-4-3-2-1: 5 things you see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste
- Name 5: fast food restaurants, bands you listen to, places you've visited, books you've read, etc..
- Math games: doubles, count backward
- Recite something

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### Break Behaviors

- Take a walk
- Go get a drink of water
- Sharpen a pencil
- Take a bathroom break
- Draw, scribble, doodle, color it in
- Read
- "Calm corner"

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Remember, it's a  
break...not an escape or  
avoidance.

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### Tolerating Behaviors

- |   |   |   |   |
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|  |  |  |  |
| Chew gum  | Fidget  | Focus gaze  | Blinders  |

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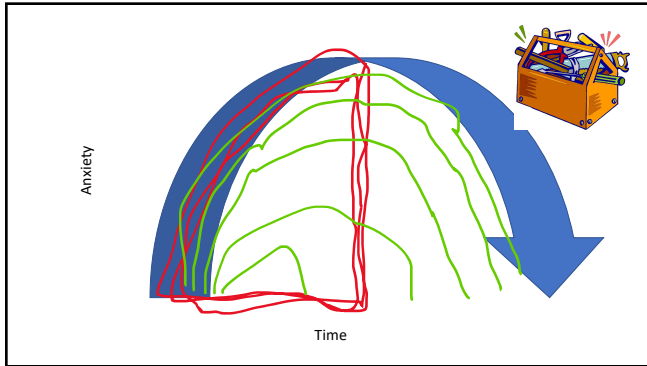
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Exposure

- Repeated
- Graduated
  - Individualized
  - Thoughtful
  - What will make this step easier to tolerate?
- Flooding\*
- Desensitization



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Remain in class, participating as expected for the duration of the period.

Enter class, sit at desk, answer predetermined questions.

Enter class, sit at desk, no expectation to participate.

Enter class, work on chromebook in back of classroom.

Enter classroom, check in with teacher. Go to office.



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## Rewards and Celebrations

- Biggest reward is relief
- Use rewards for following plan & trying tools if motivating
- Celebrate sensitively (there can be a sweet spot!)

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## School Refusal

- Thorough assessment required!
- Teach student skills
- Teach parent skills
- Create graduated exposure plan
- Consider "abort" strategies...intentionally
- Put in *as many* supports as possible
- If at home, structure like school day; consider secondary gain factors

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## Separation From Parents

- Parents should be educated and involved (i.e., who to drop off)
- Student should be educated and involved (I feel better by the bell...)
- Create plan and prepare
- Build in transition (use objects, distractions, rewards)
- Build in resets if needed (objects, controlled check-ins, break)

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### Selective Mutism

- Thorough assessment/understanding required
- Ask yes/no vs open ended questions
- Do not pressure, expect, or require speech/conversation
- Do not label as shy or quiet
- Find ways to increase comfort levels (i.e., preferred classmate, teacher, seating, access to coping tools)
- Careful desensitization or graduated exposure plan in coordination with mental health professional
- Plan for how to get needs met
- Be patient

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### OCD

- Connect with mental health provider who can begin CBT (likely will include ERP)
- Understand how OCD impacts school day/academics and vice versa
- Modify expectations if appropriate (thoughtfully and temporarily)
- Be willing to be a part of the plan

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### Panic Attacks

- Create a plan (often includes an escape route\*)
- Increase comfort (i.e., preferred seating, access to water bottle, etc)
- Arrange for a signal if needed
- Allow access to utilizing coping tools

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## Working Together

Creating plans collaboratively and thoughtfully.

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## Communication

- Listen
- Validate
- Express concern and desire to help
- Share your perspective, allowing that you may not be seeing everything
- Try to determine "end goal"
  - Break into short term and long term
- Try to determine what helps, what hurts
- Be open, creative, flexible, individual

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## Plans

- Avoid "rubber stamping"
- Think it through, does this make sense for this student in this setting at this time?
- Be open about potential obstacles, concerns
- Allow parents and student to share their obstacles, concerns
- What is our initial plan, how can we adjust and shape it to eventually reach long term goals?

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## Remember

- It can take time
- You may not see the results of your work, but you may be an important step to progress (or an undoing of a problem)
- Be aware of and manage *your* anxiety related to the student



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