

Typical Concerns, Worry, and Anxiety in Youth

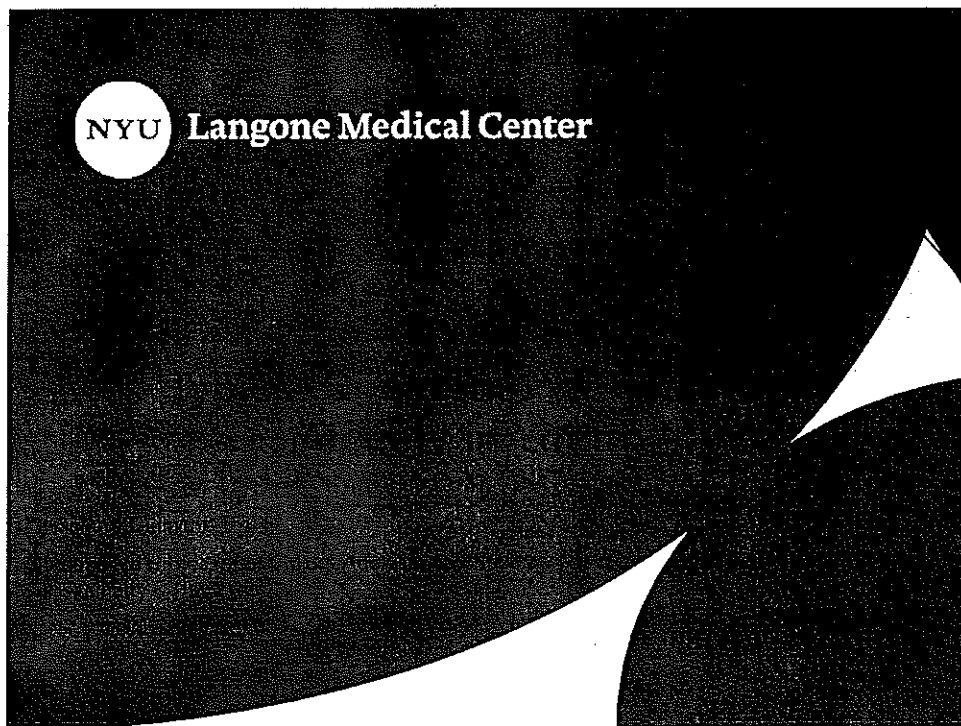
Richard Gallagher, Ph.D.

**Associate Professor of Child & Adolescent
Psychiatry & Psychiatry**

The Child Study Center

NYU

Langone Medical Center



Introduction & Definitions

- Children and teens experience concerns in their daily lives that can contribute to mild nervousness, worry, and, in some cases anxiety or fear
 - Nervousness – a mild change in your mood to one of tension
 - Worry – the thoughts that lead one to think that a negative outcome is possible
 - Anxiety – the emotional experience associated with considering a negative/harmful outcome
 - Fear – an intense reaction that is present when the negative situation is imminent or present

Stress and Youth

- Stress has had a number of definitions over the years
 - Biological model indicates that stress is a bodily reaction of heightened arousal that occurs in response to an environmental event
 - It can be healthy and useful as long as it is not chronic
 - Environmental model suggests that stress is a threat or aversive experience from the outside
 - A psychological model is one that takes into account an interpretation of events that includes a reaction filtered through the person's particular interpretation of events and the person's coping mechanisms
- This discussion will emphasize the psychological model of stress
 - We will review what children perceive as stressful
 - We will review how varied families and children cope with stress
 - We will determine the possible problematic reactions to stress that are commonly found
 - And, we will discuss means of improving the children's environment, altering the interpretations of the environment, and improving coping mechanisms

How Stress Affects Us

- The body is prepared to respond to an environmental stressor
- The brain perceives a problem; the hypothalamus reacts sends a message to the pituitary which sends a message to the adrenal glands
 - The fight or flight reaction is activated
 - Heart rate goes up, blood pressure goes up, digestive tract stops, and a person becomes more tuned into the environment
 - This is supposed to be a temporary reaction, not a sustained one
 - When it is a sustained reaction, it wears on the body and the mind
 - Kids do show disruptions in sleep, not falling into the kind of restful sleep that is useful
 - The brains of animals can show death of cells and reductions in connections

An example of the psychology of stress

- Remember Goofus and Gallant
- They both have homework to complete
 - Gallant worries that he will not complete it because he has a baseball game tonight and is stressed
 - Goofus does not worry, he has a baseball game too, but he does not care about his school work, so he is not stressed

People are stressed when:

- They perceive something in the environment which could be harmful
- They perceive that they may not be able to effectively respond to the problem
- They have to engage in actions to change the situation and they are not sure if the actions will work

Sources of Stress for Young and Middle Children

- Family
 - The family is threatened or the child is threatened in some way
- Social
 - The child's social situation is threatened
- School
 - The child's effectiveness is threatened
- Safety
 - The child's safety is threatened

Sources of Stress for Young and Middle Children

- Family
 - Safety
 - Economics
 - Maintenance – is the family going to remain a unit
 - Parents fighting
 - Parents having conflict with children
 - Children having conflict with each other

Sources of Stress for Young and Middle Children

- Social
 - Bullying
 - Teasing
 - Rejection
 - An argument
- School
 - High stakes testing
 - Teacher criticism in public
 - Completing work on time
 - Coordinating schedules

Perceived Stressors

- Doing well in school – 45%
- Family's economic status – 28%
- Getting along with friends – 22%
- Appearance – 17%
- A good college – 5%
- Variations –
 - 95% of girls report that they are stressed
 - 50% of boys report that they are stressed
 - Survey of 8 -12 years olds from 2009

Actions That Contribute to Stress

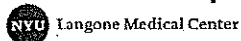
- Parents
 - Arguing between parents
 - Arguments between parents and kids
 - Changes in financial status or employment
 - Holding unreasonably high expectations
- Teachers
 - Unreasonably high expectations
 - Pushing students too hard
 - Favoring students over one another
 - Singling out students in front of others
 - Not taking the time to provide assistance

Situations That Increase Stress

- High powered academic demands before many students are ready
 - IB students reported that they “often or very often” found their lives overloading compared to students in non-IB programs who reported this “often”
- Coping style
 - Positive appraisal
 - Were both helpful and positively related to level of life satisfaction
 - Family communication
 - Were both helpful and positively related to level of life satisfaction
 - Negative avoidance
 - Anger
 - Were both negatively related to level of life satisfaction

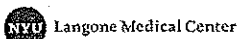
The Impact of Stress

- Effective coping that keeps the challenges in perspective
- Increasing effort in the area of concern
- School burnout
 - Exhaustion
 - Cynicism and detachment or disengagement
 - Feelings of inadequacy
- More serious mental health problems
- Serious physical symptoms



Mental Health Concerns

- Positive appraisal and family communication are associated with low levels of emotional disorders and behavior problems
- Negative avoidance and anger are associated with more emotional disorders and behavior problems
 - Depression, anxiety, and substance use are the most distressing
 - Excessive socialization, junk leisure time, and excessive media use are the less distressing, but just as distracting



Specific Disorders & Epidemiology

- Anxiety Disorders
 - Separation Anxiety Disorder – 2 to 4%
 - Generalized Anxiety Disorder – 3 to 6%
 - Specific Phobias – 3 to 4%
 - Social Phobia – 1 to 5%
 - Panic Disorder – 1 to 2%
 - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder – 2 to 3%

The Nature of the Disorders

- Names reflect the area of concern
 - Separation Anxiety Disorder – concerns about being separated from a significant person
 - Generalized Anxiety Disorder – concerns about negative events occurring in many situations
 - Specific Phobias – concerns about specific objects or situations
 - Social Phobia – concerns about social interactions
 - Panic Disorder – a strong physical reaction followed by worries about worry and what is happening to the body
 - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder – persistent repetitive ideas that can lead to actions that protect against bad outcomes

Overall Rates of Disorder

- Probably 20 to 25% of children and adolescents have been impacted by a behavioral or emotional or learning disorder at some point before 18
- Treatment for these conditions –
 - 20% obtain evaluations
 - The modal number of contacts is 1

Contributing Factors

- Biology
 - Heritability estimates of 30 to 45% in extended family members
- Childrearing Environment
 - Parenting practices and experiences
- Present Circumstances
 - Level of stress and support

Behavioral Inhibition

- A stable temperamental characteristic
- Manifested by a withdrawal from or avoidance of novelty & challenge
- Experience high heart rate, less variable heart rate, and acceleration of heart rate
- Present in 15 to 20% of infants
- 18 to 22% had anxiety disorders
 - Biederman et al. (1995)

Characteristics of Behavioral Inhibition

- Parents had:
 - higher rate of social phobia
 - history of childhood anxiety disorders (17 vs. 4%)
 - Continuing anxiety disorder
- Siblings had:
 - more phobias
- Stable behavioral inhibition
 - present in 35% of children
 - More likely if parents have anxiety disorder

Parenting Actions

- There are practices and actions that contribute to an increased experience of anxiety in children
 - Overprotection
 - Keeping children from negative experiences
 - This is a behavioral trend that leaves a child vulnerable
 - An anxious attentional bias
 - Attending to and noting potentially harmful elements in the environment
 - The use of intrusive guidance
 - Providing detailed guidance as children complete acts
 - Preventing them from learning on their own
 - Hindering a sense of competence

Current Circumstances

- A high level of demands that cannot be met successfully
- Repeated exposure to circumstances that challenge the system
- Limited support from others
- Limited pleasurable and mastery experiences

Means of Reducing Anxiety

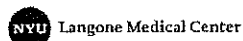
- Set a schedule that allows “down” time
- Engage in relaxation methods
 - Body training
 - Mental training
- Establish a calming mindset
 - Help differentiate between critical and non-critical situations
- Provide appropriate exposures with support
- Refrain from providing extensive and intrusive guidance

Systematic Work with Anxiety Disorders

- The Coping Cat Protocol
 - Instruction/Orientation
 - Relaxation Training
 - Cognitive Training and Restructuring
 - Exposure with Support and Rewards
 - **F. E. A. R.**
 - Developed by Phil Kendall, Ph.D. - described in the book: Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Anxious Children: Therapist Manual, 3rd Edition, Workbook Publishing - <http://www.workbookpublishing.com/>

Ways to Manage Life and Stress

- Get a good routine
 - Predictable schedules help
 - Get good rest
 - Get involved in exercise
 - Make sure everything is not seriously competitive
 - Make sure kids have a good support network
- Help kids have a good perspective
- Don't ignore problems
- Develop a method to address problems



Resources

- <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2010/12/12/stress-and-the-high-school-student>
- www.nyulangone.org/csc
- NYU Child Study Center
 - 212-263-6622
 - Manhattan
 - 516-358-1808
 - Lake Success
 - 201-465-8111
 - Hackensack

