



# Linden Oaks

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

A part of Edward-Elmhurst Healthcare



# School Anxiety & Refusal

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# Objectives

- Defining anxiety
- School refusal versus school truancy
- Brief overview of the DBT modules:
  - ✓ Mindfulness
  - ✓ Emotion Regulation
  - ✓ Distress Tolerance
  - ✓ Interpersonal Effectiveness
- Building a School Action Plan

# Definition of Anxiety

- “A feeling of worry, nervousness or unease typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome.” (Merriam-Webster's)
- Anxiety is a common experience.
- It is one of the most basic of human emotions.
- In general, anxiety serves to motivate and protect an individual from harm or unpleasant consequences.

# Common Anxiety Symptoms

- Heart palpitations
- Chest tightness
- Numbness/tingling
- Fidgeting
- Short of breath/heavy breathing
- Dizziness
- Blurred/distorted vision
- Nausea
- Sweating
- Stomach aches
- Muscle tension
- Nail biting
- Lump in throat
- Tapping foot/fingernails
- Shaking
- Butterflies stomach
- Having a lump in your throat
- Headaches/migraines
- Difficulties concentrating

# Signs of Anxiety

- Intense physical sensations, like stomach aches or headaches
- Staying home or isolating in bedroom
- Leaving class, frequent trips to guidance office/nurse or asking to stay home from school
- Unwilling to engage in hobbies or extracurricular activities
- Struggles with concentration/focus/retrieving information
- Seeking re-assurance from support
- Repetitive behaviors
- Sleeping difficulties
- Lack of appetite or overeating
- Constant fidgeting

# Sources of Anxiety in Schools

- A situation in which physical safety is at risk
- A situation in which self-worth is threatened
- Concern about physical appearance
- A new situation
- Judgment or evaluation by others
- Frustrating subject matter
- Excessive classroom demands
- Tests
- Concern about the future
- E-Learning - Camera anxiety, difficulties learning the concepts virtually, social anxiety

# When Anxiety Becomes a Problem

- Disrupts daily activities and quality of life
- Moves you away from your values:
  - ✓ Friendships
  - ✓ Family relationships
  - ✓ Role-modeling
  - ✓ Education
  - ✓ Religion/spirituality
  - ✓ Self-care
  - ✓ Hobbies/interests
  - ✓ Community life
  - ✓ Romantic relationships
  - ✓ Career

# School Refusal versus School Truancy (Freemont, 2003)

<b>School Refusal (Anxiety)</b>	<b>School Truancy</b>
Severe emotional distress about attending school	Lack of excessive anxiety or fear about attending school
Parents are aware of absence, child tries to persuade parents to allow child to stay home	Absence is concealed from parents
Absence of antisocial behaviors	Frequent antisocial behavior, such as lying, breaking rules or stealing
Child usually wants to stay home, as they consider it safe and secure	Child prefers to be away from home
Child expresses willingness to do schoolwork, however anxiety may present itself while completing it	Lack of interest in schoolwork and unwillingness to conform to academic expectations

# 4 Types of School Refusal (Kearney and Silverman, 1993)

- To avoid school related stimuli that provoke negative affectivity (anxiety, depression or somatic complaints)
- To escape aversive social and/or evaluative situations (social phobia or performance anxiety)
- For positive reinforcement with intangible rewards, such as attention or sympathy (separation anxiety disorder)
- For tangible rewards outside of school (oppositional defiance disorder, conduct disorder or substance abuse)

# Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)

- Developed by Marsha M. Linehan, Ph.D. from the University of Washington, Seattle
- A multi-modal psychosocial treatment approach
- DBT was created to be an organized, systematic approach to create structure and to enhance decision making and problem solving
- General goal: to learn and refine skills in changing behavioral, emotional, and thinking patterns associated with problems in living, that is, those causing misery and distress

# 4 Modules of DBT

- Mindfulness
- Emotion Regulation
- Distress Tolerance
- Interpersonal Effectiveness

# Mindfulness

- Mindfulness means paying attention, in a particular way, on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally. - Jon Kabat-Zinn
- Goals of mindfulness:
  - ✓ Reduce suffering and increase happiness
  - ✓ Observe or notice thoughts
  - ✓ Experience reality as it is
  - ✓ Reduce past and/or future thinking
  - ✓ Get engaged in the present moment
  - ✓ Refocus mind when distracted

# Mindfulness Exercises

- 4 square breathing
- Notice five things
- Drop anchor

# Breathing Exercises

- 4 Square breathing
  - ✓ Breathe in for 4 seconds
  - ✓ Hold for 4 seconds
  - ✓ Breathe out for 4 seconds
  - ✓ Hold for 4 seconds
  - ✓ Repeat 4 times

# Notice 5 Things by Russ Harris

- Observe 5 things you can SEE and silently describe them to yourself in great detail.
  - Observe 5 things you can HEAR and silently describe them to yourself in great detail.
  - Observe 5 things that you can FEEL and silently describe them to yourself in great detail.
- ❖ Note: describe as if you are telling a person who has never seen, heard or touched the objects before.

# Drop Anchor by Russ Harris

- Plant your feet into the floor and push them down
- Notice the floor beneath you, supporting you
- Increase your awareness of the muscle tension in your legs as you push your feet down
- Notice your entire body and the feeling of gravity flowing down through your head to your spine to your legs and into your feet
- Be willing to complete this exercise for at least 1 minute

# Emotion Regulation

- Emotion regulation skills work towards keeping individuals at lower emotional levels.
- Goals of Emotion Regulation:
  - ✓ Understand emotions you experience and decrease the frequency of unwanted emotions
  - ✓ Decrease emotional suffering
  - ✓ Reduce emotional vulnerability

# Emotion Regulation Skills

- Observe and Describe Emotion
  - ✓ Anxiety Ladder
- STRONG:
  - ✓ Sleep hygiene
  - ✓ Treat physical illness
  - ✓ Once a day
  - ✓ Nutrition
  - ✓ Get Exercise

# Observe and Describe Emotions: Ladders

- Patients identify different levels of their emotion by creating a ladder.
- The ladder is a scale of physical sensations/urges/impulses/thoughts that patients report they experience when they have the specific emotion.
- The scale is from 1 to 10 with 10 being the worst amount of the emotion that patients have ever experienced.
- Patients identify a crisis zone. The typical crisis zone is between 7 and 10, however it does vary.

# Ladder Instructions

- Step 1: Identify the physical sensations, urges and impulses that are experienced
- Step 2: Put the experiences in order on the scale of 1-10
- Step 3: Identify crisis zone

# Anxiety Ladder

COMMON PHYSICAL SENSATIONS	COMMON URGES AND IMPULSES
<p>                     Crying                      Loss of appetite                      Dizziness                      Numbness/tingling                      Chest tightness/discomfort                      Hot/cold flashes                      Flush skin/blushing                      Sleep problems                      Loss of breath/heavy breathing                      Unreality/detached from self                      Muscle tension                      Racing thoughts                      Butterflies in stomach/nausea                      Nail biting/lip biting                      Fast heartbeat                      Sweating                      Having a lump in your throat                      Blurred or distorted vision                      Difficulty concentrating                      Headaches/migraine                      Fidgeting/tapping foot/shaking leg                      Playing with hair/clothes/fingers                      Panic attack                 </p>	<p>                     Suicidal thoughts                      Suicidal plans                      Suicidal actions                      Suicide attempt                      Self-harm urges                      Self-harm behaviors                      Picking urges                      Picking behaviors                      Substance use urges                      Substance use behaviors                      Restrict/binge food intake urges                      Restrict/binge food intake behaviors                      Physical aggressive urges                      Physical aggressive actions                      Verbal aggressive urges                      Verbal aggressive actions                      Impulsive behaviors urges                      Impulsive behaviors actions                      Isolation                      Run away/hide                      Nap/sleep                      Opting out                 </p>

# Anxiety Ladder

- |    |                                      |
|----|--------------------------------------|
| 10 | Self harm behaviors                  |
| 9  | Panic attack                         |
| 8  | Self harm urges                      |
| 7  | Stomach aches / nausea               |
| 6  | Chest tightness / heavy breathing    |
| 5  | Heart racing                         |
| 4  | Muscle tension in neck and shoulders |
| 3  | Racing thoughts                      |
| 2  | Playing with clothes and hair        |
| 1  | Leg or foot tapping                  |

# STRONG: Sleep Hygiene

- Goal of 8-10 hours of sleep per day
- No napping
- No screens one hour before bed
- No exercise three hours before bed
- Limit caffeine and sugar after lunch
- Bedtime routine
- Bed = sleep only
- Get up after 20-30 minutes of no sleeping and do a non-stimulating activity

# STRONG: Treat Physical Illness

- Take prescriptions medicine as directed
- Be aware of side effects
- Do not take other people's medicine
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Rest
- Go to doctor after 3-5 days of illness with no relief

# STRONG: Resist Mood-Altering Substances

- Limit: caffeine, sugar, pop, candy, desserts, coffee, over the counter medications
- None: alcohol, energy drinks, illegal drugs, nicotine, vape

# STRONG: Once a Day

- Engage in activities that are enjoyable and meaningful on a daily basis
- Move towards values
- Balance work and play
- Accumulate positive experiences

# STRONG: Nutrition

- Follow food pyramid or “my plate” guidelines
- 3 full meals or 5 small meals per day
- Protein for breakfast to increase focus and concentration
- Water intake: half your body weight in ounces

# STRONG: Get Exercise

- 60 minutes of activity per day
- Engage in fun activities
- Stay hydrated
- Exercise releases endorphins: increase mood and decrease stress

# Distress Tolerance

- Distress tolerance emphasizes learning to bear pain skillfully to manage crisis situations.
- Goals of Distress Tolerance
  - ✓ moving body towards values while carrying any discomforts lightly
  - ✓ Survive emotional situations
  - ✓ Become free of having to satisfy the demands of any unhealthy urges
  - ✓ Let go of realities you can not control

# Distress Tolerance Skills

- Crisis kit
  - Object related skills
  - Index card of non-object related skills

# Crisis Kit: Objects Related Skills

- Crosswords/word searches/Sudoku/logic puzzles/Extreme dot-2-dots/Hidden pictures
- Pictures of family/friends/pets/nature
- Favorite smelling lotion/perfume/cologne
- Chap stick/lip gloss
- Gum/mints/candy
- Fidget toy (stone/squishy toy/cloth/coins)
- Ear buds/playlist of high energy songs/soothing songs
- Deck of playing cards
- Silly putty/Play-doh/thinking putty
- Pen/paper/journal
- Coloring pages/markers/crayons
- Cinnamon stick/tea bags/wax melts
- Book/magazine/jokes/poetry
- Shell for ocean sound plus fidget
- Inspirational quotes/lyrics/poems
- Travel sound machine
- Water bottle

# Crisis Kit: Index Card of Non-object Related Skills

- 4 square breathing, belly breathing
- Observe thoughts
- Be gentle with others
- ABC game
- 20 questions, I Spy, tic tac toe
- DBT phrases: ride the wave, get out of your future, move towards values
- Count backwards by 7's from 1,000
- Exercise: jumping jacks, high knees, push-ups
- Imagine calming scenes, nature, moving towards values
- You Tube videos of animals or babies, watch clips of movies or television shows
- Notice 5 things with five senses
- Cook, bake, eat mindfully

# Interpersonal Effectiveness

- Interpersonal Effectiveness works to improve communication with others.
- Goals of Interpersonal Effectiveness:
  - ✓ Be skillful in getting what you want from others, as well as getting your needs met
  - ✓ Maintain, strengthen, repair or create relationships
  - ✓ End unhealthy relationships
  - ✓ Find balance in relationships
  - ✓ Balance acceptance and change in relationships

# Maintaining Relationships versus Keeping Self Respect

## Relationship Effectiveness:

- **Gentle:** be courteous and polite; no attacks, manipulation, threats, or judging
- **Interested:** listen to other person's point of view, opinion, reasons for saying no, or requests; do not interrupt or talk over the person
- **Validate:** acknowledge the other person's feelings, wants, difficulties, or opinions
- **Easy Manner:** use humor, smile, ease the person along, be light-hearted

## Self-Respect Effectiveness:

- **Fair:** be fair to yourself and others while problem solving; do not "play dirty"
- **Apologies:** do not apologize for having an opinion, disagreeing, making a request, or being alive; do apologize if you have sincerely inadvertently hurt someone's feelings
- **Stick to Values:** stay on your own value path. Plus, do not sell out your values or integrity to meet your objective
- **Truthful:** do not exaggerate, lie about your intentions, or pretend to be helpless

# School Action Plan

- The goal is for patients to practice skills in the classroom to manage their anxiety, however they may need to take a Vacation.
- DBT skill of Vacation: break to guidance office
  - ✓ If patients anxiety reach and/or stay in the crisis zone and they have practiced at least 5 crisis skills in class, it is recommended for them to be able to take a break to the guidance office to practice skills with school staff.
  - ✓ During this break, it would be helpful for school staff to not discuss the cause of the anxiety and/or triggers in detail, as asking these types of questions may result with more rumination/obsessive thinking and increase the anxiety.
  - ✓ The break is intended to practice skills to decrease anxiety in order to return to class. Patients should only be taking a break when they are in their crisis zone.

# School Action Plan (Cont.)

- Returning to class:
  - ✓ As soon as their anxiety number have lowered and they are out of their crisis zone they should go back to class.
  - ✓ The goal is for the break to last no more than twenty minutes. Patients may need to continue to practice skills once they return to the classroom as their anxiety may be in the moderate to low range.
  - ✓ Again, the goal of the break is to get them out of the crisis zone, not to have the anxiety eliminated altogether.
  - ✓ They may frequently visit the guidance office in the beginning of implementing the action plan, as their tolerance to distress may have decreased.

# Contact Information

- Linden Oaks Behavioral Health
  - ✓ Resource & Referral Center: 630-305-5027
  - ✓ Marketing Department: 630-646-5150