

Anxiety in Middle School Students

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AGENDA:

- What is Anxiety?
- What Maintains Anxiety?
- Helping Kids Manage Anxiety
- Resources

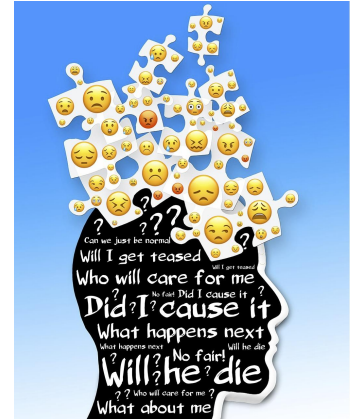
In Middle School
We See Three
Different Kinds:



"THE GOOD,
THE BAD ^{AND}
THE UGLY"

Anxiety

- Internal sense of worry, dread or fear
- May or may not have a clear cause
- Can be a typical response



Forms of Anxiety:

- General anxiety/worries
- Phobias
- Panic
- Obsessions
- Compulsions
- Social Anxiety
- Trauma reactions

Common Symptoms

In children it may not look like what we are accustomed to when we think of traditional expressions of anxiety:

- Expressed fears and worries
- Crying
- Irritability and oppositional behavior
- Silly/goofy behavior or dysregulation
- Antsy/fidgety and difficulty concentrating
- Self-doubt and fearful/clingy behavior
- Sleep disturbance
- Repetitive behaviors, thoughts or questions
- Panic

THE ANXIOUS BRAIN

PREFRONTAL CORTEX (PFC)

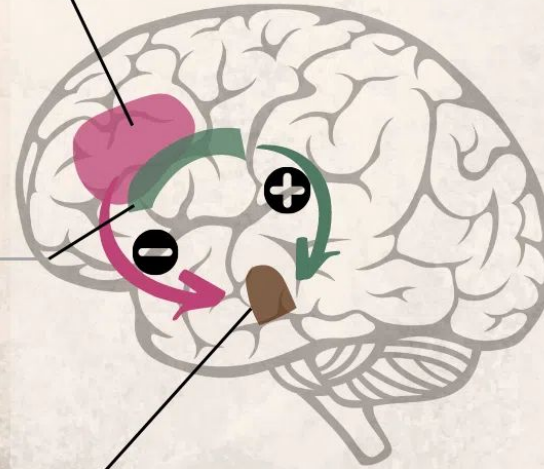
Involved in logical responses and reasoning. Anxiety can shut down the PFC, hampering logical thinking and rationalizing.

ANTERIOR CINGULATE CORTEX (ACC)

Amplifies fear signals from the amygdala. In anxiety disorder, malfunctioning ACC hyperactivates the amygdala

AMYGDALA

Responsible for responses to fearful stimuli. In persistent anxiety, the amygdala increases in size, boosting responses to scary stimuli.



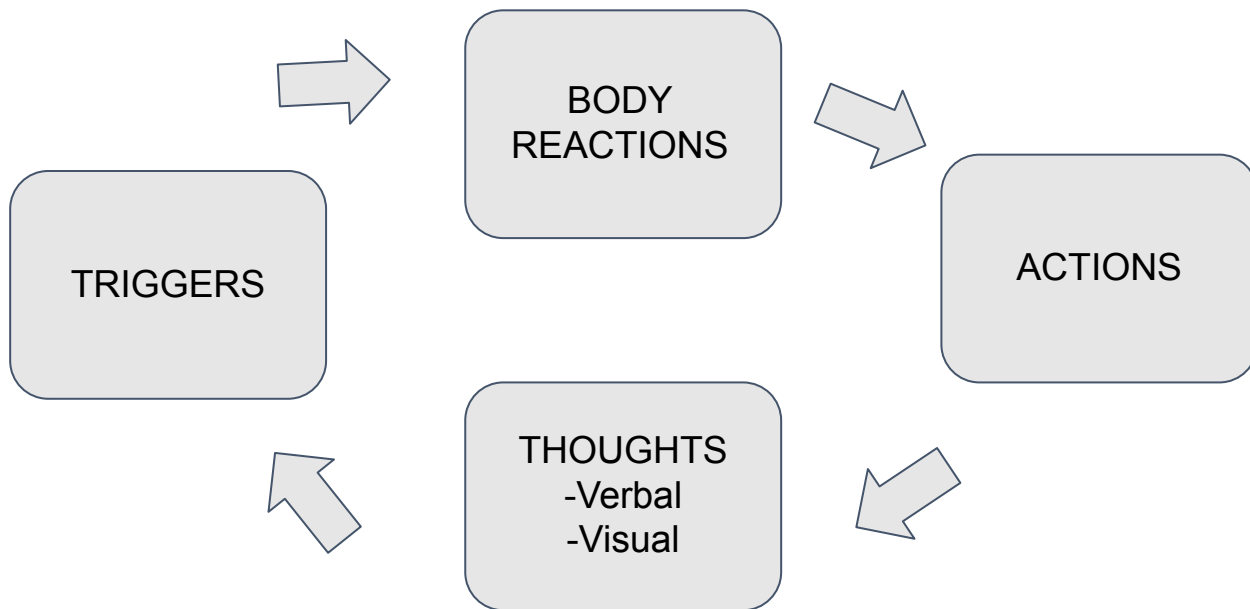
+ Enhances Anxiety

- Dampens Anxiety

Common Physical Reactions

- Breathing fast
- Butterflies in stomach
- Needing to go to bathroom
- Wobbly knees
- Tense Muscles
- Crying
- Shakiness
- Stomachache
- Headache

What Happens When Kids are Anxious?



What Maintains Anxiety?

- Allowing or encouraging avoidance
- Lack of coping skills
- Excessive reassuring
- “Taking over”
 - Prevents child from developing coping skills
- Thinking errors

Thinking Errors



Ignoring the Good. You pay more attention to bad things, and ignore when something good happens.

examples:

- You get one answer wrong on a long test, and all you can think about is the mistake.
- You score two goals in your soccer game, but all you can think about is the shot you missed.



Blowing Things Up. Making a really big deal out of something small, or making something a little bit bad seem like the worst thing ever.

examples:

- You get a stain on your new shoes and you think they're ruined and can't be worn anymore.
- "I'm not allowed to see my friends on Friday. My life is horrible!"



Fortune Telling. Thinking you know what will happen in the future, and that it will be bad.

examples:

- "I know if I ask her to the dance she's going to say no."
- "I bet no one will come to my birthday party."

Thinking Errors



Mind Reading. Believing you know what someone else is thinking, or why they are doing something, without having enough information.

examples:

- "People are looking at me. They probably think my shirt is ugly."
- "Emma didn't invite me to her party. I bet she thinks I'm weird."



Negative Labeling. Having a negative belief about yourself and thinking it applies to everything you do.

examples:

- "I'm a loser so my artwork stinks."
- "I'm so stupid. Everything I say is dumb."



Setting the Bar Too High. Thinking that you must be perfect in everything you do, otherwise you're no good.

examples:

- "If I don't get an A on every test, I'm not smart."
- "I have to win every tennis match I play, otherwise I'm worthless."

Thinking Errors



Self-blaming. Blaming yourself for anything that goes wrong around you, even if you had nothing to do with it.

examples:

- When your basketball team loses a game, you think it's entirely your fault.
- "Alicia is sad today. I probably did something to upset her."



Feelings as Facts. Believing that if you feel something, it must be true.

examples:

- "I feel ugly, so I must be ugly."
- "I feel like I'm a bad friend, so I must be a bad friend."



"Should" Statements. Believing things have to be a certain way.

examples:

- "People should always be nice to me."

- Sleep
- Food
- Exercise/movement



- Building on strengths and interests
- Avoiding overbooking of activities

- Connecting with family, friends, animals, nature, teachers, and other staff members

- Leaving time to “just be a kid”

CALM Strategy for Parents

- **C**atch your breath:
 - Pause to think or withdraw briefly to become calm and plan a response
- **A**ccept negative feelings:
 - Wait patiently and respond with “I see” “Hmm, ok”
- **L**abel emotions:
 - “You seem really nervous”, “You seem angry”,
- **M**odel coping skills:
 - Show your child how to remain calm and collected

Coping Skills:

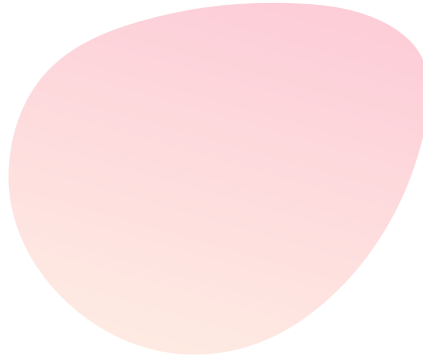
- Ability to calm down physically
- Ability to talk through a situation
- Problem solve and create a Plan B
- Remind child of previous successes and that this feeling will pass

Body Relaxation Strategies



- Awareness of physical signs of anxiety
- Deep breathing
- Muscle relaxation
- Visualization

Using Parent Power



- Model brave/encouraging, non-anxious behavior
- Be gentle, yet encouraging
- Pay attention to non-anxious behavior

Collaboration



- Connect with Case Manager and/or Counseling Social Worker
- Updates from/to teacher team
- If medication is involved, discuss with Nurse

Student Support

- Case Managers/Social Workers
- Teachers
- Nurse
- Administrators
- Social Work Interns (**SOMS School Social Work Program**)
- Counselors & Interns (**MMS School Counseling Program**)

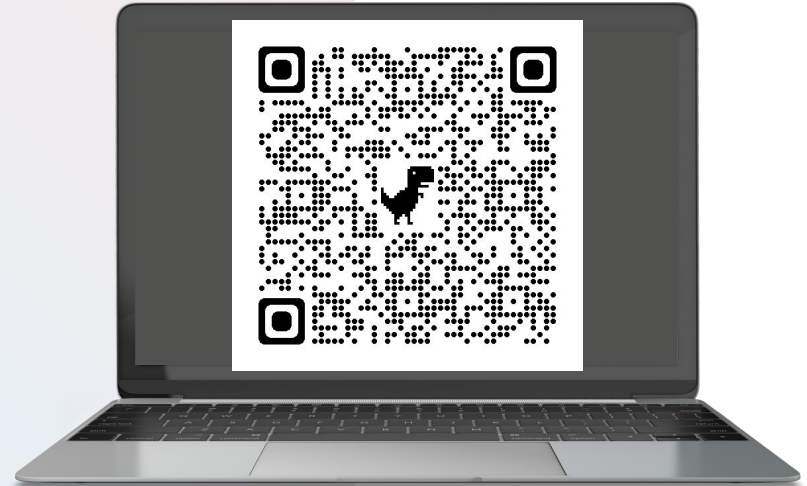
When To Seek Professional Help

- Difficulties are severe
- Tried strategies but they don't seem to be working
- Parent-child relationship factors
- Parents' own anxiety

SOMS Social Work Intern Program

- Counseling services
- Individual/group with social work intern
- Areas of Focus:
 - Dealing with anxiety
 - Managing feelings
 - Confidence
 - Friendship problems
 - Covid 19 Transitions
 - Peer pressure and bullying
 - Behavioral concerns
 - Loss or family changes
 - Referrals

SCAN QR CODE FOR WEBSITE INFO:



MMS Mental Health Supports

Maplewood Middle School has a robust set of programs and services for mental health support.

If you are concerned about your MMS student, please don't hesitate to reach out for support:

- School Counselors
- Grade-Level Administrators
- Team Leaders
- CST Case Manager (for students with an IEP)
- Louis Brown (for students with a 504 Plan)
- Principal Dana Gronau (dgronau@somds.k12.nj.us)

Find contact info in the [MMS 2022-2023 Handbook & Directory](#)

Resources:

- Online:

- [Child Mind Institute - Anxiety Disorders Center](#)
- [Child Mind Institute - Quick Guide to Anxiety in Children](#)
- [Child Mind Institute - What to Do \(and Not Do\) When Children Are Anxious](#)
- [Child Mind Institute - Thinking Errors](#)

- Books:

- Rapee, R.M., Spence, S.H., Cobham, V., & Wignall, A. (2008) [Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents, Second Edition.](#)
- Huebner, Dawn (2008) [What to Do When You Worry Too Much.](#)



Thank You!