



November 2010

TEEN ANXIETY **Strategies for Change through Mindfulness, Reflection and Relaxation**

Parenting in the year 2010 continues to be an extraordinarily demanding job. The challenges of raising teens today can feel like a roller coaster ride with incredible highs and frightening lows. As we stand by our children, we see a world filled with ever-increasing academic demands, economic uncertainty, stress and anxiety. Our children need to have strong values, good judgment and personal resiliency to thrive and flourish.

The Parent Corner is a professional publication with the goal of providing Jericho parents with practical tools and effective strategies that can serve to strengthen family ties and protect our children from harm and unnecessary stress.

| TOOLBOX SKILLS |
|----------------------------------|
| ★ Mindfulness |
| ★ Managing Test Anxiety |
| ★ Relaxation Skills |
| ★ Positive Affirmations |
| ★ Cost Benefit Stress Analysis |
| ★ Minimizing Overgeneralizations |
| ★ Serenity , Courage and Wisdom |

Many of the toolbox skills that will be presented in this year's *Parent Corner Newsletters* are based on the work of Lisa M. Schab, LCSW (*Anxiety Workbook for Teens*), and Dr. Ronald M. Rapee, Ph.D. (*Helping Your Anxious Child*).

The structure of each newsletter will provide you with information about teen anxiety and practical strategies to help your child manage their anxiety more effectively.

Let's begin with some common understandings. Almost everyone experiences anxiety in their lives. A small dose of anxiety can actually be good—provided that it motivates us to achieve or face an issue that may need our attention. However, left unchecked, teen anxiety can lead to future psychosocial complications and potential problems.

In fact, it is estimated that 8-10% of all children and teens in the United States have an anxiety disorder. It is the most common of all the mental disorders. Unfortunately, it also may accompany alcohol and/or drug abuse as some teens turn to substances to medicate themselves and mask their underlying feelings of anxiety.

As we examine the topic of teen anxiety, it is helpful to think about this issue on a continuum with benchmarks of mild, moderate and severe. The DSM IV (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*) is published by the [American Psychiatric Association](#) and lists the following Anxiety Disorders.



1. **Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD):** teenagers with OCD have constant thoughts that compel them to do things. Teens feel like they must control their lives by constantly doing the same rituals (checking things, touching things or counting things are examples).
2. **Social phobia (or social anxiety disorder):** being uncomfortable to the point of being incredibly overwhelmed and self-conscious in social settings can mean a teen has a social phobia. Some symptoms include sweating profusely, difficulty speaking and blushing.
3. **Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):** this follows a traumatic event or threatened traumatic event. This is often associated with war, but many things can provoke PTSD. Teenagers with PTSD can startle easily, feel emotionally empty or even be violent.
4. **Panic disorder:** this is characterized by a sense of impending doom and physically feeling chilled, nauseous and/or sweaty. Panic attacks usually last ten minutes and can even happen when a teen is asleep.
5. **Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD):** worrying constantly and unable to relax describes GAD. If a teen finds his/herself worrying like this for over six months, the teen probably has a generalized anxiety disorder.
6. **Specific phobias:** specifically and irrationally fearing something to the point that it retards emotional growth characterizes the specific phobias. A few examples include heights, tunnels, dogs, spiders and blood. Sometimes these specific phobias can induce panic attacks.

(Referenced from <http://www.teenhelp.com/teen-stress/anxiety.html>.)

MEASURING TEEN ANXIETY



As we care for our children and try to help them manage the stress and anxiety of adolescence, it is important to assess the degree to which their anxiety is influencing their lives. If stress and anxiety are impacting one's life functioning, professional mental health services should be considered. If anxiety is not severe, strategies listed in this publication can be experimented with to see if they are effective in helping your child stress less.

There are four factors that contribute to the way that we process anxiety. They include:

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|-----------------|--------------------|
| Genetics | Life Events |
| Brain Chemistry | Personality |

As genetics, brain chemistry and life events are difficult to control, it seems prudent to address the topic of specific personality strategies that may be helpful in “reframing” or “reducing” your teen’s feelings of stress and anxiety. For this reason, most of the activities and strategies that will be presented in this newsletter will focus on helping you to understand that the way one approaches and responds to life’s events, can have a direct impact on lowering one’s anxiety level.

Below is a communication strategy that you might like to try.



Strategy # 1: The Endorphin Communication Activity

Physical activity helps reduce and prevent the effects of stress. This is because physical activity helps increase the production of endorphins, which are the brains feel-good neurotransmitters. This feeling is sometimes referred to as a "runner’s high," but other physically demanding activities such as a game of tennis or an aerobics workout can produce this same feeling.

Sometime this week, invite your child to join you in a scheduled 30-minute stress buster or endorphin boosting activity. While engaged, ask them to participate in a snapshot communication activity. Share together one really good thing that happened in your own individual lives this week (e.g. made a new friend, accomplished a goal, etc.) and one thing that you wished had not happened (e.g. something disappointing, etc).

Good luck!

The next issue of *The Parent Corner* will present

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Mindfulness and Teen Anxiety