

From the counsellor's office...

ANXIETY is the buzz word lately. Everyone is talking about it, but what does it really look like? Sometimes it might be easy to spot, but sometimes it is not so simple. Some personality traits of a potentially anxious person might be:

- Responsible
- Perfectionist
- High standards
- Difficulty relaxing
- Likes to please
- Prefers structure
- Worries
- Avoids conflict
- Low assertiveness

Keep in mind that not all people with anxiety will have all of these traits. In some cases the anxiety speaks out with some negative behaviour traits; the outside disorder may mask the anxiety. Anxiety affects our ability to pay attention. However, sometimes it goes underground as the person internalizes the stress and behavior and changes in behaviours may be seen. Depression and anxiety go together as worries are typically negative and they affect sleep. A defense mechanism often used is avoidance; in particular, perfectionistic people love to procrastinate as they have high expectations for themselves to do things perfect the first time.

3 INGREDIENTS IN ANXIETY

- Biological sensitivity
- Personality traits
- Stress overload

Yes! Children feel stress also! It could be school, family, media and our general society with so much stimuli, TV, internet, etc. And an anxious child is often a very sensitive child who hears everything, and feels the smallest tag or seam in their clothing.

Dealing with stress:

- SLEEP: Ensure that your child gets enough sleep. Adolescents need 9 hrs/day
- DIET: Eat a healthy diet with 4-5 small meals/ day. Small meals, often. Share a meal as a family as often as possible.
- SCREENS: Manage media- all screens should be limited in particular close to bedtime (1 hour before) as the screen emits a light that affects our brain telling us it is daytime, and not night or sleeping time.
- EXERCISE. Outside where possible
- BREATHE: Enjoy relaxing as a family. Too much of a good thing, is still too much.

How can we support our anxious children?

Well, recognize that what is really going on is a desire to do well, and that is a good thing. While it may not appear so on the outside they likely are very motivated and have the capacity to be thoughtful and cooperative. So we as parents need to praise the effort and not the end product. Look for ways to build in flexibility as a positive trait and reward times when plans do change and it does work out. Create as much structure as you can so that children know what to expect. Structure, like set routines, definite bedtimes, rules and consistent consequences and rewards. Demonstrate empathy for them when they are so stressed, regardless of how 'unimportant' it may seem to you. When worried children react strongly remember they are not necessarily coming from a rational mind. Anxiety is often irrational fears, and the first step is to be calm.

OTHER WAYS TO HELP

- Alternate medicine approaches like herbal therapy and homeopathy
- Breathing practices
- Relaxation strategies like meditation

And, research says that the habit of eating dinner together as a family and having a set bedtime reduces anxiety and reduces the vulnerability of our children to negative peer influence. Sometimes our anxious kids actually get some anxiety from us!! And sometimes the anxiety is the symptom and not the problem. What is happening at home may influence an anxious child more than you realize. Be aware of your own anxieties where you can and examine how they may influence your parenting.