

Understanding Anxiety during COVID-19:

A parent primer

SPRPCE

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Stress and Anxiety

- The body naturally responds to the unknown or feared stimuli in a manner that protects it from harm.
- A slight raise in stress/tension can lead to improved focus and performance.
- High levels of stress can impair thinking, cause misbehavior, and result in withdrawal/avoidance.

Thinking, Anxiety, and Performance

- Our brain is wired to protect us and help us survive when danger is detected.
- "Fight or Flight." is our automatic way of turning on protective functions.
- What we have learned and can show can be blocked by automatic physical reactions to stress.

The Accordion Brain



Fully Open Accordion accesses all prior learning and knowledge

The Accordion Brain



When stressed the accordion closes, blocking access to what we know and have learned.

The Accordion Brain

- Humans are the only animals who can turn off the automatic response.
- Re-opening the brain can result in large improvements in thinking, performance, and behavior.

What do you see?

Task Refusal vs. Avoidance

- Your child may respond to requests and tasks with an automatic physical response (accordion closing).
- If they failed before, struggled to learn, or feel unsafe they will react physically.
- When children don't know "how to start" they will also react physically/emotionally.
- Sometimes they "won't" because they feel they "can't."

Task Refusal vs. Avoidance

- **Truth:** Knowing the difference between refusal and avoidance may be impossible in the moment.
- Trying new strategies is the only way to know for sure.
- Children who have prior knowledge and skill will not always show it when anxious.

Physical Interventions: Movement, Pressure, etc.

- Providing consistent good physical activity and self-care keeps the body even and calm.
- Regular input, care, and monitoring allows for reduction in predictable system functioning.
- Practice skills for movement and care before the child is upset or starts a stressful task.
- Offering strategies when stressed is possible, but not always effective.

Physical Interventions for Anxiety

- Awareness of the inherent stimulation in daily activities will drive the plans more accurately.
- Heavy Work: Push, Pull, Lift, Drag, and Moving Objects
- Movement breaks: Allowing the body time to express it's energies.
- Exercise.
- Yoga.

Yoga, Movement, and Exercise

- Movement and exercise can calm the body/senses.
- Yoga, meditation, and other movement exercises are excellent for calming and resetting daily stress levels.
- Intense exercise can reduce the body's response to stress and provide a less extreme differences between calm and scared.

Mindfulness and Relaxation

- Mindfulness and building awareness of how the body affects the mind is a growing part of mental health.
- We do not try to throw away, block, or refuse the negative emotions or feelings.
- Allow them to exist, but don't fight or wrestle them.

Mindful Breathing

Mindfulness Exercise

- 1.** Find a quiet place free of distraction.
- 2.** Sit comfortably, with your back straight but relaxed.
- 3.** Focus your awareness on your breath. Pay attention to the sensations of the inhalation and exhalation. Start again on the next breath.
- 4.** No need to judge or change your breathing in any way.
- 5.** Notice anything else that comes to mind as a distraction. Let them go and return your attention to your breath.