Building Resiliency and Reducing Stress & Anxiety in Children

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Overview

STRESS – ABILITY TO COPE (Resiliency)=Anxiety

- Why are Stress and Anxiety Increasing?
- What is Stress?
- Reducing Stress At Home
- Anxiety
- Developmental Anxiety
- Harmful Anxiety
- Test Anxiety
- Resiliency
- Tips to Reduce Stress and Anxiety
- Recap
Why are Stress and Anxiety Increasing?

• Less play
• More pressure—academics, standardized testing, sports, extracurricular activities
• More exposure
Stress

• Stress is part of being human and begins even before birth.
• It plays an important part in development from learning to eat to trying to memorize multiplication tables.
• In order to learn and grow, a degree of stress is important!
• A small degree of stress during tests is important as it produces extra energy in your brain to concentrate and do well.
Stress

• Too much stress can have a profound impact on children.
• Even a constant low level of stress can take a toll.
• Stress can change children’s mood and behavior and cause hyperactivity, depression, anxiety, etc.
• Some stressors cannot go away: divorce, learning disabilities, starting a new school.
• Kids are resilient and can learn ways to cope!
Examples of Stress

Big Stressors for Children
• Parents fighting
• Moving
• Taking a test
• Fighting with a friend or sibling
• Difficulty at School
• Appearance

Smaller Stressors for Children
• Homework
• Too many chores
• Acne
• Being sick
• Being tardy to school
Reducing Stress at Home

- Eat dinner together
- Have family meetings
- Spend time with extended family members
- Plan game nights
- Enjoy nature activities
- Go on a picnic
- Have a movie night
- Go on a “technology diet”
Anxiety

• Anxiety is the uneasiness, worry, or tension we experience when we expect a real or perceived threat to our welfare.

• All humans experience anxiety. It is necessary for preparation and protection from danger.

• It can enhance our performance in stressful situations.

• 10–20% of school age children experience anxiety symptoms.

• An even greater number experience stress that does not qualify as an anxiety disorder.
Typical Anxiety

• Infants: stranger anxiety 7–9 months
• Early Childhood: separation anxiety, ghosts, monsters
• Elementary: school performance, burglars, hurricanes, illness
• Middle childhood: academic difficulties, social issues, natural dangers, death
• Adolescence: moral issues, relationships, future
When Does it Become Harmful?

- When it affects a child’s ability to learn, make friends, or have fun
- When it begins to impact a child’s functioning
- Difficulty sleeping
- Affects concentration and decision making (test anxiety)
- Thinking is unrealistic, catastrophic, and pessimistic
- Physical symptoms—stomachaches, nausea, vomiting.
- Perfectionism
Test Anxiety

• Specific phobia where symptoms interfere with concentration, problem solving, and creative thinking during tests.
Tips to Reduce Test Anxiety

• Before tests:
  ▪ Prepare and study
  ▪ Learn relaxation skills and practice
  ▪ Practice self-talk
  ▪ Limit worrying to a specific “worry time” and say “not now” at other times
  ▪ Avoid talking about the test before and after—anxiety can be contagious!
  ▪ Develop a healthy lifestyle—good sleep, healthy breakfast
  ▪ Use different ways to study (ex: study groups, flashcards, talk about information with your stuffed animals)

• During tests:
  ▪ Move on from difficult items
  ▪ Avoid comparing yourself to peers
  ▪ Use relaxation skills
  ▪ Positive self-talk
Stop, Drop, and Roll

• According to a study by Cheek, Bradley, Reynolds, and Coy (2002), this strategy is successful for students feeling test anxiety.
• STOP – put your pencil down and place your hands on the cool surface of the table
• DROP – drop your head forward, take a deep breath
• ROLL – roll your head around 3 times
• Of the students who used this technique, 87.5% of them went on to pass their next benchmark assessment that they previously failed.
• Parents and teachers reported a reduction in stress–reaction behaviors.
<table>
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<th>Books for Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) What to Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid’s Guide to Overcoming Anxiety</td>
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<td>2) David and the Worry Beast: Helping Children Cope with Anxiety</td>
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<td>3) Is a Worry Worrying You</td>
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<td>4) Sea Otter Cove: Introducing relaxation breathing to lower anxiety, decrease stress and control anger while promoting peaceful sleep</td>
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<td>5) Little Mouse’s Big Book of Fear</td>
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<td>6) A Boy and a Bear: The Children’s Relaxation Book</td>
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<td>7) Don’t Panic, Annika</td>
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<td>8) Wemberly Worried</td>
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<td>9) Wilma Jean the Worry Machine</td>
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<td>10) What to Do when You’re Scared and Worried: A Guide for Kids</td>
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<tr>
<td>11) When My Worries Get Too Big! A Relaxation Book for Children who Live with Anxiety</td>
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Resiliency
What is Resiliency?

• In life, things go wrong all the time.
• For children, some of these challenges include academic struggles, bad grades, feeling isolated, bullying, and divorce.
• Being able to deal with those setbacks is a factor in positive mental health as well as school, career, and relationship success.
1) Don’t Accommodate Every Need

- When we try to overprotect, we get in the way of children being able to develop their own problem-solving skills.
- Avoidance of situations that elicit anxiety maintains the anxiety.
1) Don’t Accommodate Every Need

- You’ve been working with your child all week on their homework. It is the day that the homework is due and your child leaves it on the kitchen counter. What do you do?

- Your child got in a mild disagreement with another student at school. What do you do?

“You can compare low amounts of stress to vaccines that provide resistance. As long as the stress is within the range that one can tolerate, it can be considered healthy.” – Dr. Oddgeir Friborg
2) Teach Children to Problem Solve

- Brainstorm strategies to decrease anxiety in stress producing situations
- Set goals
- Engage your child in figuring out how to handle challenges
### Managing Stress

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<th>Stressor</th>
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<th>How I Can Handle It</th>
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| Building Resilience: A Non-Thematic Small-Group Approach
| © 2011 Marico Products, Inc. 1-800-449-2197 |
3) Model Relaxation

Research Based Ways to Relax

• Belly breathing vs. chest breathing
• Having a list of your favorite things where you can see it
• Guided imagery
• Exploring Nature
• Yoga
• Art– provides emotional release
• Play!
• Repetitive phrases paired with breathing
3) Model Relaxation

- Have alternate ideas from technology
- Repetitive play—repetitive motions causes your brain to produce chemicals that can help you relax (think rocking chairs, hammocks, etc.)
4) Let Them Make Mistakes

• Failure is not catastrophic. It is the state you are in when you need to figure out what to do next.

• It helps kids learn how to fix mistakes and make better decisions the next time.
5) Talk about Emotions and Model Empathy

• Teach children that all emotions are ok. Validate their feelings using statements such as, “I can see that you are feeling stressed out right now. I would feel the same way if I was in your situation. Let’s figure out what the next step will be to make you feel better”.

• Allow them “Worry Time”

• Empathy Activity
6) Create and Model Play

• Play is the foundation of mental health!
1. **Jimmy Neutron: Boy Genius**: When gooey green aliens kidnap all the adults in Retroville, it's up to 11-year-old Jimmy Neutron to come up with a plan to rescue them.

2. **Mulan**: Disney brings an ancient legend to life in this animated tale of a tomboy who disguises herself as a man so she can fight with the Chinese Army.

3. **Turbo**: A speed-obsessed snail who dreams of being the world's greatest race car driver gets his chance when an accident imbues him with high speed.

4. **The Emperor's New Groove**: In this animated Disney adventure, a South American emperor experiences a reversal of fortune when his power-hungry adviser turns him into a llama.

5. **Angelina Ballerina: Pop Star Girls**: Ballet is still the bomb, but Angelina decides that hip-hop is cool, too, when she joins forces with the Pop Star Girls to direct a hip-hop musical.

6. **Stellaluna**: When a cute baby fruit bat is adopted by a mama bird after being separated from her mother, she struggles to fit in with her new feathered siblings.

Movies of building resilience for older children

1. **Mr. Peabody & Sherman**: Resurrected from the 1960s animated series “Rocky and Bullwinkle,” canine genius Mr. Peabody and young Sherman take a dizzying ride through time.

2. **Princess Diaries 2**: As the newly crowned princess of the tiny European country of Genovia, teen Mia Thermopolis learns an arranged marriage may be in store for her.

3. **The Perfect Game**: A seemingly impossible dream of playing baseball for the United States becomes reality for a group of impoverished youngsters from Mexico.

4. **ANTZ**: In this animated hit, a neurotic worker ant in love with a rebellious princess rises to unlikely stardom when he switches places with a soldier.

5. **Avengers Assemble**: After Iron Man persuades his fellow superheroes to reunite, the Avengers combine their skills to battle both longtime foes and deadly new villains.

6. **School of Rock**: Musician Dewey Finn gets a job as a fourth-grade substitute teacher, where he secretly begins teaching his students the finer points of rock ‘n’ roll.
Books that Promote Resiliency

From: https://www.kaplanco.com/product/46793/childrens-books-that-promote-resilience-set-of-14?c=17%7CEA1000

- **Runaway Bunny** - Many children may wonder what it would be like to strike out on their own, but seldom imagine it as beautifully as the little bunny in this classic tale.

- **Allie's Basketball Dream** - Allie has always been hooked on basketball, but the boys she knows won't play with her. On the verge of giving up, Allie has one last go at it -- and she makes the basket!

- **When Sophie Gets Real Angry -- Really, Really Angry** - A young girl is upset and doesn't know how to manage her anger, but takes the time to cool off and regain her composure. This thoughtful story addresses one of the most difficult challenges facing parents: what to do when a child become angry.

- **Mommy Don't Go** - Matthew's mother has to go on a business trip, but he doesn't want to stay with the babysitter. Can the situation be resolved?

- **Mean Soup** - Horace has had a terrible day at school and he has come home feeling mean. Mom suggests they make a pot of soup, and a reluctant Horace resists at first, until Mom tells him about the special ingredients. They take turns yelling, growling, and making faces into the pot of hot water making a batch of "Mean Soup".

- **Cleversticks** - Ling Sung dreads going to school. There are too many things the other kids can do that he can't. When he discovers everyone admires his ability to use chopsticks, Ling Sung is empowered.
Let’s Reflect!

• What are some insights or “Ah-ha!” moments?
• What are some questions that you still have?
• What are some action steps that you can take?

Questions? Contact BriskinJ@fultonschools.org
References

Online Resources:
1) 12 Tips to Reduce Your Child’s Stress and Anxiety
   Amy Przeworski, Ph.D.
2) Your Mental Health is More Important Than Your Grades
   Kristen Lee Costa
3) www.worrywisekids.org/node/70

Books:
1) Building Resiliency
   Karen Griffith, Ph.D.
2) The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook for Kids
   Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D. & Robin K. Sprague, LCPC

Journals:


Other:
Tracy McConagheic– presentation 11/2/2015 at Summit Hill Elementary