

Child & Adolescent Anxiety: What Every Parent Should Know

MATT SWENSON, MD

CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRIST

UTAH VALLEY PSYCHIATRY & COUNSELING

INTERMOUNTAIN MEDICAL GROUP



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify when anxiety is a problem
2. Understand the range of treatments, and when professional help may be needed
3. Learn what a parent can do
4. Introduce additional resources

From the Parents

Until he knows for sure, he can't, he won't. How do I convince him life is okay?

I feel like the worst parent. I want to help my son, but I lose it and I know that's not helping anything. I start out patient, but nothing I say makes him feel better. Then I get frustrated and it's a mess

The day I learned that my son had been eating his lunch in a bathroom stall rather than face the kids in the cafeteria, I died a thousand deaths. I knew he was shy, but I didn't realize how unbearable life had become for him

OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ☐ Empathy and Connection
- ☐ Relabel the worry
- ☐ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ☐ Calm the body
- ☐ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ☐ Reinforcement and Praise
- ☐ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ Professional help



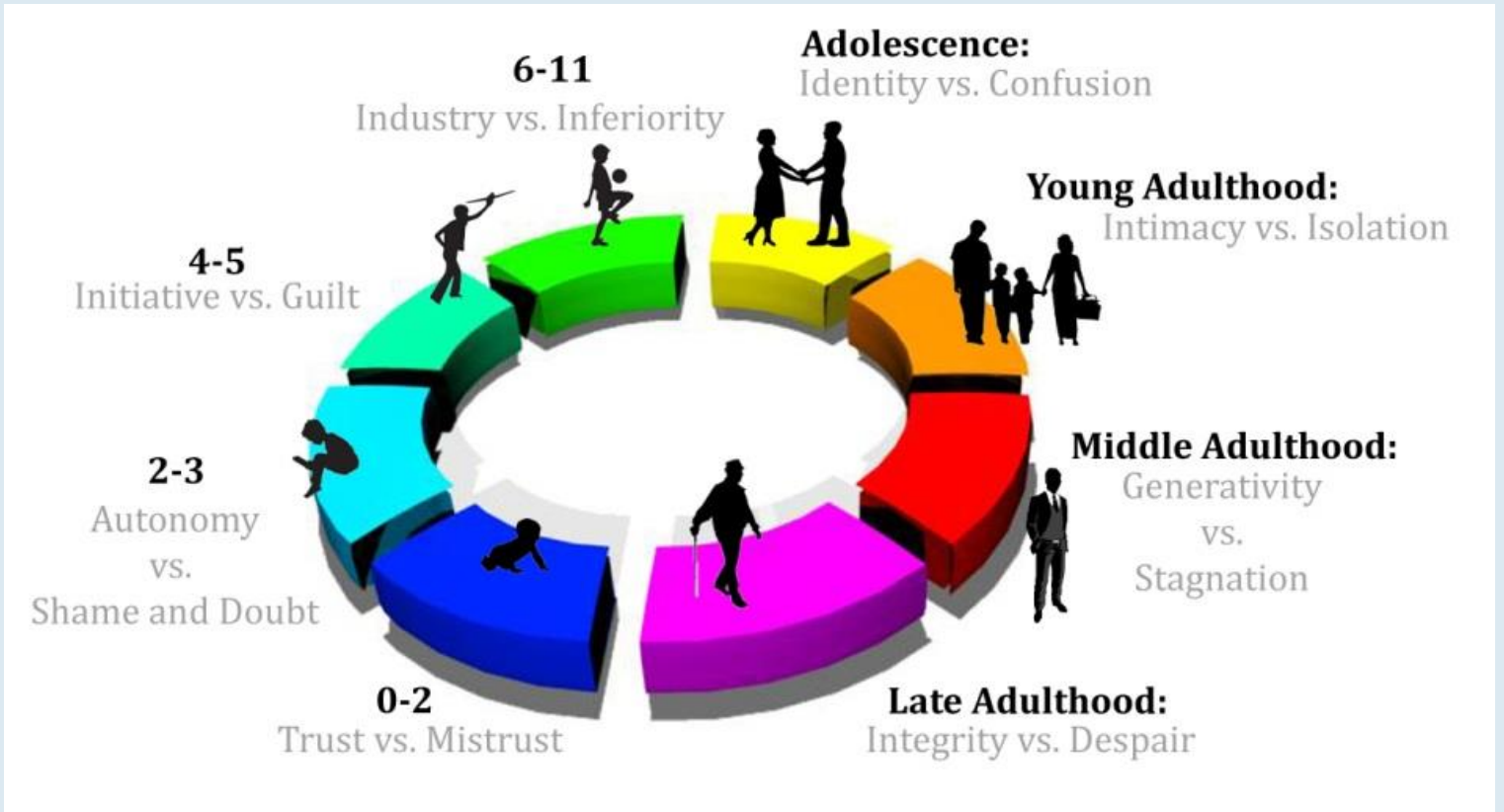
- Avoids social relationships
- Sleep difficulty
- Chronic or persistent body aches
- Refuses to attend school
- Unusually irritable or moody
- Needs excessive reassurance



- Loud noises or separation (infants)
- Darkness, dogs, burglars or monsters (preschool)
- Fear of failure, sickness, being alone, snakes/spiders/bats (school)
- Fear of rejection, spending time away from home (teen)

OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ☐ Empathy and Connection
- ☐ Relabel the worry
- ☐ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ☐ Calm the body
- ☐ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ☐ Reinforcement and Praise
- ☐ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ School
- ☐ Professional help

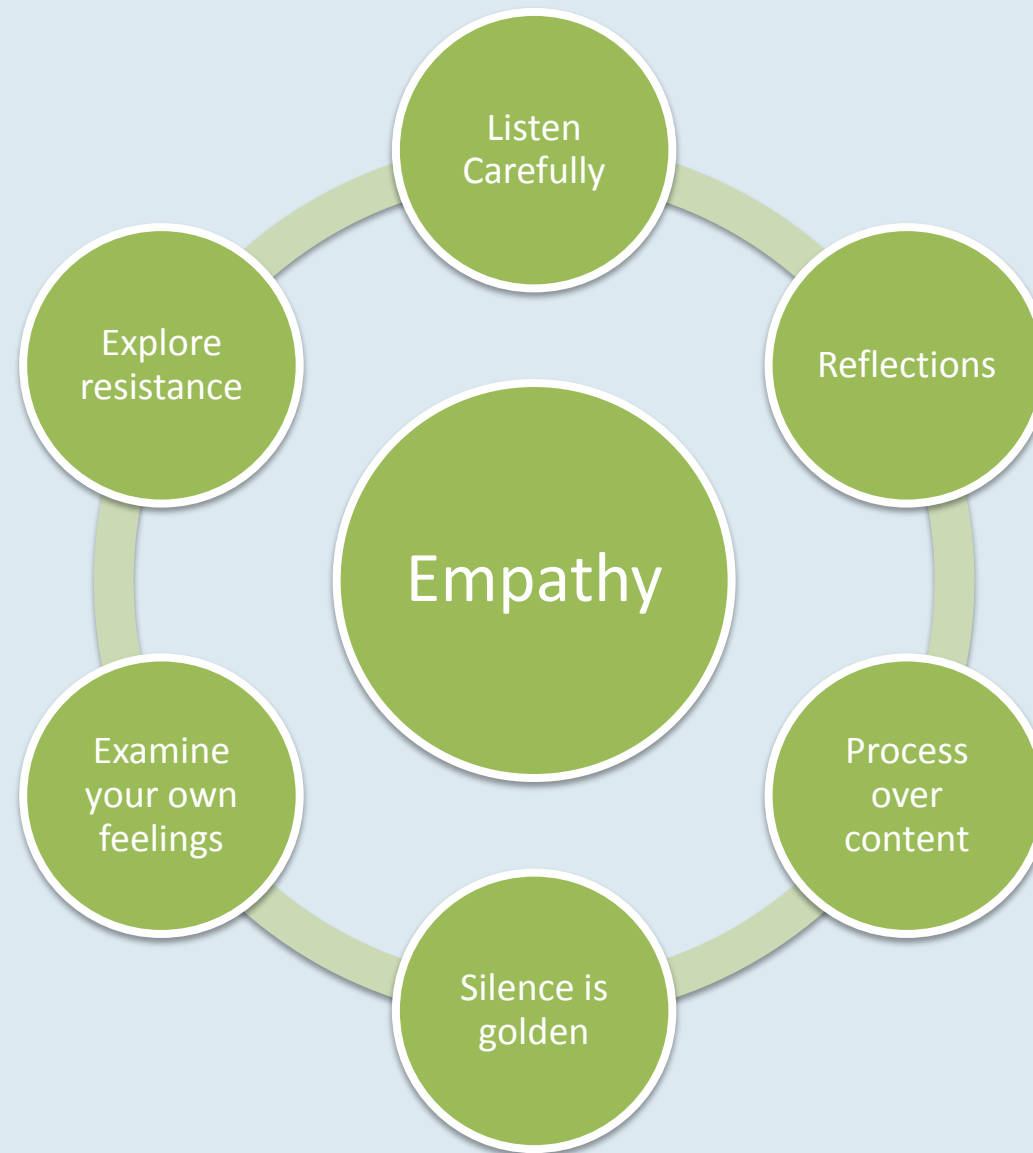


Does my child feel...

- Connected & Safe
- Independent
- Powerful
- Achievement & Mastery
- A stable sense of self
- Closeness / Intimacy

OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ☐ Address the real problem
- ☐ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ☐ Calm the body
- ☐ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ☐ Reinforcement and Praise
- ☐ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ School
- ☐ Professional help



OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ❑ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ❑ Calm the body
- ❑ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ❑ Reinforcement and Praise
- ❑ Managing your own anxiety
- ❑ School
- ❑ Professional help



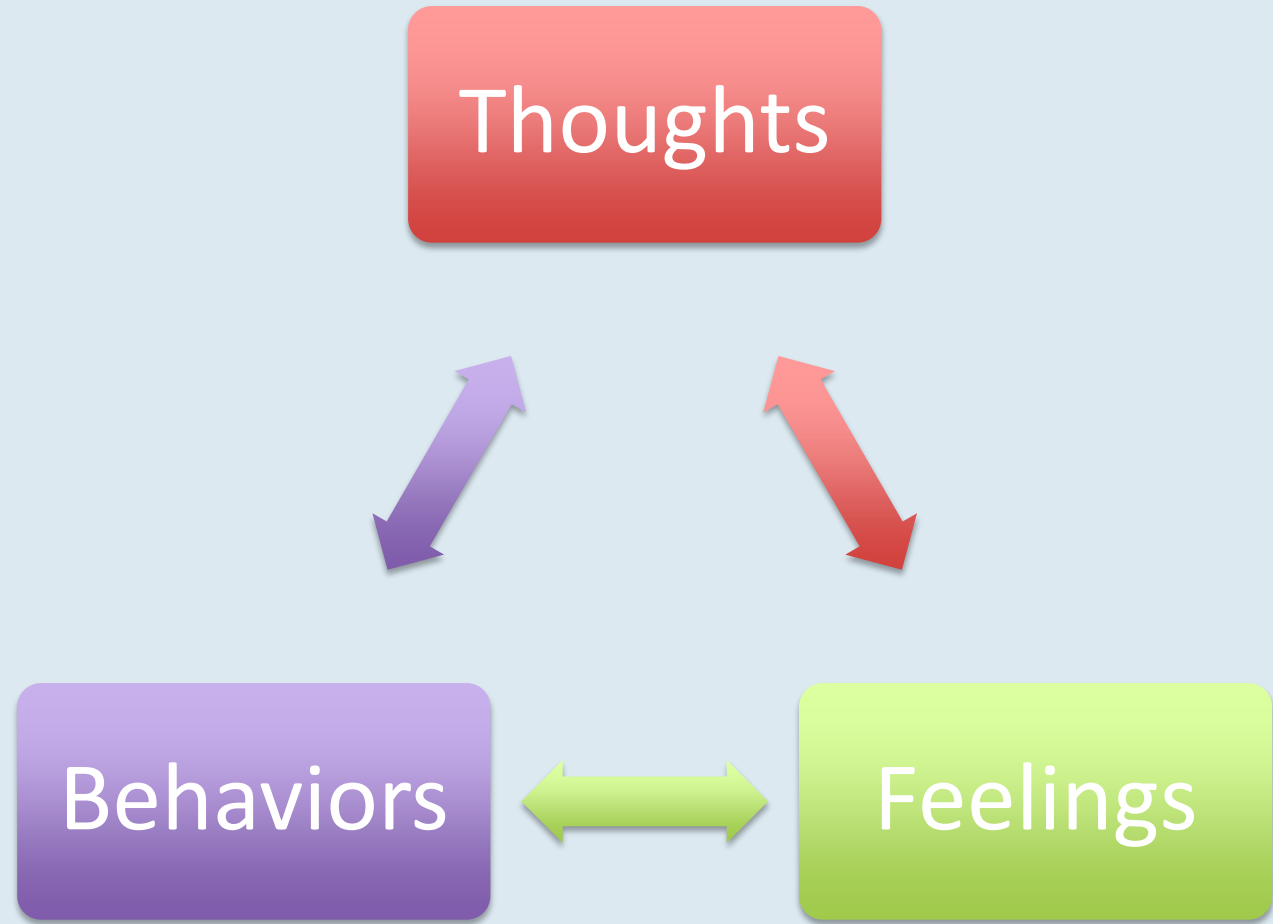
OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ☐ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ☐ Calm the body
- ☐ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ☐ Reinforcement and Praise
- ☐ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ School
- ☐ Professional help

- The problem is not the peer, the dog, the school, the class, the project or even the date-night you are trying to go on; the problem is *the worry*
- Worry is a choosing moment: what part of your brain will you choose to listen to?
 - “This is a tough situation. What part of your brain do you think is best for this job, your worry brain or your smart brain?”
 - “Is that what worry is telling you?”
 - “What is worry bugging you about?”
 - “Looks like the yikes button got pushed! Lets do a system reset. Is this really a yikes moment?”
 - “So part of you is scared. What does the other part of you think?”
 - “Whose job is it to ask ‘what if’ questions, Widdle or Til?”
 - “Krank must think this is an emergency, what do you think?”

OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ✓ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ☐ Calm the body
- ☐ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ☐ Reinforcement and Praise
- ☐ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ School
- ☐ Professional help



OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ✓ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ☐ Calm the body
- ☐ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ☐ Reinforcement and Praise
- ☐ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ School
- ☐ Professional help

Thoughts

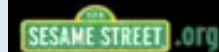
Cognitive Distortions = Thinking Errors = Thought Holes = Dark Shades

Example Strategies:

- Debate yourself
- Million dollar question
- Humor
- Change the voice
- Train of thought (side by side)
- Practice tests (true/false) or 'find the facts'
- Imaginary or real panel or survey
- Separate into parts (one part of you is nervous...)
- Set up a worry time

OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ✓ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ✓ Calm the body
- ❑ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ❑ Reinforcement and Praise
- ❑ Managing your own anxiety
- ❑ School
- ❑ Professional help



See Sesame Street and Electric Company apps and toolkits

OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ✓ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ✓ Calm the body
- ☐ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ☐ Reinforcement and Praise
- ☐ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ School
- ☐ Professional help

- Breathing
 - “belly” breathing
 - With imagery like balloons, sailboats or hot cookies
 - For older kids, explain “diaphragmatic breathing” and use age-appropriate imagery or self-talk
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
 - Rag doll / Robot
 - Squeeze Lemons; stretch like a kitten, move head/neck like a turtle, get a pesky fly off your face without using hands, tighten your stomach before the cute baby elephant steps on you, work your feet as if in a mud puddle. ALWAYS pause afterward to notice how good relaxation feels.
- Get moving!

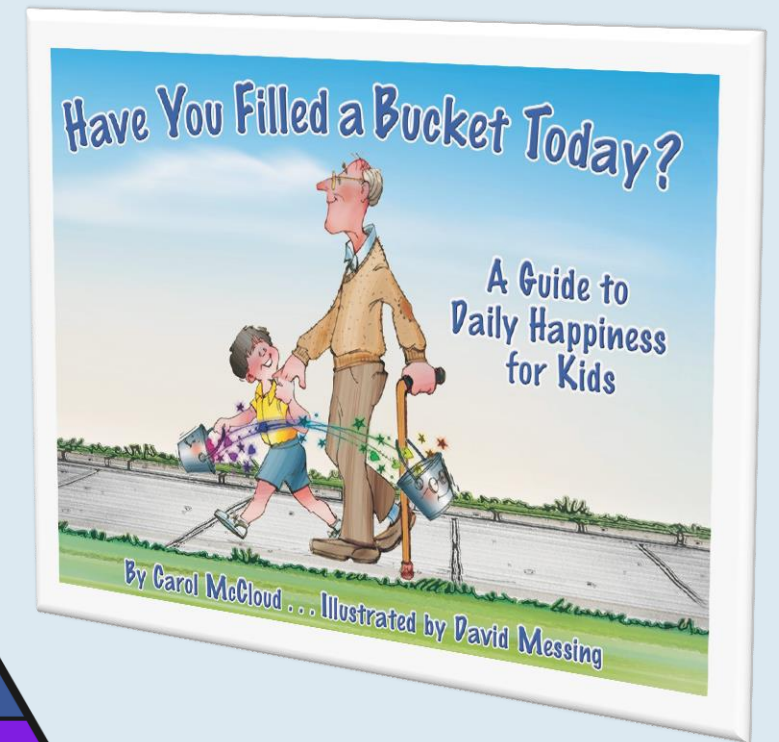
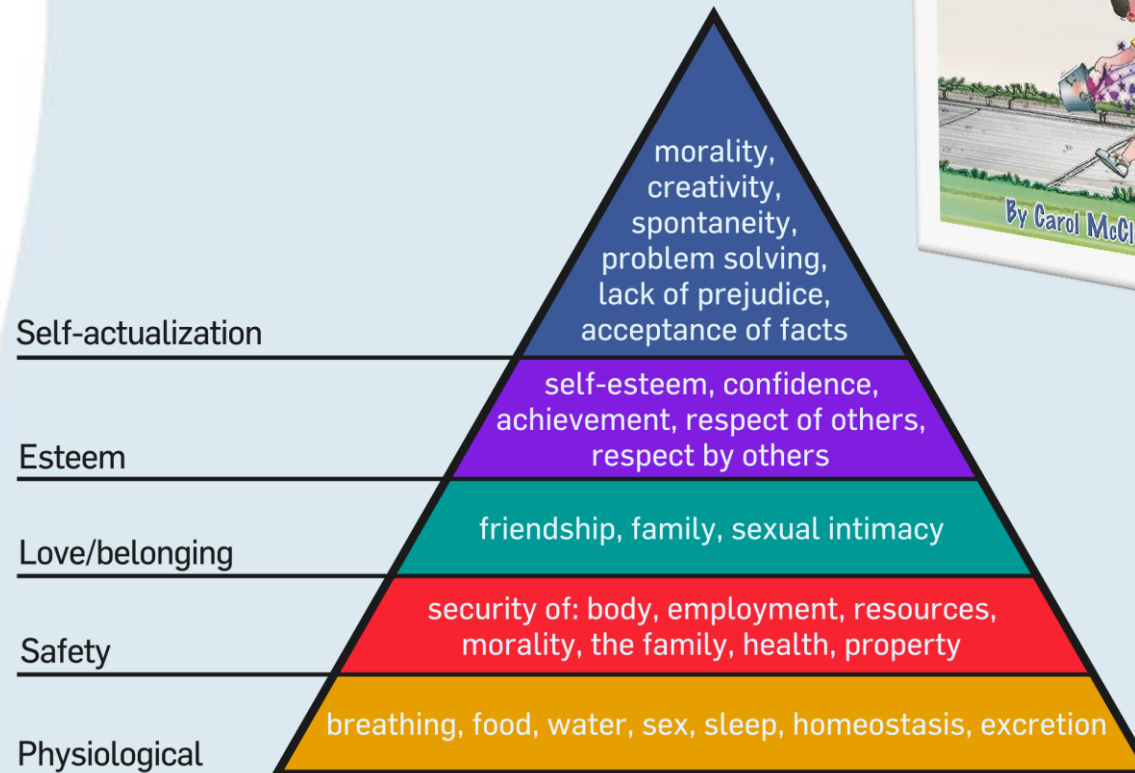
OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ✓ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ✓ Calm the body
- ✓ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ☐ Reinforcement and Praise
- ☐ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ School
- ☐ Professional help

- Exposure = Uncomfortable on purpose
- Hierarchy of fear challenges
 - “How many times do you think you’ll need to get used to it?”
 - “How do you think you’ll feel after doing this three times?”
 - “What are the things you need to practice and get good at before you can do that?”
 - Too easy: “Let’s keep trying.” Too hard: “That’s fine, but now you need to find a goal that you can say yes to.”
- End on a success, not escape
- Talk in a matter-of-fact way
- Don’t accept avoidance or “I can’t” statements
- Add humor
- Consider imagination exposure
- Roll with resistance (don’t get stuck)
 - “What part of this can you do?”
 - “Can you think of a way that you and I can share this job?”
 - “I know you really want to be able to _____ someday. This can really help you get there.”

OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ✓ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ✓ Calm the body
- ✓ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ✓ Reinforcement and Praise
- ☐ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ School
- ☐ Professional help



OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ✓ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ✓ Calm the body
- ✓ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ✓ Reinforcement and Praise
- ✓ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ School
- ☐ Professional help

Caretaker Modeling:

Nature's little way of
making sure your
anxiety
disorder
outlives you.

someecards
user card



OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ✓ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ✓ Calm the body
- ✓ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ✓ Reinforcement and Praise
- ✓ Managing your own anxiety
- ☐ School
- ☐ Professional help

- Put limits on your own worry and imagination
- Show confidence that we can live with uncertainty
- Emphasize “getting better” over “doing good.”
- It’s not what you say, its how you say it.
- Stop focusing on the risks. Focus on resilience and safety
- Give up predictions and control. Try viewing your parenting role as ‘showing up to discover’ where their life will go and who they will become . Allow yourself to be delighted in their life-education.

OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ✓ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ✓ Calm the body
- ✓ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ✓ Reinforcement and Praise
- ✓ Managing your own anxiety
- ✓ School
- ☐ Professional help

- What is the problem? Get specific!
- “Children must be in school”
 - Don’t mention home school, changing schools or other escape strategies
- Laddering
- Partner with the school
 - Coach teacher how to talk about the “worry brain”
 - Perspective on oppositional behavior
 - Free pass to check in with counselor. CAUTION phone calls home.
 - Accommodations? *While remembering that the *situation* is not actually the biggest problem
- Other tips
 - Keep routine moving in the morning
 - If you have the flexibility, consider taking them to school yourself
 - Try to be one of the first in the classroom
 - Consider having a teacher or counselor meet you or call the night before
 - Use rewards for success

OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- ✓ Empathy and Connection
- ✓ Address the real problem
- ✓ Rethink and shrink the worry
- ✓ Calm the body
- ✓ GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- ✓ Reinforcement and Praise
- ✓ Managing your own anxiety
- ✓ School
- ✓ Professional help

Medications

Less time and cost,
not provider
dependent

“anti-depressants”
like Prozac, Zoloft or
Celexa

50-60% Respond

Therapy

Clearly better for
OCD and Trauma

Skill building =
Sustained benefit

50-60% Respond

Turnaround: Turning Fear into Freedom



GoZen!



Module 1: What is Worry?

In the first module, we dive right in to explore what causes one to worry. Kids are fascinated by facts about the brain. It helps them demystify what they are going through and shows them the control they have over their worry.



Module 2: Worry Affects Your Body

Increased heart rate, shortness of breath, tummy aches—we talk about how worry makes us feel and kids learn special techniques to help calm them down when worry takes over.

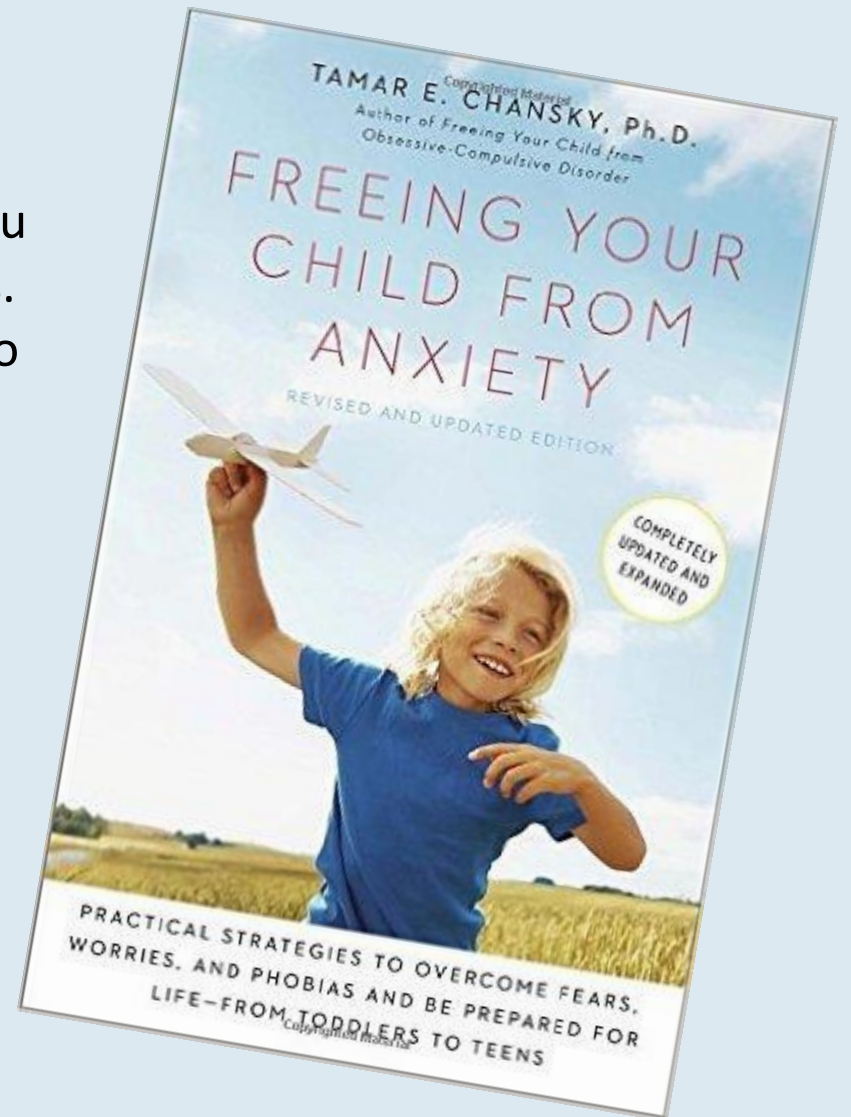


Module 3: Worry Affects Your Thinking

We go over the the 3 major thinking errors that causes kids to worry—Avoiding, What Ifing and ThoughtHoles—and how kids can change their thinking style.

Freeing Your Child From Anxiety

450 pages but a great place to go if you feel you are running out of ideas. Organized by problem so you don't have to read the whole thing.



UACAP.org

