

Tips to Manage Stress and Anxiety

A Brief Presentation About How to Help Our Youth Manage
Emotions More Effectively

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What is an Emotion?



Why do we have emotions?

Emotions have 3 functions:

- 1) They give us information and SIGNAL that something is happening.
- 2) They communicate to and influence others.
- 3) They motivate and prepare us for action.

What is “Anxiety” specifically?

Anxiety is NORMAL.

- It is a response to the perception of a future threat or danger, where the perceived fear is greater than the actual threat.
- We need this to prepare for potential difficulties.
- Some anxiety is actually GOOD for performance.

When everyday occurrences become overwhelming and behaviors interfere with someone’s daily functioning, then anxiety becomes problematic.

What can Anxiety look like?

Anxiety can manifest in many ways, but some possible signs include:

- psychomotor agitation
- flushed face or chest
- excessive worry/rumination
- fatigue
- irritability or lack of cooperation
- social isolation
- nausea or vomiting
- physical complaints (particularly headaches, stomach aches, muscle aches or gastrointestinal issues)
- other unusual behavior
- faintness
- chills
- chest pain
- fear of failure/perfectionism
- black/white thinking
- reassurance seeking

What makes Anxiety worse?

1. Avoidance

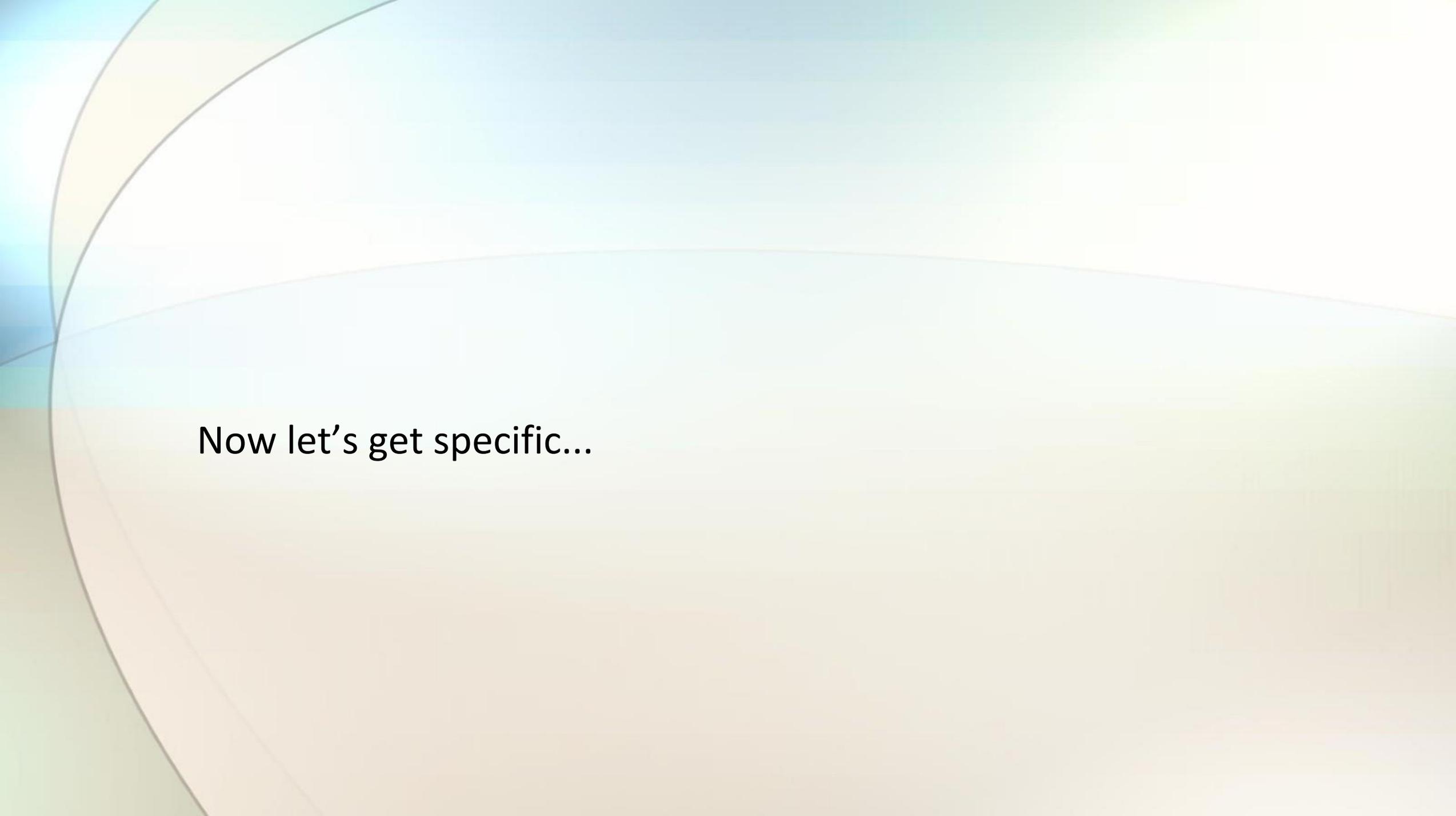
- This is the WORST possible behavior to enable.
- Over time, avoidance reduces our child's tolerance level instead of letting him/her have an experience, ride the wave of his/her emotion, and return to an emotional baseline with no significant long-term consequences.
- If the intention is to avoid the feared stimulus, it never allows for someone to disprove their misappraisal of the threat.
- Coping patterns develop to create immediate relief and avoid discomfort (but it's okay to be uncomfortable).

2. Reassurance Seeking

- This lets the person off the hook... if something goes wrong, it's the other person's fault!
- Reassurance is addictive, and the long-term goal is for our children to learn how to reassure themselves.

3. Distraction

- This makes it look like we're doing the feared behavior, but we're not *really* doing it.
- For example, most people who fear flying will cry, pray, drink, legally medicate, etcetera instead of fully experiencing a flight and learning that they can handle it on their own.



Now let's get specific...

Tip: Don't Enable Escape or Avoidance Behavior

Anxiety puts parents in a tough spot...

Yes, I am suggesting that you encourage your kid to do something that is uncomfortable while you witness how painful the experience is for him/her.

We cannot accommodate too quickly or too much, or else our kids will never learn how to manage stress (or distress).

They need these opportunities to grow! Let your mantra become, "You can handle it".

Tip: Allow for Natural Consequences to Occur

Especially of avoidant behavior!

Don't protect your kid from natural consequences! It's how they learn the fastest...

Please, please, please - don't rescue!

Tip: Set Clear Behavioral Expectations

Kids thrive off of structure and routine

The best way to increase a child's tolerance is to set expectations just above his/her comfort level

When in doubt, try some “Refrigerator Therapy”

Expectations:

1. Attend School
2. Be ready at 7am
3. Chores
4. Do Homework
5. Use respectful language

Privileges:

1. Two hours of screen time
2. Go out on the weekend
3. Allowance
4. Cell phone access
5. Video game/computer access

Tip: Be Aware of Your Own Reactions

We are all sensitive to certain behaviors.

Be mindful of your verbal and nonverbal reactions (such as rolling your eyes, sighing, walking away, making poorly-timed jokes, etcetera). These can be really invalidating!

Stay calm, even when your child is not :)

Tip: Validate Your Child's Emotion(s)

Actively listen. Make eye contact and stay focused.

Observe what the other person is feeling in the moment. Look for a word that describes the feeling.

Look for how the feelings, thoughts, or actions make sense given your child's (or your own) history and current situation, even if you don't approve of the behavior, emotion, or action itself.

Respond in a way that shows that you are taking the person seriously.

Your child will be more receptive to your limits once s/he feels validated!

Final Thoughts

We can't necessarily control our thoughts or emotions, but we can control our behavior...
remember: our minds are not our friends when we're upset!

We can't "convince" someone to be less anxious, you need to do things and learn for yourself!

Worrying is a huge waste of time... it won't actually change the outcome of anything.

The world is neutral, all we have are our perceptions or (mis)interpretations.

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