

## SUPPORTING CAMP PARENTS AROUND ANXIETY


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1

## WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION DEFINITION OF MENTAL HEALTH

“A state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community.”



2

## ANXIETY DISORDERS

Generalized anxiety disorder – excessive worries / “what if” in multiple domains

Obsessive compulsive disorder – intrusive thoughts with specific rituals

Panic disorder – panic attacks (heart racing, difficulty breathing, disabling sense of doom) with fear of future attacks

Social phobia / social anxiety disorder – significant, disabling anxiety specifically in the realm of social interactions


Selective mutism – child only speaks in certain settings (usually related to social anxiety)

Trichotillomania – pulling of hair (usually as a result of anxiety)

3

## LET'S TALK ABOUT STRESS/ANXIETY


- Some anxiety is normal and necessary
- We need some anxiety to attend to:
  - A new situation or experience
  - Achieve/accomplish an important task
  - Something pushing us out of our comfort zone
  - Perception of danger



4

## HOW OUR SOCIETY APPROACHES ANXIETY


- Considered something ‘bad’ that needs to be removed
- Try to remove or fix stressful situations
- Particularly many parents
- Youth come to be fearful of experiencing any stress
- Told:
  - ‘Don’t worry’
  - ‘Be happy’
  - ‘Focus on the positive’
  - ‘Relax’
- Can lead to more distress



5

## FORCED/TOXIC POSITIVITY

- Undermines resilience
- Denies reality
- Don’t develop skills to live in world as it is
- Cannot meet suffering



6

### STUDY ON STUDENTS TAKING EXAMS

- ½ were taught a relaxation technique before the exam
- Other ½ were taught to acknowledge stress and reason behind it



7

### WHICH GROUP DID BETTER ON THE TEST?

- Those that acknowledged the stress did much much better
- Can't be 'relaxed' when trying to attend to a task
- Emotions and experiences are signposts that need to be acknowledged/recognized
- Not try to make it go away or disappear



8

### LOMA PRIETA EARTHQUAKE STUDY

- Looking at whether stress increased local children's susceptibility to illness
- "Draw the earthquake"
- Thought the kids drawing 'cheerful pictures' would turn out to be more resilient
- Children who drew scenes of destruction, injury, fear and sadness:
  - ❖ Stayed healthy in following weeks and months
- Those who drew sunny pictures more likely to come down with infections & illness



9

### COMMON FINDING IN STUDIES

- Best way for managing emotions and challenging experiences:
  - Name/acknowledge/recognize them
  - Find problem solving/coping strategies
- Neuroscience shows us why this is important



10

### 2 SIDES OF THE BRAIN DAN SIEGEL, MD

Left Hemisphere	Right Hemisphere
Logical	Emotions
Language	Bodily experience
Factual Memory	Emotional/Embodied Memory



11

### INTEGRATION OF LEFT & RIGHT BRAIN FOR WELLBEING



- 'Name it to Tame it'
- Connect first with the Right
- Acknowledging Feelings
- Identifying Feelings in the Body
- Normalizing and Validating
- Then Redirect with the Left
- Problem Solving
- Planning
- Strategies



12

## HOW NOT INTEGRATING CAN BE HARMFUL

- Integration=move to right brain first, then move to left
- If we stay in right brain too long, can wind up 'swimming' in emotions/experiences and feel overwhelmed
- If we move too quickly to left brain and bypass the right, then our emotions often show up in unhealthy ways



13

## PARENTAL ACCOMMODATION

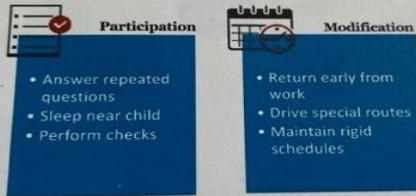
- Parental behavior modifications that attempt to prevent or reduce child distress associated with participation in age-appropriate activities and/or exposure to feared or avoided stimuli.
- Any change a parent makes to their own behavior to help kids avoid or lessen anxiety.
- These changes come from a caring and loving place, one where parents don't want their kids to be distressed.
- Accommodation often shows kids that they cannot face their anxieties and they need others to step in to fix their problems.



14

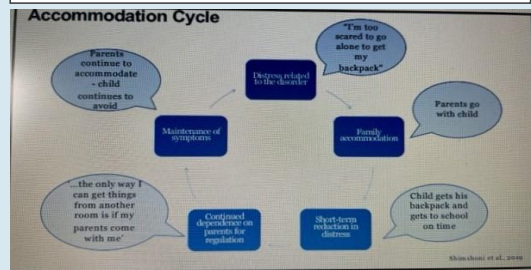
## TYPES OF PARENTAL ACCOMMODATION

### Family Accommodation



15

## ACCOMMODATION CYCLE



16

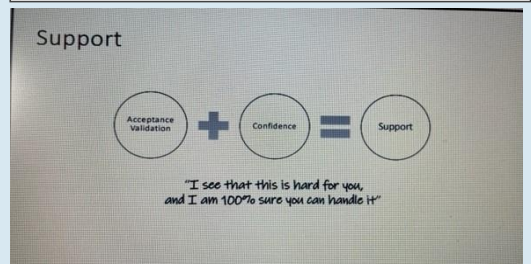
## SPACE (SUPPORTIVE PARENTING FOR ANXIOUS CHILDHOOD EMOTIONS) PROGRAM

- Yale Child Study Center
- Evidence based parent program for children and adolescents with anxiety, OCD and related problems
- As effective as working with youth directly
- Parents learn to acknowledge the anxious feeling their child is experiencing
- And to reduce the *accommodations* they have been making to the child's symptoms
- Present in 95% of anxious children



17

## SPACE APPROACH



18

## SPACE SUPPORT

- Anxiety disorders are maladaptive attempts to manage worries
- 'Too heightened' alarm system
- Impacts/impedes typical functioning
- Kids (and parents) believe these strategies will help or make anxiety go away
- Don't think can handle worries



19

## SPACE REFLECTS BRAIN INTEGRATION

- Acknowledging anxiety
- Validating how hard it is
- Believe child (and parent) can handle it
- 'Redirecting with Left' is parent changing the way they approach child's anxiety



20

## STEP 1: RECOGNIZE/ACKNOWLEDGE

- Name or say the feeling.
  - To self: "I'm worried." Or "I feel nervous and my heart is racing."
  - To another: "Sounds like you're upset."



21

## STEP 2: NORMALIZE AND VALIDATE

- Everyone feels that way sometimes and/or it makes sense to feel that way.
  - To self: "Of course I am sad. It's ok to feel that way."
  - To another: "Everyone feels that way sometimes."  
"That makes sense you would feel like that."



22

## STEP 3: SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT

- Bringing soothing, support and encouragement
- Supportive/comforting touch
- Breathing
- Words



23

## ARE THESE SUPPORTIVE?

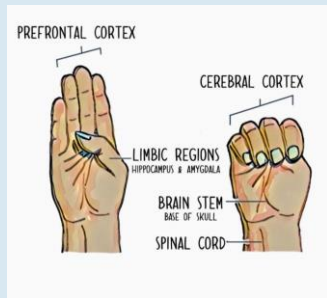
- You just have to power through. I know you can.
- I know it's not easy for anyone. You don't have to do it.
- I know it's a really really scary thing to go to camp.
- Life doesn't always revolve around you, you know.
- Everyone feels worried sometimes. This moment will pass and you will be ok.
- We know it's really hard, we got you.



24



Dan Siegel's Hand Model  
of the Brain



31

HAVING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- Highlight what is going well
- Name that goal is to best support their child
- 'Set them up for success'
- If child is showing any anxiety or other concern- they are communicating distress
- We want to find ways to minimize the distress
- Name and validate parent's upset
- Understanding and empathy helps in their amygdala not taking over



32