

Parenting Now
The Ottawa Catholic School Board Parents' Association
St. Patrick's High School

Workshop: Stress and Anxiety in a Young Child.

April 10, 2010

Dr. Douglas Scoular, Psychologist

This is a handout of key notes and resources for attendees of the workshop as a supplement to the workshop.

Note: The workshop and following notes are for general information purposes only, not meant for any specific child and/or family. If you are concerned about your own or your child's mental health, please contact a health professional.

Key Workshop Notes

- Definition: Anxiety is a response to a *perceived* threat that *can* involve thoughts, specific behaviour(s), and physical response.
- Heightened states of anxiety can involve a child experiencing troubling catastrophic thoughts, maladaptive avoidant behaviours, and specific physical symptoms. In younger children, the troubling thoughts tend to be less complex and extensive as compared to older children/youth. Avoidant behaviours in response to anxiety may also be associated with a child expressing anger, frustration, sadness, and irritability.
- Anxiety can be a normal and adaptive response to a truly threatening situation.
- Many children develop anxious fears that may be somewhat age dependent, and these fears reduce naturally with time.
- Learning to manage anxiety effectively can be developmentally beneficial for a child.
- Higher levels of anxiety can contribute to significant problems (e.g., academically, socially and recreationally) for a child.
- Anxiety involves an individual's brain's response to a perceived threatening situation. Higher levels of anxiety can negatively impact thinking ability (e.g., problem solving ability) while the anxiety remains high.
- Anxiety disorders are only identified after an assessment by a health professional.

- If an anxiety disorder is present, treatment can involve Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or a variant of this therapy.
- Parents can help their children manage anxiety through:
 - Becoming educated about anxiety.
 - Keep in mind that children can learn how to manage anxious situations through watching their parents.
 - Parents modeling calmness, and problem solving methods helps to teach their children to do the same in an anxious situation.
 - Parents encouraging their child to use relaxation methods may be helpful in managing their child's anxiety.
 - Parents helping their child to develop a plan and to approach a potentially anxiety provoking situation in a step by step and gradual manner may also be useful in helping their child to manage an anxious situation.
 - Parents who help their child to consistently avoid an anxious situation that is actually safe may be strengthening the anxiety.
 - Parents helping their child to find creative ways to express their anxious thoughts and feelings can be helpful. Creative ways may include, for example, drawing, arts and craft projects, and story telling activities.

Resources

Websites:

eMentalHealth.ca: <http://www.ementalhealth.ca/site/ottawa/>

www.anxietydisordersontario.ca

www.anxietycanada.ca

Books:

Garland, J., & Clark, S. (2000). *Taming Worry Dragons*.

Rapee, R. M., Wignall, A., Spence, S. H. (2008). *Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents*.

Foa, E. & Andrews, L. (2006). *If Your Adolescent has an Anxiety Disorder*.