


Addressing anxieties in your family arising from COVID19

Presented by Dr Lyn O'Grady Community Psychologist & Jac Van Velsen Mental Health and Wellbeing Educator



For schools in the City of Azara, Grampians and Pyrenees Shires. Thanks to the generous support of the School Focused Youth Service at Grampians Community Health.

1

Acknowledge traditional owners
Housekeeping
Group working agreement




WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

2

Session Outline

1. Explore anxiety and how it might play a role in the lives of children, young people and families during times such as a pandemic.
2. Recognise when anxious feelings can be helpful and keep us safe and when anxiety can become a concern.
3. How to respond to anxiety to reduce its impact and help build resilience.



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

3

What is anxiety?

When you hear the word "anxiety" what comes to mind for you?

What sorts of things lead to anxiety?



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

4

"Feeling anxious in certain situations can help us avoid danger, triggering our "fight or flight" response. It is how we've evolved to keep ourselves safe.

Sometimes though we can become overly worried about perceived threats – bad things that may or may not happen.

When your worries are persistent or out of proportion to the reality of the threat and get in the way of you living your life you may have an anxiety disorder."

Black Dog Institute: <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/>



Adapted from Zinin & Myers as cited in DeWolfe, D. J., 2000. Training manual for mental health and human service workers in major disasters (2nd ed., HHS Publication No. ADM 90-538), Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services.



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

5



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

6

Impact of the pandemic on anxiety levels

For many people, anxiety is high as a result of the pandemic. This is not all bad. Anxiety and fear are natural protectors of people's lives. These responses trigger the fight-or-flight response that motivates people to act in the primitive sense — usually to run or fight. This response has kept humans alive for generations despite many dangers in this world.

However, an unknown or not easily understood danger can increase people's anxiety. These reasons lead many people to seek understanding and develop a plan of safety and action.

Mayo Clinic: <https://www.mayoclinichealthsystem.org/hometown-health/speaking-of-health/9-ways-to-tame-anxiety-during-the-covid-19-pandemic>



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

7

Resilience during and beyond the pandemic

How to help your kids

Our society's parenting culture is set up to make sure our children are comfortable. Because of that, many children are ill-equipped to handle life's unexpected and unavoidable setbacks. We all possess the potential to grow as human beings when we are put in uncomfortable situations.

The pandemic is a teachable moment for our children.

- Showing them how to successfully adapt to stressful events can inoculate them when faced with future crises.
- Don't use catastrophizing terms when discussing the virus with them.
- Be honest about the uncertainty – it's OK to say you don't have all the answers.
- Teach them all emotions are normal; the trick is how you manage them. From this, children learn how to tolerate uncertainty and develop problem-solving strategies.



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

8

Resilience during and beyond the pandemic

How to help your kids con't

And the most critical: Model resiliency. Our children watch and hear what we do and say. The same behaviors we want to see in our children should be reflected in how you respond to stressful life events. Be calm, be consistent and remember – resilient kids become resilient adults.

As we continue to navigate uncharted waters, this is an opportunity to cultivate a stronger nation. By practicing strategies of resilience during the pandemic, we will be more prepared for the next inevitable crisis.

<https://theconversation.com/developing-resilience-is-an-important-tool-to-help-you-deal-with-coronavirus-and-the-surge-in-cases-140412>



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

9



Human beings are resilient

Human beings are astonishingly resilient and have prevailed over mass traumas and tragedies before – the COVID-19 pandemic will be no exception.

People have proved again and again that it's possible to forge on and even thrive during periods of turmoil and transition.

These coping strategies can help make sure you come out the other side of this pandemic with a good psychological outlook.

<https://theconversation.com/your-coping-and-resilience-strategies-might-need-to-shift-as-the-covid-19-crisis-continues-140507>

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

10

You've probably been doing this already ...

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/the-big-dry-the-impact-of-drought-on-children-and-families/>



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

11



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

12

IDENTIFYING ANXIETY

WHAT I'M THINKING

I can't do it.
I can't do it.
I can't do it.
I can't do it.
I can't do it.

WHAT I'M THINKING

What if my homework gets too hard?
What will I eat with all this?
What if I couldn't find all my stuff?
What if I got sick?

HOW I BEHAVE

Avoiding opportunities in class.
Trailing the bus goodbye, not understanding things even when over.
Not joining clubs or teams, not playing with other kids.
Refusing to go to school when no anxiety, socially, etc.
Responding to other questions by the teacher of doing.
Avoiding certain activities, people or events.

WHAT I FEEL IN MY BODY

Nausea, stomach
Headaches
Racing heart
Dizziness or light-headedness
Trembling or shivering
Nervous, tense, jittery, shaky
Tiredness

© 2019 WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

13

8 WAYS A CHILD'S ANXIETY SHOWS UP AS SOMETHING ELSE

- 1. Anger**
The perception of danger, stress or opposition is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.
- 2. Difficulty Sleeping**
In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.
- 3. Defiance**
Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child's defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.
- 4. Chandeliering**
Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.
- 5. Lack of Focus**
Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.
- 6. Avoidance**
Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.
- 7. Negativity**
People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.
- 8. Overplanning**
Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.

FOCUS

© 2019 WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

14

Core features of anxiety disorders

Avoidance is the core feature of anxiety disorders. This can include overt avoidance of specific situations, places, or stimuli, but it may also involve more subtle forms of avoidance such as hesitancy, uncertainty, withdrawal or ritualized actions.

The avoidance is generally accompanied by affective components of fearfulness, distress or shyness. Some children may have difficulty verbalizing these emotions.

Core features of anxiety disorders can't

Remember that anxiousness occurs due to an expectation that some dangerous or negative event is about to occur – i.e. an expectation of threat. This is important in understanding whether a child's behavior is related to a possible anxiety disorder.

Eg. *Two children don't want to go to school. One wants to have fun doing other things, whereas the other one has a worry about being teased by other children. The first child's response is not related to anxiety whereas the second child's response is motivated by a perceived (or real) fear or threat.*

Physical complaints, such as headaches, stomach aches, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and muscle tension, are common among anxious children. Many anxious children will also have difficulty with sleep.

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

15

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

16

Developmentally appropriate fears & worries



Even in the best of situations babies, toddlers and teenagers suffer from anxiety from time to time. Eg. Babies feel separation anxiety between 6-9 months.

Toddlers to middle childhood feel dread, apprehension fear or distress when faced with new situations, being separate from parents, taking tests, being frightened of the dark, dogs, monsters and ghosts.

As they grow older and continue to develop their cognitive capacity, they become more conscious of their peers. They can become more preoccupied with social acceptance, academic and physical performance.

All these fears are perfectly normal, they may need you more at those times. They can move on with these fears with no lasting effects.

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

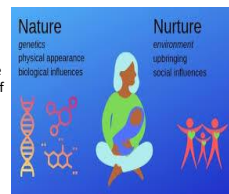
17

What leads to anxiety in children?

Experts believe anxiety disorders are caused by a combination of biological and environmental factors, similar to allergies and diabetes.

Stressful events such as starting school, moving, or the loss of a parent or grandparent can trigger the onset of an anxiety disorder, but stress itself does not cause an anxiety disorder.

Anxiety disorders tend to run in families, but not everyone who has one passes it on to their children. Neither you nor your child is at fault, and an anxiety disorder diagnosis is not a sign of weakness or poor parenting.



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

18

How common is anxiety in children and adolescents?

(2nd Child and Adolescent Mental Health Survey 2013)

- Almost one in seven (13.9%) 4-17 year-olds were assessed as having mental disorders in the previous 12 months. This is equivalent to 560,000 Australian children and adolescents.
- Males were more likely than females to have experienced mental disorders in the 12 months prior to the survey (16.3% compared with 11.5%).
- ADHD was the most common mental disorder in children and adolescents (7.4%), followed by anxiety disorders (6.9%), major depressive disorder (2.8%) and conduct disorder (2.1%).
- Based on these prevalence rates it is estimated that in the previous 12 months 298,000 Australian children and adolescents aged 4-17 years would have had ADHD, 278,000 had anxiety disorders, 112,000 had major depressive disorder and 83,600 had conduct disorder.

Figure 1: Prevalence of mental disorders in 4-17 year-olds in the past 12 months

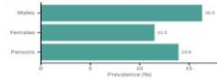
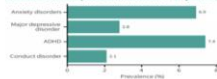


Figure 2: Prevalence of different types of mental disorders in the past 12 months in 4-17 year-olds



WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

19

Most common types of anxiety disorders in childhood and adolescence

Separation anxiety disorder – fear or concern that something bad will happen to the child or attachment figure (typically parent) when they are separated. As a result of this belief, the child avoids separation from the attachment figure. Can lead to dreams/nightmares about separation, refusal to face situations that involve separation (eg school, staying at friend's houses), worry about consequences of being separated like kidnapping or death, physical symptoms can occur when separation is anticipated).

WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

20

Most common types of anxiety disorders in childhood and adolescence

Generalised anxiety disorder – A tendency to worry about a wide range of negative possibilities, that something bad will happen (e.g. repeated and extensive worry about friendships, schoolwork, performance, family health, daily issues, repeatedly seek reassurance from parents and others about fears, avoidance of novelty or uncertain situations or making mistakes, physical symptoms, sleepless and irritability when worried).

Social phobia - Fear and avoidance of social interactions or social performance due to a belief that others will negatively evaluate the child. Can lead to avoidance of a range of social situations or activities, including speaking or performing in front of others, meeting new children, talking to authority figures such as teachers, being the centre of attention in any way; worries about negative evaluation from others including that others will think they are unattractive, stupid, unpleasant, overly confident, or odd; a limited number of friends and difficulty making new friends; high levels of self-consciousness or self-focused attention.



WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

21

WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

22

Specific phobias – Fear and avoidance in response to a range of specific cues, situations or objects, due to a belief that the object or situation will lead to personal harm. Examples include animals such as dogs or birds, insects or spiders; the dark; loud noises and especially storms; clowns, masks; blood, illness and injections.



- Trying to convince them that nothing bad is going to happen, that they'll be ok
- Trying to reassure them by overdetailing schedules or the exact nature of upcoming events
- Telling them everything will be fine if they just calm down
- Alter family's plans and social activities to accommodate their fear and keep them comfortable
- Excuse tantrums or outburst of anger as though they are an extension of the child's uncontrollable anxiety
- Allow them to see parents' own anxious behaviours without role modelling any coping strategies
- Becoming frustrated and angry and make unreasonable demands for them to "just do it"

What are unhelpful ways adults might respond to anxiety?



From "Anxious Kids, Anxious Parents" (2013) Wilson and Lyons (US psychologist, social worker)

WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

23

WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

24

What can parents and teachers do to help?

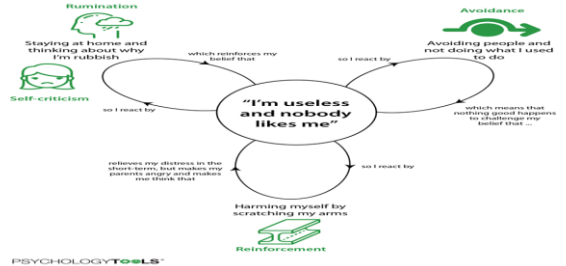
- Give it a name and explain the anxiety response, it does not need to be complicated, let them know it is a normal response.
- Remember that they may express anxiety in physical symptoms such as tummy aches, headaches, skin picking and pulling hair, so explain it may be about anxiety.
- Help the child by teaching them feeling words.
- Accept, empathise and validate the child's worries
- Listen to worries with full attention and gently help to them to distinguish between fact and fears.
- Teach them to breathe and mindfulness.
- <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/>
- Ask them what you can do to help them feel safe.



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

25

Context: Sally is 14. She has a younger brother who has a severe disability. Her parents are stressed and do not have much time for her.
Trigger: Sally got anxious while doing a presentation at school. This led to her getting teased. One person she thought was a friend joined in with the teasing and is now avoiding her.



PSYCHOLOGYTOOLS™

26

Learning about feelings and thoughts

- Draw a body map and help children identify areas in the body which are affected when they feeling worried.
- Help children name the feelings and identify when they occur.
- Use a worry scale like a thermometer to identify the different degrees of worry – say from 1 to 10. Let them know that everyone has some worries.



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

27

Fear Ladder Worksheet

Think of situations that you consistently worry about as being scary and uncomfortable. Rank the situations from 1 to 10 on the Fear Ladder. Think up other scenarios related to your fears for inclusion on your list. As this ladder grows taller, let it be built up your 'fearless' state. Start with things that are the least scary or anxiety-producing and work your way up. Remember, you aren't afraid of the situations until you are able to overcome your fear. Once you are able to do so, you can move on to the next level. You can't climb all the way up and never stop, you can't be afraid of anything forever.

Situations	Anxiety (0-10)
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

WISA

28

Learning to think realistically – The Detective Approach

Step 1: Child works out what they are worried about – focus on thoughts, not feelings – describe what the thought is that causes the anxious feeling e.g. I'm scared that Dad has been hurt.

Step 2: Child gathers as much evidence as possible about the worried thought. Get to play detective and try to work out how they might really know whether the thing they're afraid of will really happen.

Ask:

- What has happened before in this situation?
- What general things do I know about the situation?
- What else could happen in this situation?



Final step: Based on the evidence children have thought of, they'll be in a position to re-evaluate the worried thought hopefully realizing it isn't actually very likely and that a calm thought is more likely. It's about realistic thinking, not positive thinking.

WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

29

The BRAVE PROGRAM.

The BRAVE Program is an interactive, online program for the prevention and treatment of childhood and adolescent anxiety. The programs are free, and provide ways for children and teenagers to better cope with their worries. There are also programs for parents.

Select an option below to learn more about the program

LEARN MORE ABOUT
Child Program

FOR AGES 9-13

LEARN MORE ABOUT
Teen Program

FOR AGES 12-17

<https://bravedyou.psy.uq.edu.au/>

WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

30

Helping kids to calm down quickly

<https://copingkillsforkids.com/calming-anxiety>

- Imagine your favorite place - it's like taking a mini holiday wherever you are
- Think of your favorite things
- Name animals alphabetically (alligator, bear, cow, dog, etc...)
- Squeeze Something (play dough, clay, silly putty, your fists, a stress ball)
- Get a cold drink of Water
- 54321 Grounding - go through each of your 5 senses
- Give yourself a hug - squeeze tight!
- Remember the words to a song you love

5 4 3 2 1 Grounding Exercise

31

Questions to ask when seeking help from a mental health professional

- What training and experience do you have in treating anxiety disorders?
- Do you specialize in treating children? (If your child is a teenager, you may want to ask the age limit that your child can remain under this specialist's care.)
- What is your basic approach to treatment?
- How long is the course of treatment?
- How frequent are treatment sessions and how long do they last?
- Do you include family members in therapy?
- How will I know that my child is responding to the treatment and getting better?
- If my child does not respond to treatment, how will you decide when to change or modify the treatment?
- As my child ages, will any symptoms change? Will the response to treatment change?
- What should I explain to the school about my child's anxiety disorder?
- Will you coordinate my child's treatment with our family doctor or pediatrician?
- What is your fee schedule, and do you have a sliding scale for varying financial circumstances?

WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

33

Other helplines:

beyondblue www.beyondblue.org.au 1300 22 4636

beyondblue is a national organisation that has a range of information and resources associated with depression and anxiety. Useful resources and further information about beyondblue programmes are available on its website at www.beyondblue.org.au or by contacting its Support Service on 1300 22 4636 (toll free). The Support Service runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All calls are one-on-one with a trained mental health professional, and completely confidential.

Lifeline Australia www.lifeline.org.au 13 11 14

Lifeline Australia provides a free, confidential and anonymous, 24-hour telephone counselling service for adults needing emotional support. Lifeline Australia also has a range of information and resources available from their website, about providing care in times of crisis.

Mensline Australia www.mensline.org.au 1300 78 99 78

Mensline Australia provides a free, confidential and anonymous, 24-hour professional telephone counselling service for men needing emotional support or in crisis. Mensline also has a range of information and resources available from their website, about providing support and taking care of yourself, in times of crisis.

Suicide Callback Service 1300 659 467

The Suicide Callback Service is a free nation-wide telephone support service available to support people at risk of suicide and their carers, and is well suited to people who are geographically or emotionally isolated. The service can support callers through structured 50 minute telephone counselling sessions, scheduled according to the caller's needs. The Suicide Callback Service operates seven days a week.

WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

35

When should I seek more help?

- Your child (and you) are very distressed and what you've tried hasn't helped so far.
- The anxiety has been present for a couple of weeks and not related to something obvious that you are dealing with (e.g. family death)
- The anxiety is happening across many settings (e.g. school, home, with friends, during activities) – if it's in one setting you might be able to more easily work out what's going on.
- Your child wants to talk to a mental health professional.
- Your child is talking about hurting him or herself or wanting to die.
- The anxiety is impacting on your child's enjoyment of life, ability to learn, and getting along with others.
- Your child's sleeping and eating is becoming affected.



WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

32

If you're worried about your child's anxiety:



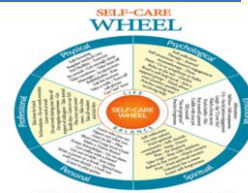
- School – check if there are concerns at school
- General Practitioner – rule out any physical concerns
- Psychologist - <https://www.psychology.org.au/Find-a-Psychologist>
- Head to Health - <https://headtohealth.gov.au/>

WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

34

Looking after yourself



WISA

WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

36

Resources:

Anxiety and fears in children: Raising Children Network:

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/health-daily-care/mental-health/generalised-anxiety>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/toddlers/health-daily-care/mental-health/anxiety-in-children>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/first-1000-days/looking-after-yourself/anxiety-tips-for-parents>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/pre-teens/mental-health-physical-health/stress-anxiety-depression/anxiety-disorders>

<https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/health-daily-care/mental-health/phobias-panic-attacks-pts>

Emerging Minds: <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/parent-guide-one-gathering-information-about-your-childs-experience-of-anxiety/>

Anxiety Disorders Association of America brochure:

<https://adaa.org/sites/default/files/Anxiety%20Disorders%20in%20Children.pdf>



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

37

Resources re: COVID

<https://theconversation.com/p-is-for-pandemic-kids-books-about-coronavirus-138299>

<https://www.apa.org/pubs/magination/kids-guide-coronavirus-ebook.pdf>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/09-04-2020-children-s-story-book-released-to-help-children-and-young-people-cope-with-covid-19>

"My Hero is You" is a book written for children around the world affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. "My Hero is You" should be read by a parent, caregiver or teacher alongside a child or a small group of children. It is not encouraged for children to read this book independently without the support of a parent, caregiver or teacher. The supplementary guide called "Actions for Heroes" (to be published later) offers support for addressing topics related to COVID-19, helping children manage feelings and emotions, as well as supplementary activities for children to do based on the book.



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

38

Thank You

Thank you for your participation today.

Contact details:

Jac 0423 823 145 Jac@wisawellbeing.com.au

Lyn O'Grady lynjogrady@gmail.com



WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

39