

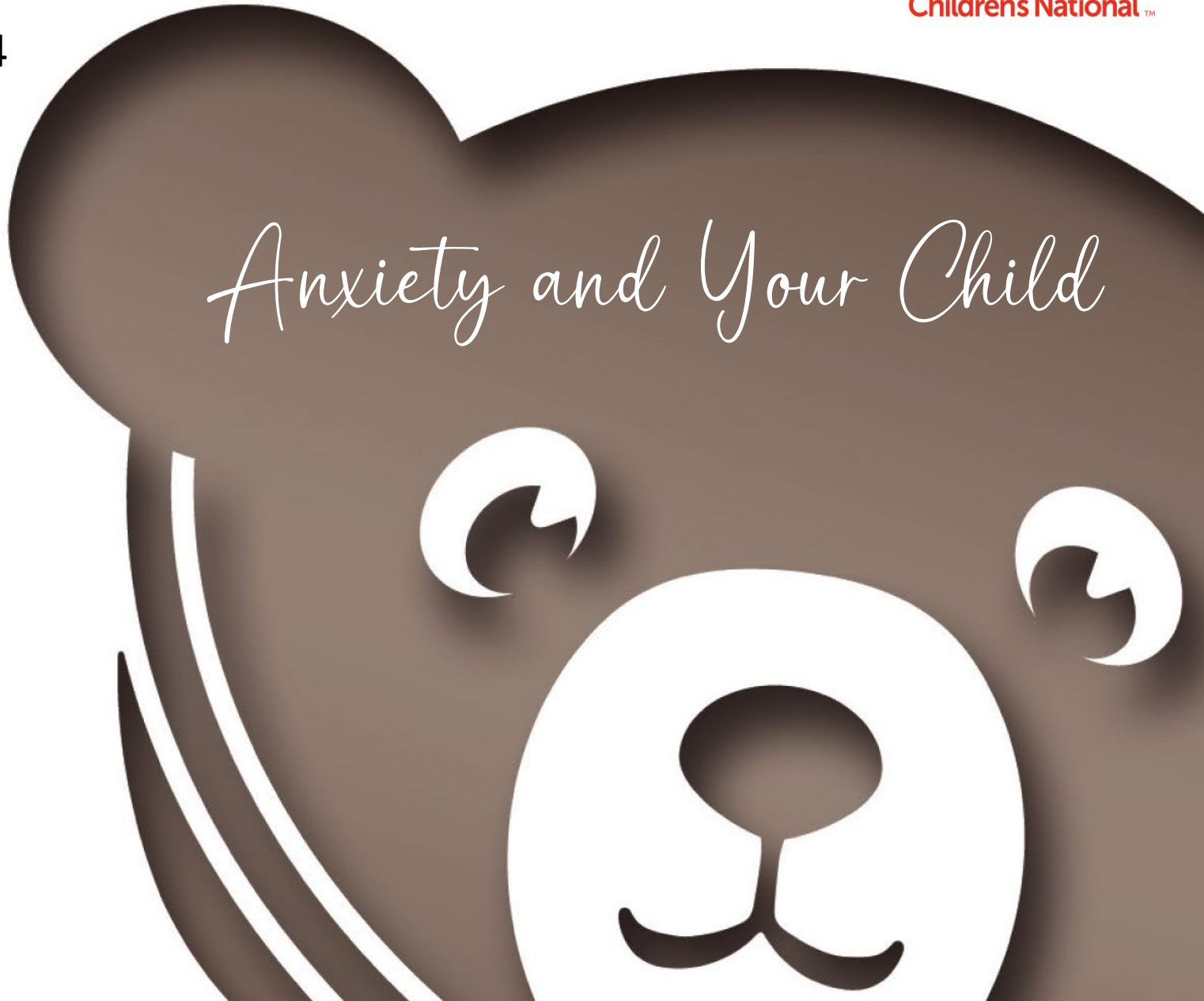
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Anxiety and Your Child



Disclosures

- I have no actual or potential conflict of interest in relation to this program/presentation.



Today's Agenda

What is anxiety?

How can I spot signs?

Management strategies.

What does 'facing fears' mean?

Time for questions.



Anxiety

Anxiety is a **normal response** to stressful experiences and situations in the environment.



Lion!! Run!



Oops. My bad.



Anxiety Equation

$$\textit{Anxiety} = \frac{\textit{Overestimation of Danger}}{\textit{Underestimation of Resources}}$$

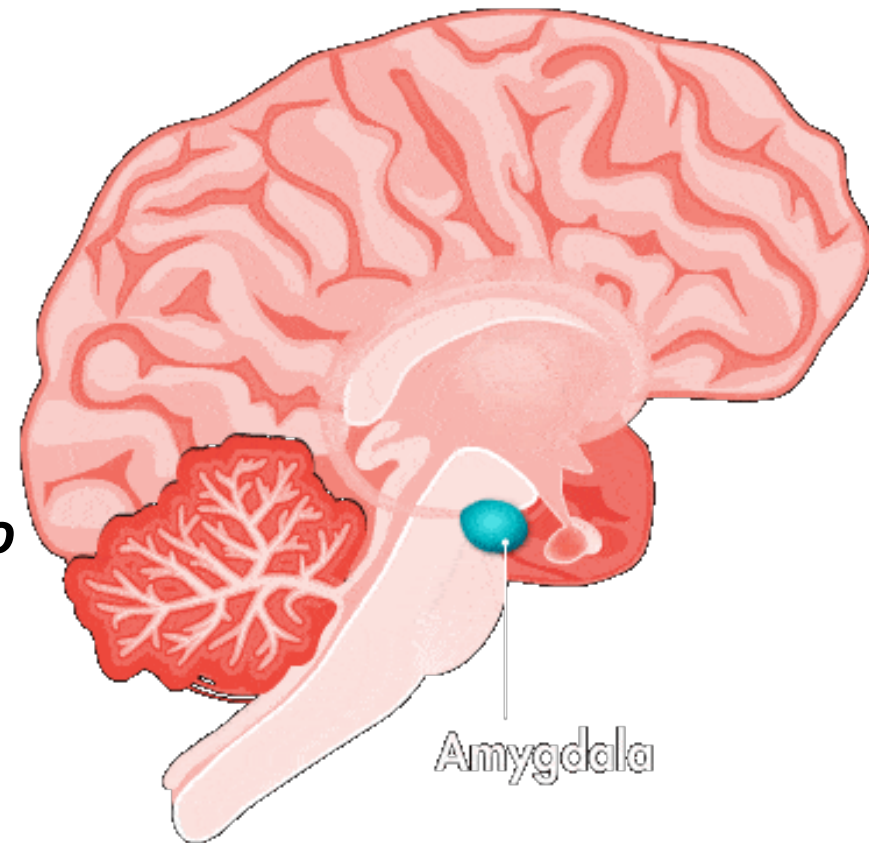


Understanding the Amygdala

Helps prepare you for action in emergency situations but can be a bit too sensitive for some kids

Hard to learn or understand when it's activated

Sample script: ***Worry is jumping to conclusions! The amygdala is taking over! We need smart brain to assess the situation. Let's look again!***



The what nervous system?

SYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM



PARASYMPATHETIC NERVOUS SYSTEM



Stress Response

Revs you up, preparing you to fight, take flight or freeze

- Heart beats fast
- Breath is fast and shallow
- Pupils of eyes expand (can make you sensitive to light)
- Gut becomes inactive (difficult to digest)
- Blood rushes to your skeletal muscles and away from your brain, making it hard to think clearly
- Hormones rush through your body, making you feel anxious
- Expend your energy

Relaxation Response

Calms you down, preparing you to rest, think and restore

- Heart beats in slow, rhythmic pattern
- Breath is full and slow
- Pupils of the eyes shrink
- Gut is active (helps you digest and absorb the nutrients from your food)
- Increased blood flow to gut, lungs and brain
- Hormones rush in, lifting your mood and helping you to relax
- Conserves your energy



What might anxiety look like in my child?

Physical Examples

Change in breathing, heart rate, sweating, shaking, crying, nausea, headache

Thinking/Action Examples

Unwanted worry thoughts

Seeking reassurance

Avoidance (“I’m fine!”)

Isolating



Anxious Thoughts

I have to be perfect!

What if I get a terrible grade?

What if I fail the whole semester?

*Discomfort is BAD and WRONG –
I have to feel comfortable!*

*This “FEELS” dangerous...that
means I should believe that it is!*

I can't handle this feeling.



Is it my parenting?

NO!

As a parent it's normal to protect your kids and provide reassurance.

The tricky part is making sure you are supporting and reassuring your child and **NOT** their anxiety.



Children's National™

Quiz: Answer yes or no to the following.

Your nine-year-old has been practicing for his piano recital for months. He's been so excited about it, yet on the day of the recital, he says that he feels ill. He doesn't have a fever, but he's complaining of not feeling well. Do you let him stay home? After all, he can't perform when sick.

You're walking with your seven-year-old and you see a small dog being walked up the block toward you. Do you cross to the other side of the street because you knows your daughter is afraid of dogs?

Your teenager says no to every party his classmates invite him to. When you question him, he says he doesn't want to go because his "whole grade drinks and does drugs." Are you thrilled that he's making good choices, so you don't question him further?

Quiz: Answer yes or no to the following.

Your twelve-year-old is consistently having trouble with her math homework. You've helped her as much as you can, but when you suggest that she speak to the teacher, she says that she'd rather you help her. Are you happy that you have such a good relationship that she's coming to you for help?

Your kindergartener has been invited to a few drop-off birthday parties, but you always go, too. After all, that's the only way to make sure she stays safe.

While watching the news, your thirteen-year-old gets very upset about what she's seeing. You quickly change that channel. After all, she's too young to be worried about this sort of stuff.

Anxious Thoughts and Parents

Kids and teens with anxiety often look to parents to provide:

- Reassurance
- Accommodations



Pro Tip:
Reassure
your child
that they
CAN sit
with their
emotions.



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

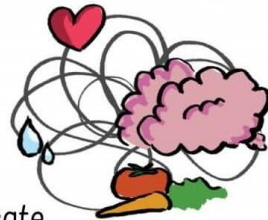
1. Anger

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.

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.



Anxiety Across Development

Most children have worries and fears, particularly at certain developmental stages, which should **NOT** be viewed as problem!



When is anxiety a *problem*?



Daily activities
(dressing, self-care,
eating, sleep)

Academic
achievement

Social interactions

School refusal and
avoidance

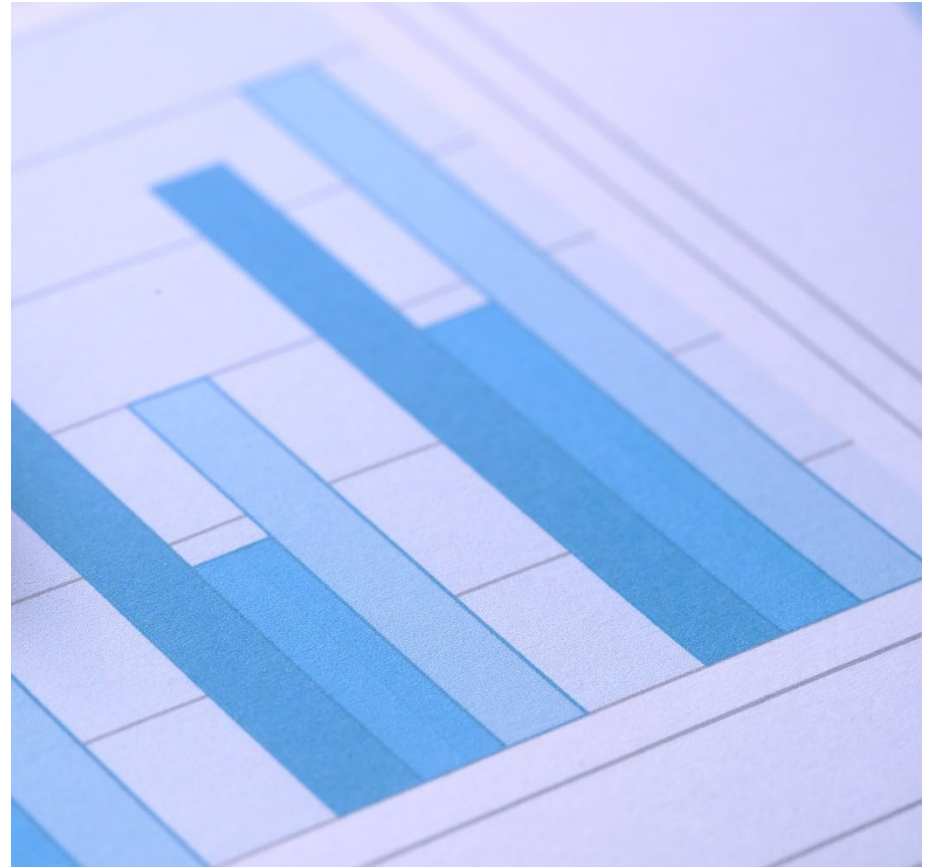
Mood shifts



How many kids have an anxiety disorder?

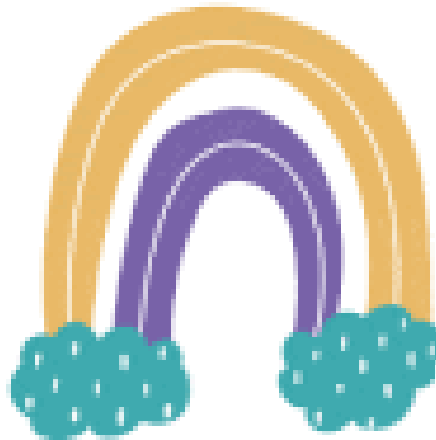
The NIH estimates that 31.9% of teens aged 13-18 are affected by anxiety

A 2021 study in JAMA estimates levels doubled from 11.6% for children and teens pre COVID-19 to 19%



Management Strategies

Take a breath



Toolbox

Strategies to help manage emotions and thoughts:

- Deep breathing
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Mindfulness
- Practicing emotion-regulation
- Thought challenging
- Pleasant events/distraction
- Balancing social media intake
- Facing fears



Toolbox



Belly Breathing

Diaphragmatic Breathing



1. Stand, sit or lie down comfortably in a quiet place.



2. Close your eyes and loosen any tense muscles. Make sure to relax your shoulders.



3. Place one hand on your upper chest and another on your belly button.



4. Breathe in slowly through your nose for *three seconds*. Feel your stomach expand. Your chest should remain still.



5. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for *three seconds*. Feel your stomach move back.



6. Repeat steps 4 and 5. Gradually increase the time you take to breathe in and out.

Four seconds in and four seconds out, five seconds in and five seconds out.....

Toolbox Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Squeeze & Release



Squeeze oranges



Go into your
turtle shell



Show off your
muscles



Scrunch your face



Bury your toes
in the sand



Pull your legs up
like a puppet

Mindfulness Bingo

T
O
O
I
b
O
X

find
something
smooth

find a
flower that
smells good

find
something
hard

notice the
color of the
sky

find
something
that is your
favorite
color

make
someone
laugh

listen to a
song you
love

help a
family
member

give
someone a
compliment

find
something
soft

feel the
grass under
your feet

find
something
bumpy



Facing Fears, Bravery Missions, or Exposures

Anxiety wants all the answers or pushes us to avoid uncomfortable things.

This works in the *short term*, but long term keeps us from learning we can face those fears.



Goal is NOT to eliminate anxiety, but to help your child learn they can tolerate it!

Facing Fears, Bravery Missions, or Exposures

Planned practices can help teach your child they can handle the discomfort of facing fears.

Rewards for practices are helpful for a lot of kids/teens.

Example missions:

- Social worries → order own food at restaurant
- Knowing plans → go on a drive to a place that will be revealed at destination



Facing Fears

Exposures

- Most effective when step by step, long enough, and repeated



Watch out for these traps!

- Lecturing with logic
 - *“Well, there’s only a 1/1000 chance that’ll happen.”*
- Simplifying
 - *“This is easy! You’ve done it before.”*
- Demanding
 - *“See, you did it. Now you can do it next time!”*
 - *“Just do it! This is taking too long!”*
- Protecting
 - *“You’re scared. You don’t have to do it!”*

So how can I help?

Use validating statements (accept):

"It makes a lot of sense you feel so stressed about this."

"That's a big worry thought. Let's work together to explore it and figure out how to talk back."

"You have been so brave. I'm proud of you for sitting with this feeling and I know you can do it."

Ask your child what you can offer (confidence):

"Would it be helpful to talk more about these feelings?"

"What support can I provide?"

Please remember...

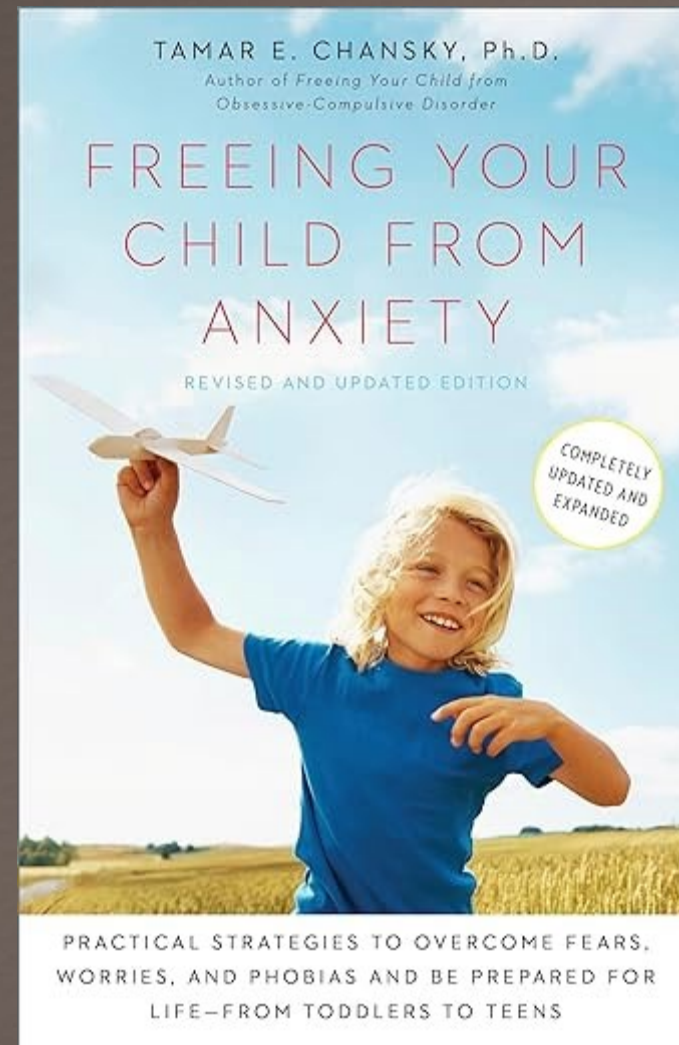
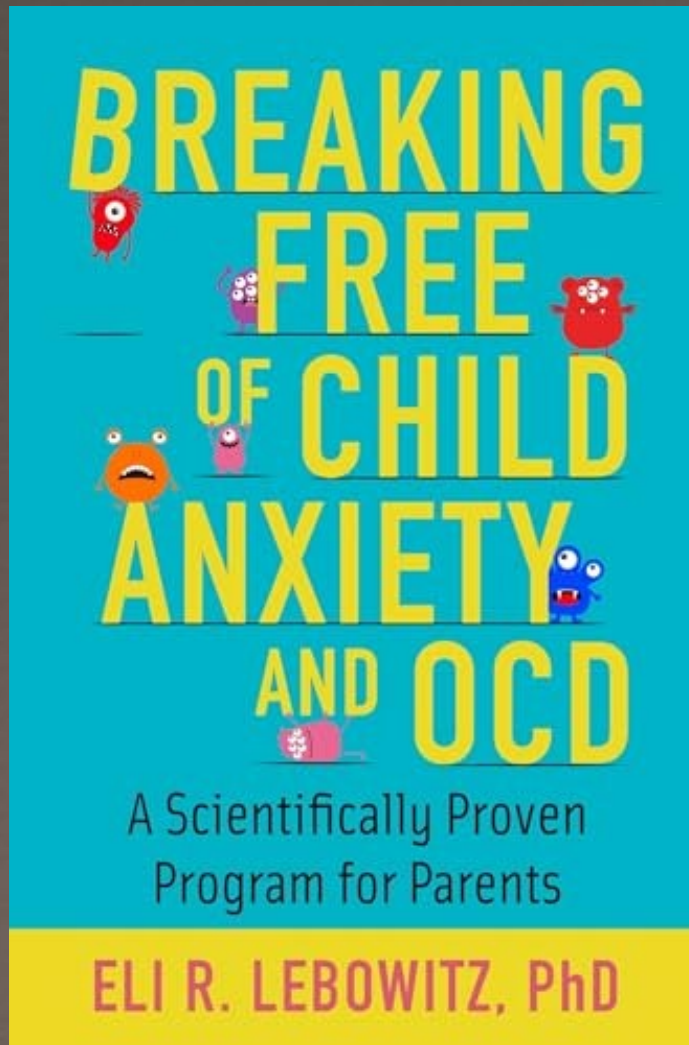
You **CANNOT** “fix” your child because they are **NOT** broken. All emotions are **NORMAL**. Sometimes kids (adults too!) just need help balancing big feelings.



Resources

- **Insight Timer App**
- **Calm App**
- **Headspace App**
- **YouTube videos**

Resources



What if I think my child needs more support?

Referral to behavioral health provider who can:

- Complete an initial intake evaluation with the family
- Provide therapy treatment plan (CBT/ERP; SPACE; DBT; parent management training; PCIT, etc)
- Teach stress management strategies to use at home

Referral to psychiatrist who can:

- Complete an initial intake evaluation with the family
- Manage appropriate medications such as SSRIs

Thank you!

