

Worried all the time: Parenting in an age of anxiety

Learning about Learning ~ February 8, 2019

Defining Anxiety:

A method of seeking two experiences: certainty and comfort.
Problematic when we want these immediately and continually.

Fear can protect us - the fight, flight, or freeze response kicks in when we feel threatened or afraid.

Old Message: "Worry is powerful complex, and bad. Get rid of it."

New Message: "Worry is a powerful part of me that protects me when needed."

Anxiety disorders affect one in eight children.

What's making the kids so fearful?

Overexposure to Media – convincing us of greater risk than in actuality

Overscheduling – of parents and of children

Anxious Temperaments – from nature and nurture

Unresolved issues in parents' lives - projecting fears onto children

Safety of the Current Culture: "American youth are probably the safest, best-nurtured generation in human history." David Anderegg

How will I know if my child is excessively anxious?

- Pessimism and negative thinking patterns such as imagining the worst
- Anger, aggression, restlessness, irritability
- Physical complaints such as stomachaches, headaches, fatigue, etc.
- Rigidity and inflexibility
- Avoiding things or places
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep, nightmares
- Noticeable sneakiness or lying
- Perfectionism
- Procrastination

Ways to keep children from unnecessary worry:

- Maintain routines and structure
- Talk about their feelings – name them
- Do not avoid anxiety-provoking situations
- Model healthy responses
- Foster a growth mindset about worries
- Encourage healthy sleep, exercise, and eating habits
- Teach problem-solving strategies – but don't "fix"
- Teach them to hide God's word in their hearts

Ways to help our children once they are anxious:

- Acknowledge and don't dismiss the feeling
- Lead them in relaxation exercise like breathing and visualization
- Use humor to lighten up distressing situations
- Promote self-awareness - name the feeling
- Sooth and comfort but don't enable
- Encourage/reward brave behavior
- Talk them through problem solving
- Remind them of God's promises they know

Some things never change: Maslow's *Hierarchy of Needs*

Cardinal rules of parenting apply no matter what: pay attention, ask questions, show empathy, accommodate temperaments, be present, be consistent

Keeping your own anxiety in check by:

- Keeping a reasonable schedule and set of expectations.
- Keeping a growth mindset about how you handle anxiety.
- Keeping a sense of humor.
- Maintaining robust faith.

Talk as a family about what this verse means: Philippians 4:6-7

Be anxious for NOTHING but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.