



Lakeview Beacon

Helping People Find Solutions

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Lakeview Counseling

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Anxiety in Children and Teens

Janet Hughes, MSW, ACSW

Anxiety seems to be more and more common in our children. The different ways it manifests itself makes it difficult to identify. Children with anxiety may seem more stubborn, difficult, or set in their ways. Some students get anxious over homework, tests or oral presentations. Another student may appear extremely shy. Anxiety can also look like ADD, because it causes students to have difficulty concentrating. Students can also act hyperactive when they are nervous. Some students may have difficulty eating in front of others or being in a crowded room or cafeteria. After a long break or illness, a student may find it difficult to return to school. They may find themselves worrying something bad is going to happen. These students feel overwhelmed and out of control.

One tendency for adults is to try and push the child or teen into the avoided behavior. It does not help when other parents say, "you just need to make them do it". However, for anxiety, that technique makes it worse. The child will just totally melt down while being overwhelmed with uncomfortable feelings. On the other hand the more they avoid, the worse it gets. So what can you do? Here are some tips that will ease the way.

1. For new transitions, help your child acclimate as much as possible. Before starting a new school, take them there and let them hang out or try the playground. Have them find their new classes before school starts. Walk through the cafeteria and see where to get food and where to pay. Have them visit every day for an hour the week before school starts. Let them bring a friend. If they do not want to go to school be aware that every day they miss school makes it twice as hard to attend after that. The more an anxious student can avoid something, the worse it will become.
2. If you cannot get your child to attend school ask for help from the school nurse, social worker, administrator, school counselor, or a private therapist.
3. Anxiety calls for the **carrot versus the stick approach**. Use encouragement and rewards versus threats and punishments. A combination of incentives and consequences can work well. Such as, incentives for grades or attendance, along with loss of privileges for failing marks.
4. Anxiety is very treatable. The earlier the better. The most effective treatment currently is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), a short term therapy where the individual learns relaxation techniques, how to recognize the thought that is causing them stress, and how to fight back the irrational thoughts.
5. Medication can be used if necessary, but it is only effective long term if it is used with CBT. Exercise can be very helpful with anxiety and depression.

GREAT BOOKS

Helping Your Anxious Child by Rapee

You and Your Anxious Child by Albano

Freeing Your Child from Anxiety by: Chansky

BOOKS FOR KIDS

What to Do When you Worry Too Much by: Huebner

WEBSITES

worrywisekids.org
lynnlyonsnh.com



When anxious,
try a slow deep
breath.

CALMING APPS

*SAM

*pranayama

*calm

*sleep meditators
for kids

*headspace

Helping Your Child Make a Smooth Transition From High School to College

Laura Slaughter, MSW, ACSW

You have been helping your child develop the skills for independence since they were very young. If your child is now a college student, you may be proud to see them using these skills to maneuver this very significant rite of passage. You may also be worried, however, about their ability to cope with the new and very challenging responsibilities and pressures that college presents. Although you are no longer with them on a daily basis, you still have a very important role in their successful adjustment to college life.

It can be both heartbreaking and frustrating when your child expresses that they are homesick, lonely, anxious, and that they want to come home every possible weekend. The caretaker part of you may want to make everything better for your child, and immediately say “of course, you can come home whenever you want”. While occasional visits home can be comforting, too much time at home may validate for your student that home really is the only place that they can be comfortable, and may reinforce their fear that they truly cannot cope with being on their own at college.

While it may be helpful to visit them, or bring them home occasionally, there are additional ways that you can offer your child comfort, while at the same time helping them to develop confidence in their own capabilities. Focusing on your student’s coping and problem solving abilities may be more helpful than rushing in to “save” them. Try to remember that what sounds like a crisis from afar, may change in a matter of minutes or days.

Encourage your student to make personal connections with roommates, Resident Hall Advisors, Professors, or the Counseling Department to support them in their adjustment to being on their own. There are also many clubs and activities to explore that can help them feel more a part of their environment.



Try to calm your own fears and anxieties about your child's struggles. While he or she does need your empathy and understanding, your anxiety may cause them to feel less confident in their own abilities. Remind them of their strengths, and all of the prior challenges that they have met in the past.



Schedule times to call, skype or face time your student. Let them function independently through most of their day, knowing that they can look forward to contacting you after they have met most of their responsibilities. Eventually they will realize that they are coping well on their own.

Encourage your student to make a schedule, or a list of fun or comforting things to do between or after classes. Contacting friends, going for a walk or working out, finding a "safe haven" to have coffee and do homework, can help them build structure in their free time, which is often when anxiety can be most overwhelming.



Your student will have many challenges in his or her first year of college. Perhaps the biggest challenge for most of us as parents, is to develop the ability to relinquish control of our child's life. Learning to withhold advice or reminders takes effort, but your child's independence will be achieved by practicing how to think for themselves, and take responsibility for their own actions. Hopefully along the way we will be able to let go of our anxiety and celebrate that the love and guidance we have provided has been sufficient, and we can now enjoy watching the wonderful adults our children are becoming.

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Please feel free to make copies of your Lakeview Beacon

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ON THE WEB!

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Resources

"The Connected Parent" Staying Close To Your Kids in College (and beyond) While Letting Them Grow Up, Barbara K. Hofer, Ph.D. and Abigail Sullivan Moore

"Don't Tell Me What To Do, Just Send Money", Helen Johnson and Christine Schelhas-Miller

"You're on Your Own (But I'm Here if You Need Me)" Mentoring Your Child Through the College Years, Marjorie Savage

"The Naked Roommate: And 107 Other Issues You Might Run Into in College" Harlan Cohen

"The Naked Roommate: For Parents Only: A Parent's Guide to the New College Experience: Calling, Not Calling, Packing, Preparing, Problems, Roommates, ...Matters When Your Child Goes to College", Harlan Cohen

UniversityChic.com - Website to help young women succeed in college and beyond.

www.aboutourkids.org - "Making the Transition to College - A Guide for Parents"

www.ncid.org - *"Checklist for Transitioning from High School to College" (PDF)*

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