



# Assessment and Diagnosis of Anxiety in Children and Teens

Project Teach

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# Disclosures

Neither I nor my spouse/partner has a relevant financial relationship with a commercial interest to disclose.

# What is anxiety?

- Feeling of apprehension, unease and worry
- Anticipation of danger
- Normal
- Adaptive
- Temporary

# What is an anxiety disorder?

- Higher frequency and intensity of symptoms
- Impairment of function
- Persistent (> 6 months)

# Anxiety is not a great term

- Home sickness (separation)
- “Worry Wart” (generalized)
- Shy or self-conscious (social)
- Dread
- Stressed out
- Fear
- Very Sensitive or gets hurt easily

# Why should we screen for anxiety?

- High Prevalence
- High Morbidity
- Low detection
- Highly treatable

# Prevalence

- Lifetime estimates of 8 - 20%
  - Up to 8% of all children and adolescents
  - Estimates since pandemic suggest doubled prevalence (20%), particularly adolescent females
- 50% onset < 14 years
- 75% onset < 24 years



# Morbidity

- Somatic symptoms (CNS, GI)
- Impairments in function
- Impacts entire family
- Alteration of normal childhood development

# Low Detection Rate

- In primary care, fewer than 25% of cases are diagnosed
- Less than 50% get treatment
- Routine screening destigmatizes mental health problems

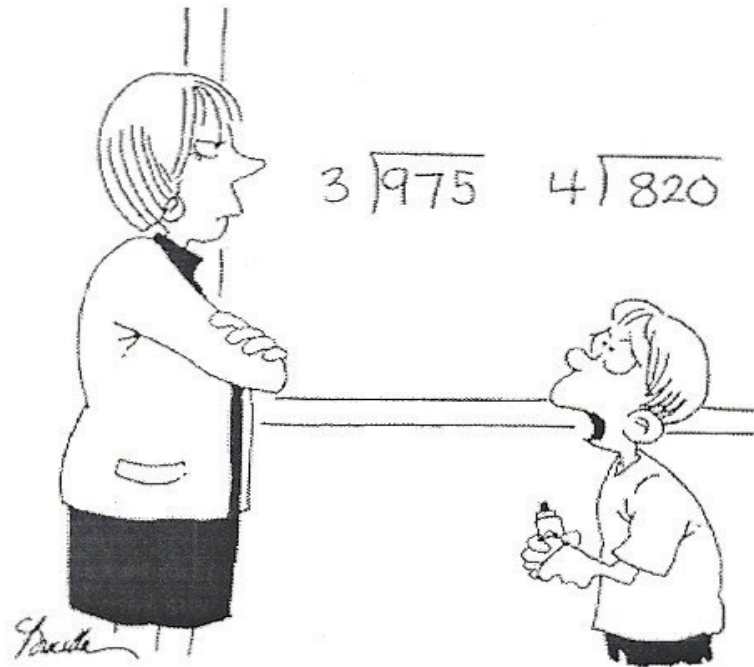
# Highly treatable

# What are the Common Pediatric Anxiety Disorders?

- Separation Anxiety Disorder
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder
- Social Anxiety Disorder

# When do anxious kids present?

- ASD's – 0 to 3 years or later for mild
- ADHD – 4 to 7 or later for mild, but differential is broader
- **Anxiety – 6 to 12 years**
- Depression – 13 to 16 years
- Bipolar and Psychosis - >16 years
- **Panic Disorder – 16 to 25 years**
- Disruptive Behavior Disorders – almost anytime



"IS THERE SOME PLACE I CAN SIGN UP FOR  
A 'DO NOT CALL ON ME' LIST?"

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# Somatic Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders

- Headache, shaky, tingling, sweating (CNS)
- Abdominal pain, nausea, swallowing problems (GI)
- Shortness of breath, chest pain (respiratory)
- Heart racing, palpitations (cardiac)
- Fatigue

# Behavioral Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders

- Sleep problems
- Avoidance – outside and interpersonal activities
- Appetite problems – over and under
- Crying/ meltdowns
- Explosive outbursts
- Inattention and poor school performance
- Rigidity
- Excessive need for reassurance



# Aggression

- A lot of childhood aggression is caused by anxiety
- Aggression comes when kids are faced with what makes them anxious
- Often works to get them out of whatever is making them anxious
- Often kids won't voice that anxiety

# Differential Diagnosis

- Medical
- Psychiatric
- Substance
- Other

# Medical Issues that may Mimic Anxiety

- Cardiac arrhythmia
- Asthma
- Migraine
- Poisoning / Lead intoxication
- Hyperthyroidism
- Seizure Disorders

# Psychiatric Disorders that may Mimic Anxiety

- ADHD
- Psychotic Disorders
- Learning Disabilities
- Depression
- Bipolar Disorder
- Autism Spectrum Disorders

# Substances that may Mimic Anxiety

- Prescribed
  - Albuterol, steroids, SSRI's, antipsychotics
- Legal
  - Caffeine – carbonated beverages and energy drinks
  - OTC medications – cold medications, diet pills, antihistamines
  - Nicotine
- Illegal
  - Substance intoxication and/or withdrawal

# Other Considerations

- Abuse
- Bullying
- Threatening Environment
- Trauma

# Assessment: Not Done in a Day!

- History of chief complaint
- Developmental history and considerations
- Family History
- Impairments of function (academic, sleep, social, family) \*\*
- Medications (especially OTC and supplements)
- Physical exam (growth chart, vital signs, neurologic)
- Labs

# Assessment: Environment

- Parenting style
  - Overprotective/ over controlling style
- Stressful life events both acute and chronic
  - Divorce, family member illness or trauma
- Modeling Observed Behaviors
- Family History
- Directionality of the interaction is unclear
- May be partially mediated by genetic influences



# Interview the Child and Parent Separately

# Screening Approaches

- Anxious temperament - anticipatory guidance/education
- Look for nonverbal cues
- Symptomatic children
  - Standardized assessment tools
  - PSC 17
  - SCARED
  - GAD-7

# Pediatric Symptom Checklist (PSC-17)

- Psychosocial symptom checklist
- Screen-in or screen-out
- Parent Version: ages 4-16
- Youth Version: ages 9-16

### Pediatric Symptom Checklist 17 (PSC-17)

Emotional and physical health go together in children. Because parents are often the first to notice a problem with their child's behavior, emotions, or learning, you may help your child get the best care possible by answering these questions. Please indicate which statement best describes your child.

Please mark under the heading that best describes your child:

|   | Never | Sometimes | Often |
|---|-------|-----------|-------|
| ◆ Fidgety, unable to sit still                  | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ■ Feels sad, unhappy                            | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ◆ Daydreams too much                            | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ● Refuses to share                              | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ● Does not understand other people's feelings   | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ■ Feels hopeless                                | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ◆ Has trouble concentrating                     | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ● Fights with other children                    | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ■ Is down on him or her self                    | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ● Blames others for his or her troubles         | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ■ Seems to have less fun                        | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ● Does not listen to rules                      | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ◆ Acts as if driven by a motor                  | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ● Teases others                                 | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ■ Worries a lot                                 | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ● Takes things that do not belong to him or her | 0     | 1         | 2     |
| ◆ Distracted easily                             | 0     | 1         | 2     |

Only takes 5 minutes to complete the form!

# Scoring the PSC-17

- Total Score: greater or equal to 15 = +
- Subscale Score
  - Internalizing (squares): greater or equal to 5 = +
  - Externalizing (circles): greater or equal to 7 = +
  - Attention (diamonds): greater or equal to 7 = +

# Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders (SCARED)

- Anxiety specific screening tool
- Parent and child versions
- Available in Spanish
- 41 questions
- Ages 8-18
- Identifies specific anxiety disorders

|   | 0<br>Not True or<br>Hardly<br>Ever True | 1<br>Somewhat<br>True or<br>Sometimes<br>True | 2<br>Very True<br>or Often<br>True |
|---|---|---|------------------------------------|
| 1. When my child feels frightened, it is hard for him/her to breathe.         | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 2. My child gets headaches when he/she is at school.                          | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 3. My child doesn't like to be with people he/she doesn't know well.          | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 4. My child gets scared if he/she sleeps away from home.                      | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 5. My child worries about other people liking him/her.                        | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 6. When my child gets frightened, he/she feels like passing out.              | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 7. My child is nervous.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 8. My child follows me wherever I go.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 9. People tell me that my child looks nervous.                                | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 10. My child feels nervous with people he/she doesn't know well.              | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 11. My child gets stomachaches at school.                                     | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 12. When my child gets frightened, he/she feels like he/she is going crazy.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 13. My child worries about sleeping alone.                                    | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 14. My child worries about being as good as other kids.                       | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 15. When he/she gets frightened, he/she feels like things are not real.       | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 16. My child has nightmares about something bad happening to his/her parents. | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 17. My child worries about going to school.                                   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 18. When my child gets frightened, his/her heart beats fast.                  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 19. He/she gets shaky.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 20. My child has nightmares about something bad happening to him/her.         | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |

Only takes 10  
minutes to  
complete the  
form!

|  | 0<br>Not True or<br>Hardly<br>Ever True | 1<br>Somewhat<br>True or<br>Sometimes<br>True | 2<br>Very True<br>or Often<br>True |
|--|---|---|------------------------------------|
| 21. My child worries about things working out for him/her.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 22. When my child gets frightened, he/she sweats a lot.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 23. My child is a worrier.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 24. My child gets really frightened for no reason at all.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 25. My child is afraid to be alone in the house.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 26. It is hard for my child to talk with people he/she doesn't know well.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 27. When my child gets frightened, he/she feels like he/she is choking.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 28. People tell me that my child worries too much.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 29. My child doesn't like to be away from his/her family.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 30. My child is afraid of having anxiety (or panic) attacks.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 31. My child worries that something bad might happen to his/her parents.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 32. My child feels shy with people he/she doesn't know well.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 33. My child worries about what is going to happen in the future.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 34. When my child gets frightened, he/she feels like throwing up.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 35. My child worries about how well he/she does things.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 36. My child is scared to go to school.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 37. My child worries about things that have already happened.  | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 38. When my child gets frightened, he/she feels dizzy.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 39. My child feels nervous when he/she is with other children or adults and he/she has to do something while they watch him/her (for example: read aloud, speak, play a game, play a sport.) | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 40. My child feels nervous when he/she is going to parties, dances, or any place where there will be people that he/she doesn't know well.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |
| 41. My child is shy.   | <input type="radio"/>                   | <input type="radio"/>                         | <input type="radio"/>              |



# Scoring the SCARED

- Total score: greater than 25 = +;
- $\geq 30$  more sturdy
- Subscales differentiate types of anxiety

# Summary

- Anxiety disorders are common in children and teens
- Screening tools aid in assessment
- Anxiety is a pediatric disease with long lasting impact and so early identification and intervention should be our goal