The Covid 19 Pandemic: What about School and Learning?

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

• I have no financial relationships with any pharmaceutical company, never did.
• Medications discussed today will include some off-label uses.
• I receive salary support from the “Project Teach” grant, which is funded by taxpayers and the NYS Office of Mental Health
Dramatic school problems increased by the pandemic

- “Red Zone” Meltdowns (often at home)
- School Refusal and Absenteeism
- Depressed Mood, Suicidal Ideation, Threats and Gestures
quiet school problems increased by the pandemic

- Social isolation and anxiety, depressed mood and behavioral regression
- Reduced Rate of Learning and a worsening of the Learning Gap unless parents can teach and technology is effective
The RED ZONE of Emotional Reactivity

1. Baseline
2. Triggers
3. Up ramp
4. Plateau
5. Down ramp
The Limbic System:
The Volcano of Raw Emotions

Emotional Life, Behavior, Passion, Motivation, Arousal, Smell, Adrenaline, Long Term Memories
The Cerebral Cortex
The Self Control Place

Planning, Reasoning, Decision making, Problem Solving, Judgment, Impulse Control, Memory and Voluntary Movement
The 25-30 Year Old Brain
Let’s Look at Anxiety symptoms

- Physical Concerns
- Separation Issues
- Social Concerns
- Fearful Thinking
The Spectrum of Anxiety

- The Anxiety in all of us 100%
- Anxious temperament 20%
- Anxiety Disorders 8-10% usually, 15-25% at this point in pandemic
Anxiety Screening Tool
Screen for Anxiety Related Disorders SCARED

- Anxiety symptoms are often easier to disclose in writing than in person
- It is difficult to think clearly when anxious so having items listed can help
- Child report and Parent report
**Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders (SCARED)**

**Child Version—Pg. 1 of 2 (To be filled out by the CHILD)**

### Directions:
Below is a list of sentences that describe how people feel. Read each phrase and decide if it is “Not True or Hardly Ever True” or “Somewhat True or Sometimes True” or “Very True or Often True” for you. Then for each sentence, fill in one circle that corresponds to the response that seems to describe you for the last 3 months.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>0 Not True or Hardly Ever True</th>
<th>1 Somewhat True or Sometimes True</th>
<th>2 Very True or Often True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. When I feel frightened, it is hard to breathe.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I get headaches when I am at school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. I don’t like to be with people I don’t know well.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. I get scared if I sleep away from home.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. I worry about other people liking me.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. When I get frightened, I feel like passing out.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I am nervous.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. I follow my mother or father wherever they go.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. People tell me that I look nervous.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I feel nervous with people I don’t know well.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. I get stomachaches at school.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. When I get frightened, I feel like I am going crazy.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I worry about sleeping alone.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I worry about being as good as other kids.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. When I get frightened, I feel like things are not real.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I have nightmares about something bad happening to my parents.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. I worry about going to school.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. When I get frightened, my heart beats fast.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I get shaky.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I have nightmares about something bad happening to me.</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Screen for Child Anxiety Related Disorders (SCARED)

*Child Version—Pg. 2 of 2 (To be filled out by the CHILD)*

**Total Score = 34**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>0 Not True or Hardly Ever True</th>
<th>1 Somewhat True or Sometimes True</th>
<th>2 Very True or Often True</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>I worry about things working out for me.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>When I get frightened, I sweat a lot.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>I am a worrier.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>I get really frightened for no reason at all.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>I am afraid to be alone in the house.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.</td>
<td>It is hard for me to talk with people I don’t know well.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>When I get frightened, I feel like I am choking.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.</td>
<td>People tell me that I worry too much.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>I don’t like to be away from my family.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>I am afraid of having anxiety (or panic) attacks.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.</td>
<td>I worry that something bad might happen to my parents.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32.</td>
<td>I feel shy with people I don’t know well.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.</td>
<td>I worry about what is going to happen in the future.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34.</td>
<td>When I get frightened, I feel like throwing up.</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35.</td>
<td>I worry about how well I do things.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36.</td>
<td>I am scared to go to school.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.</td>
<td>I worry about things that have already happened.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38.</td>
<td>When I get frightened, I feel dizzy.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39.</td>
<td>I feel nervous when I am with other children or adults and I have to do something while they watch me (for example: read aloud, speak, play a game, play a sport.)</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40.</td>
<td>I feel nervous when I am going to parties, dances, or any place where there will be people that I don’t know well.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41.</td>
<td>I am shy.</td>
<td>☑</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SCORING:**

A total score of 25 or greater may indicate the presence of an Anxiety Disorder. Scores higher than 30 are more specific.

A score of 7 for items 1, 6, 9, 12, 15, 18, 19, 22, 24, 27, 30, 34, 38 may indicate Panic Disorder or Significant Somatic Symptoms.

A score of 9 for items 5, 7, 14, 21, 23, 28, 33, 35, 37 may indicate Generalized Anxiety Disorder.

A score of 5 for items 4, 8, 13, 16, 20, 25, 29, 31 may indicate Separation Anxiety Disorder.

A score of 8 for items 3, 10, 26, 32, 39, 40, 41 may indicate Social Anxiety Disorder.

A score of 3 for items 2, 11, 17, 36 may indicate Significant School Avoidance.

*For children ages 8 to 11, it is recommended that the clinician explain all questions, or have the child answer the questionnaire sitting with an adult in case they have any questions.

Developed by Boris Barlow, M.D., Susan Khetarpal, M.D., Marcie Cully, M.Ed., David Beut M.D., and Sanda McKenzie, Ph.D., Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, University of Pittsburgh (1995). E-mail: burmaherb@wpiw.upmc.edu
Anxious Temperament 20%

- Shy
- Fearful reaction to most novelty and change
- Tending towards withdrawal
- More rapid resting pulse
- More tension in throat

- Increased risk of many diagnoses
- Increase incidence of all anxiety diagnoses
- The approach taken by adults can modulate
Anxiety Disorders (8%)

- Chronic pattern of distress and impairment
- Body Signals of Anxiety (stomach pain, headache, other chronic pain)
- Thought Distortions (Automatic Negative Thoughts)
- Social Anxiety and avoidance (cold swimming pool)
- Separation problems (more common in early childhood)
How about depression: Is a Depressed Mood always a sign of a Major Depression?

- Adjustment Disorder with Depressed Mood
- Grief and bereavement
- Persistent Depression (dysthymia)
- Major Depressive Disorder

- Triggering incident?
- Duration since onset
- Severity of distress and impairment
- DSM Criteria (PHQ 9)
PHQ9 — Over the last two weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

- Little interest or pleasure in doing things?
- Feeling down, depressed or hopeless?
- Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much?
- Feeling tired or having little energy?
- Poor appetite or overeating?
- Feeling bad about yourself – or that you are a failure…
- Trouble concentrating …
- Moving or speaking slowly…
- Thoughts that you would be better off dead …
In-person school and undoing the pandemic lifestyle to reduce incidence of anxiety and depression

- Adequate **sleep** and sleep hygiene
- Regular healthy **meals** and snacks
- Regular **exercise** helps with anxiety, sleep and mood
- Age appropriate **social involvement**

- A family **Media Plan** helps structure the use of electronics, video games and social media
- **Sleep hygiene** has fallen to the pandemic and is often the first step towards improving family mental wellness
Treatment for anxiety and depression

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

- Techniques to manage your body
- Techniques to manage your thoughts
- For Anxiety: Graduated Exposure *(going to school)* is Essential

SSRI Antidepressants

- Evidence for sertraline, fluoxetine, escitalopram, duloxetine, fluvoxamine
- Anxiety DO’s often requires more aggressive dosing than MDD
Other Pandemic enhanced sources for anxiety and depression symptoms

Medical causes: side effects of medicine, caffeine, drugs of abuse, diet and cold pills, endocrine

Social causes: abuse, bullying, domestic or neighborhood violence, ACES

Psychiatric/developmental causes: Autism Spectrum Disorders, Learning and Language Problems, Depression, PTSD, OCD
Prevention/Early intervention of Mood and Anxiety Problems at school

Prevention (Informal, RTI Tier 1)
- Notice and include shy, withdrawn children quickly
- Create rituals for known challenges (re-entry after summer, vacations, weekends, illnesses)
- Collaborate with schools regarding absenteeism, especially home instruction

Intervention (Informal, RTI Tiers 2+3, 504 Plan, IEP)
- Anxiety SWAT team to act quickly to stop patterns
- Always focus on re-entry, attending and engaging with support
- Collaborate with therapists
- Consider offering Coping Cats Program in school
Ineffective School-based Approaches to meltdowns

Prevention no no’s

- Be careful not to reinforce:
  - Task avoidance
  - Seeking excessive reassurance
  - Physical complaints to the nurse
  - Excessive peer interventions

Intervention no no’s

- Meltdown SWAT team should not use too much “sugar”
- School staff should not criticize parents or outside therapists to child
- Don’t fall into finger-pointing standoff with virtual teammates
Where are they? Where are we? How we get polarized.
As we raise the bar and move left ...
How Primary care providers can help:  
The Magic of The Therapeutic Alliance

You can:
- model and support setting reasonable limits
- collaborate with the CBT therapist
- work with school on re-entry and support plan
- monitor engagement and compliance with treatment
- predict and strategize future anxiety hurdles ahead
CURRENT STATUS:
NOT WORKING TOGETHER
The **Quiet** Crisis Associated with Anxiety and depression

- School Refusal and Chronic Absenteeism!
- The Latest Mental Health “Fad”
- A Major Source of Family Distress/Crises
- The Most Requested School Professional Development Topic
Short-term Consequences of Absenteeism

- Poor academic performance and gaps in learning
- Family difficulties due to practical problems and stress
- Problems with peer relationships by being out of the loop
Long-term Consequences of Absenteeism

- Academic underachievement becomes an acceptable norm
- Predicts future employment and relationship difficulties
- Risk for anxiety, depression and substance abuse (alcohol)
- Predicts Young-adult risk of Failing to Launch
Psychiatric Disorders in Children with School Refusal *(Bernstein et al 1991)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anxiety Disorders</strong></td>
<td><strong>54%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation Anxiety</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety Disorder, NOS</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalized Anxiety Disorder</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Phobia</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic Disorder</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panic Disorder with Agoraphobia</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agoraphobia</td>
<td>.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mood Disorders</strong></td>
<td><strong>52%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Depression</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysthymia</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Psychiatric Disorders in Children with School Refusal (Bernstein et al, 1991)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive Behavior Disorders</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppositional Defiant Disorder</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conduct Disorder</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruptive Behavior Disorder, NOS</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Disorders</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment Disorder (with mood and/or anxiety)</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Disorder</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substance Abuse</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Simple Pearls

- The Longer the Child is Out of School, the More Difficult it is to Return!

- The Easiest Day to return to school is today!

- Building a Cohesive Virtual Team is Critical – school, pediatrician, mental health providers, wraparound service providers and care managers
Prepared for Young Adulthood

- Transitions/Unstructured Time
- Interactions with Adults
- Interactions with Peers
- Academic Content

- Autonomy
- Social Skills
- Adaptability
- Strength
- Stamina
- Resilience

- All Classes, All Day Plus Extracurriculars
- All Classes with No Accommodations
- All Classes with Accommodations
- Most Classes with Accommodations
- Tutoring at School Plus Classes
- Tutoring at School
- Tutoring at Public Library
- In-Home Instruction
To Summarize:

- The Covid-19 Pandemic has contributed to both quiet and dramatic problems in school-aged children and teens.
- Social Isolation, poor sleep hygiene, lack of exercise and unhealthy eating habits increase the risk of anxiety and depression symptoms.
- The associated increase in emotional reactivity can lead to further personal and family stress and conflict.
- In-person school attendance can improve many of these issues and offer children and families much needed support and structure.
To Summarize:

- Prevention and Early Intervention is critical and the most effective public health approach to potential Mental Health Problems in Children and Teens. In-person schooling plays a central role.

- Once a Psychiatric Illness has begun, there are safe and effective treatments that include teamwork between providers, families and schools. There are also evidence-based therapies and medications that can help the vast majority of children and teens recover and lead more healthy and productive lives.
Questions