ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IN YOUTH: WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP THEM.

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ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IN YOUTH

- Mental/emotional health issues often arise in school-aged children
- Challenging situations can increase emotional problems

ANXIETY IS COMMON

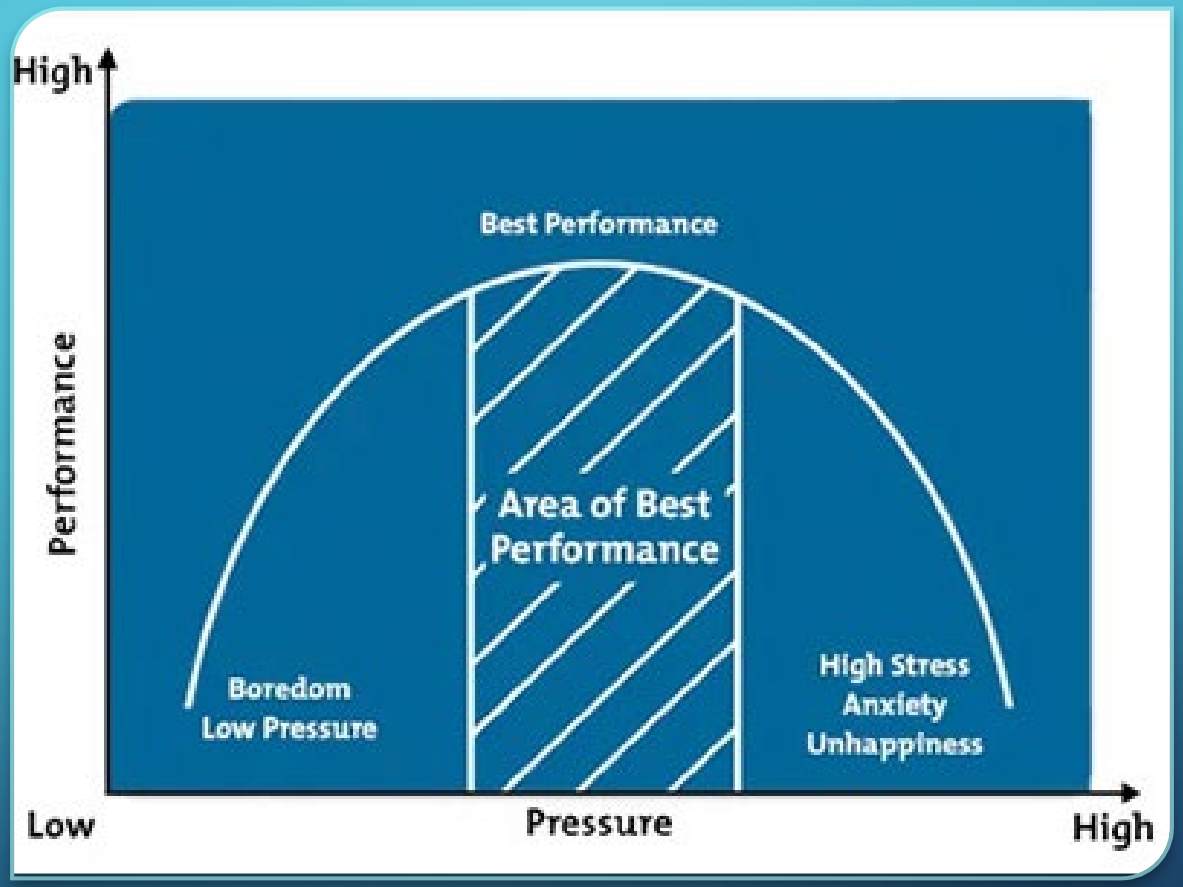
Everyone has anxiety - What are you afraid of?

Benefits of anxiety

1. Avoiding real danger is adaptive
2. Anxiety can be motivating

We learn fear very fast – even just one experience

ANXIETY AND PERFORMANCE (INVERTED U-SHAPED CURVE)



EARLY SIGNS OF ANXIETY PROBLEMS

Anxiety can lead to excessive worry or fear that affects daily life. Examples, like nervousness before exams or public speaking.

Signs of Anxiety:		
physical symptoms (sweating, heart racing),	behavioral signs (avoiding situations),	emotional impact (feeling restless).

SOURCES OF PROBLEMATIC ANXIETY

Sensitivity: Some children are more sensitive to symptoms of anxiety

Stressful life experiences like bullying and ostracism

Trauma

ANXIETY SENSITIVITY (AS)

EARLY SIGNS OF ANXIETY SENSITIVITY

- “I get scared when I am nervous”
- I get scared when I experience unusual body sensations”
- It scares me when I can’t focus”
- “I won't know what do”
- “Everyone can see that I am nervous”

SADNESS, HOPELESSNESS, DEPRESSION

- Everyone gets sad
- Natural reaction to stresses like loss and traumatic experiences
- But sadness can become persistent – hopelessness/depression

EARLY SIGNS OF DEPRESSION

Depression

The symptoms of depression can vary slightly depending on the type and can range from mild to severe. In general, symptoms include:

Low energy.

Feeling very sad or hopeless.

Thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

Irritability.

Changes in eating behavior.

Sleep changes.

Loss of interest in hobbies and activities.

Difficulty concentrating or making decisions.

CAUSES OF HOPELESSNESS AND DEPRESSION

- Negative thinking
- Stressful life experiences
- Failures e.g. academic/social

NEGATIVE THINKING (NT)

Hopelessness/
Depression

EARLY SIGNS OF NEGATIVE THINKING

- “I feel like I am a failure”
- “I am not happy”
- “My future will be disappointing”
- “I am not proud of what I have done”
- “I am not good enough for anyone”
- “No one likes me”
- “I don’t like myself”

HOW OUR CHILDREN RESPOND TO IT IS THE KEY

- COPING IS HOW WE RESPOND TO DIFFICULT AND CHALLENGING SITUATIONS
  - ADAPTIVE COPING
  - MALADAPTIVE COPING

MALADAPTIVE COPING
(MAKES THE PROBLEM WORSE IN THE FUTURE)

Escape, avoidance, distraction – evading the problem or feelings

Temporary relief, but…

- 1) increases fear,
- 2) prevents success,
- 3) decreases resilience,
- 4) physical and mental harms

EFFECTIVE COPING – POSITIVE HEALTHY COPING

addressing the problem,

managing emotions,

getting and staying connected to others,

framing the experience in a positive light, healthy stress reduction

=> increases resilience and future success and

=> leads to positive and healthy outcomes

WHAT CAN PARENTS DO TO HELP?

Ask	Ask open ended questions
Listen	Listen – stop talking and giving advice
Nudge	Nudge – lead them to their positive solutions
Reach out	Reach out – enlist help from teachers, principals etc.
Help	Help them join activities that they like, but don't force them
Reduce	Reduce their sense of blame ("its not your fault")
Celebrate	Celebrate success
Model	Model positive emotions and interactions

WHAT TO DO IF THINGS JUST KEEP GETTING WORSE

Get help from counsellors and other health professionals

Learn to

- express emotions
- healthy coping skills
- suicide prevention