

# Anxiety in the Classroom: Identification and Management

Presented by:

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January 25, 2016



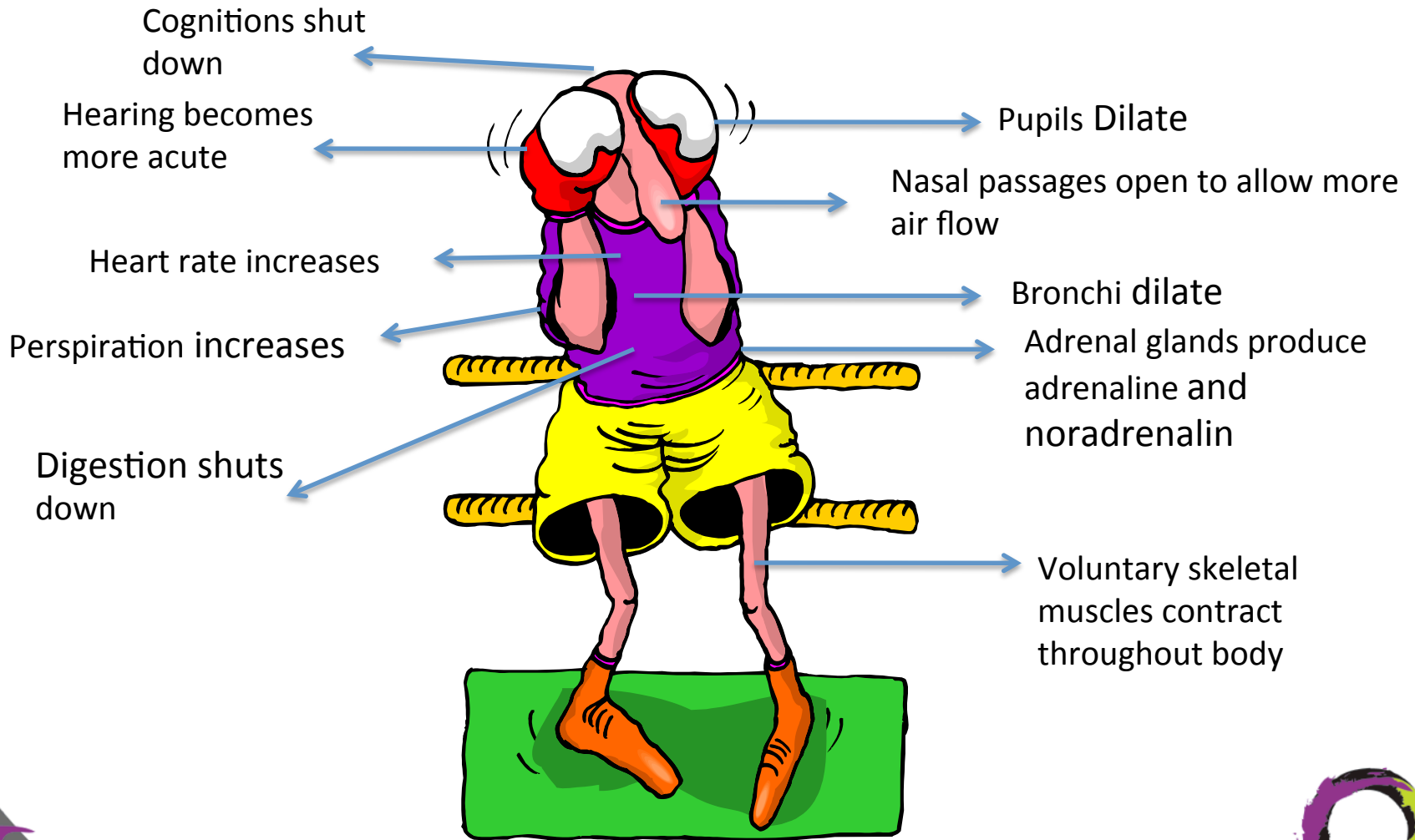
# Introduction

- Definitions of Anxiety
- Anxiety and Survival
- Severe Anxiety – Symptoms/Disorders
- Statistics
- Possible Causes and Triggers
- Impact on Learning
- Strategies for Teachers, Administrators, Support Staff
- Model for Treatment

# What is Anxiety: Definitions

- A fundamental emotion as essential to being human as anger, happiness, sadness, or disgust.
- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (DSM-IV; APA) - The apprehension of future danger or misfortune accompanied by a feeling of dysphoria or somatic feelings of tension. The focus of anticipated danger may be internal or external.

# Anxiety and Survival



# When is Anxiety a Problem?

- When the individual becomes anxious inappropriately
- When the anxiety is based on an unrealistic or excessive perception of danger
- When the person has been suffering for a long length of time
- When there is a high level of distress (somatic or emotional)
- When the anxiety interferes with a person's day-to-day life

# Anxiety Disorders in Adults/ Adolescents/Children

- Social Anxiety Disorder
- Agoraphobia
- Panic disorder
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Post traumatic Stress Disorder
- Generalized Anxiety Disorder

## **Specific Anxiety Disorders for Children**

- Separation Anxiety Disorder
- Selective Mutism

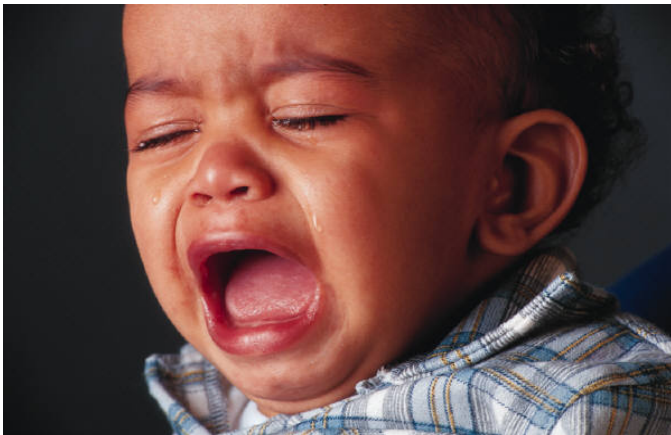
# Startling Statistics

- In its most severe forms, anxiety is one of the most common types of psychological disorder affecting millions of people.
- Stress amongst children ages 8-12 is estimated to have increased 45% over the past 30 years (Psychology Foundation of Canada, 2015).
- 75-95% of trips to the doctor are stress related (Psychology Foundation of Canada, 2015).
- Approximately 1 in 5 Canadian children will be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder today (Neufeld, 2012) requiring treatment.
- These numbers represent significant increases from previous generations.

# What Accounts for These Changes?

- Genetics

- Family History of Anxiety
- Temperament



- Environment

- Speed of Change
- Publicity
- Social Disconnection
- Technology
- Extrinsic Values
- Social Stress
- Academic Demands/  
Learning Styles
- Family Stress



# Scenarios

- “Jace” has trouble sitting in his seat and paying attention. He frequently will be staring out the window and tapping his pencil loudly on the desk. Teachers notice he has difficulty completing his in-class assignments because he is not focused. He does well academically.

ADD/ADHD

Learning Disability

Anxiety

Oppositional Defiance



# Scenarios

- “Cindy” frequently has to leave class. Her teacher notices she will begin shaking and breathing very quickly whenever she is called upon to read out loud or answer a question. She simply stares as if she is frozen and then asks to leave for the washroom. Teachers are aware she goes to the office to call her mom.

ADD/ADHD

Learning Disability

Anxiety

Oppositional Defiance

# Scenarios

- “Steve” has always done well in school except for Math. Steve tells the teacher he does not believe that he is as strong a student in this subject especially since most of the topics so far have been situational problems, which he has always struggled with. He believes he can never be as good as some of the other students in this area.

ADD/ADHD

Learning Disability

Anxiety

Oppositional Defiance

# Scenarios

- Teachers are getting fed up with “Chris” who has been rude and disruptive to all teachers. He interacts aggressively with his classmates and stymies the teachers so that they spend most of their time disciplining rather than teaching objectives. He often is asked to leave the class and is sent to an administrator.

ADD/ADHD



Learning Disability



Anxiety



Oppositional Defiance



# What Anxiety Can Look Like

- Inattention, restlessness, tics, muscle spasms
- Feelings of nervousness or tension
- Reported feelings that something bad is going to happen
- Emotionality (poor emotional regulation)
- Disruptive behavior
- Absences
- Trips to the nurse
- Trips to the bathroom
- Difficulty answering aloud in class
- Avoidance of group work or social activities
- Not turning in homework

# STRATEGIES TRIED

# Response Strategies

- Create a safe place for children to go
- Provide activities to distract the student and instill calm
- Allow students time for transitions into school as well as into class or lunch/recess
- Break complex assignments in to smaller chunks and focus the work on particular sections
- Modify the expectations when possible
- Reward EFFORT
- Teach positive self talk
- Create group activities that role-play appropriate behaviours
- Use small group activities throughout the day
- If performance anxiety is an issue, allow students to preview, or have advanced notification of the expectations
- For school avoidance: Allow students to come to school for a shorter day
- Talk to the student to see what strategies they think will be helpful

# Model for Intervention – PLAY F.A.I.R

(Rappaport & Minhan, Cracking the Behavior Code,  
Educational Leadership, October, 2012)

- **F**unctional Hypothesis
- **A**ccommodations
- **I**nteraction Strategies
- **R**esponse Strategies



# Model for Intervention

**Best Practices:** To include as many of the response strategies into the classroom for all students

- Most will benefit
- More cost effective
- Statistics

**Guiding Principles:** To build competency and create security

# Resources

- Long Live Kids - [longlivekids.ca](http://longlivekids.ca)
- Centre for Studies on Human Stress: [www.humanstress.ca](http://www.humanstress.ca)
- More Than Medication - [www.morethanmedication.ca](http://www.morethanmedication.ca)
- Psychology Foundation of Canada - [www.psychologyfoundation.org](http://www.psychologyfoundation.org) (Kids Have Stress Too program)
- Shanker, S (2013). *Calm, alert, and learning: classroom strategies for self-regulation*. Don Mills, ON: Pearson.
- Worry Wise Kids - [www.worrywisekids.org](http://www.worrywisekids.org)
- Child Mind Institute - [www.childmind.org](http://www.childmind.org)
- Relax APP on iTunes

# Reading List

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