



Counseling Corner Newsletter, Week of May 4, 2020

Dear Parents,

I hope you've had a good last week, and that you and your family are staying safe and staying healthy!

This week, and for the rest of this school year, we will be focusing on the topic of anxiety and how it impacts our students in school.

We will start this week by talking about our brain and how the neurological parts of our brain can cause anxiety. After that, in the following weeks, we will tackle how anxiety impacts academics and being in the classroom, how anxiety impacts peer relationships, and lastly, how anxiety impacts behavior.

As always, please feel free to reach out, share your ideas, or bring up any concerns you have about your student as we journey together through this topic.

Have a wonderful week!

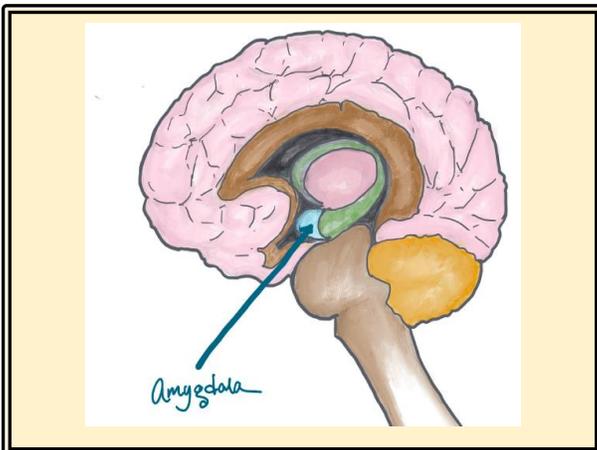
WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is our body's natural and instinctual way of dealing with real and impending danger OR unpleasant experience.

WHAT IS A PANIC ATTACK?

A panic attack is an intense response to feeling cornered by impending doom. Symptoms include: shortness of breath, difficulty breathing, increased heart rate, faint/dizzy, numbness, chest pains, and feeling of overwhelming terror. For children, this often shows up as emotional melt-down, or crying spells.

Understanding Our Brain and Anxiety, Part 1



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In order to understand how anxiety works, we must address the part of our brain that contributes to our body's response and feeling of anxiety. Let me introduce to you to the amygdala!

The Amygdala, or "Amy the Guard Dog."

The amygdala is that part of your brain which houses your emotions. It is the bit of gray matter right near the central part of your brain, which plays a crucial part in how we react towards danger, which is best compared to a very alert and watchful guard dog. All of the information our senses pick up from our environment passes through the amygdala, or Amy the Guard Dog (as I fondly call her) who is constantly sniffing out for danger. Amy the Guard Dog will not only sense danger, but she will also alert you to anything that could potentially be upsetting, distasteful, unpleasant, disgusting, or horrible to your experience. If she senses anything, she will begin preparing the rest of the body in anticipation.



Reframing the ISSUE

“Amy the Guard Dog” (or the amygdala) has been watching over us and protecting us since we were born. She has journeyed with you through every life experience, and she has been there to help you **survive** through the difficulties and challenges. She will continue to do so until the day we die, so we have much to thank for having “Amy” (the amygdala) in our life.

If for some reason, Amy becomes too hyper, sensitive, or easily triggered, we need to ask, “What’s up? What’s going on??” If any of you have ever owned a dog, haven’t you ever asked your dog, “Hey what’s going on? Why did you bark?” You would try to figure out what is happening and then you would try to soothe your dog, or rein him in, if it is getting too agitated.

The same thing applies to our amygdala. We need to connect with our amygdala, understand what is triggering us, and begin to find ways to soothe ourselves.

Tips for Soothing “Amy the Guard Dog” (Amygdala)

1. BE AWARE of AMY. When you are feeling anxious, upset, overwhelmed, worried, or frustrated, you can be sure that “Amy” is already pacing back and forth inside your head trying to tell you that something is wrong. STOP, ASK, and OBSERVE.
 - a. STOP what you are doing. Or STOP your child from their current activity.
 - b. ASK “Are you alright?” “What’s going on?”
 - c. OBSERVE. Sometimes we can’t verbalize how we feel, or for sure, our kids have difficulty verbalizing their feelings as well, so OBSERVE body language, tone, context, or situation.
2. SOOTHE or do something that will help you or your child to de-escalate and calm down. We will address this next week, but soothing your amygdala is the first step to solving most of our issues with anxiety. Soothing means:
 - a. Doing something relaxing.
 - b. Enjoy a hobby
 - c. Play. I mean really play.
 - d. Rest/sleep.
 - e. Give yourself or your student a time-limited break from the anxiety-provoking activity.
3. Find a way to tackle that difficulty from a different way. Once you or your child has calmed down, try to implement an idea or strategy that will help solve the problem. Typically, we can’t do this step until we have CALMED DOWN.

Jonathan Hsu, LMFT, PPS - Mental Health Support Specialist
La Verne Heights Elementary
1550 Baseline Rd, La Verne, CA 91750
Phone - (909) 971-8205
E-mail address: Hsu@bonita.k12.ca.us