

Easing Anxiety in Social Situations



Connecting for Kids

You're not alone.

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Objectives:

1. Discuss anxiety and nervousness
2. Provide tips and ideas for caregivers to support children
3. Review a few coping skills (body calming skills, coping thoughts, easing in)
4. Common traps (being too helpful, dismissing, avoiding)
5. Social practice ideas

Who we are: Amy Lee, Ph.D.

I am a pediatric psychologist licensed in Ohio. I have been at the Cleveland Clinic since my fellowship training which began 30 years ago. Within Pediatric Behavioral Health, I have worked at Main Campus and west side locations over the years. I provide diagnostic assessments, individual therapy, group therapy for anxiety and parenting guidance. I also supervise and train staff and residents who work at our Avon location. I specialize in diagnosis and treatment of anxiety, behavioral difficulties, executive functioning difficulties and a range of neuro-diverse challenges. It is privilege to work with so many children and families, and I respect the challenges that parents face every day.



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Who we are: Rebekah Bryson, LISW

I am a licensed independent social worker who is currently employed as a social worker at Avon High School. I come with 13 years experience with Cleveland Clinic Children's working in Pediatric Behavioral Health and the Cleveland Clinic Center for Autism. I have provided individual therapy, group therapy for social skills and anxiety, and parent coaching. I have provided support for children with behavior concerns, Autism Spectrum, ADHD, anxiety, depression, executive functioning, and more.

I have spent time working in private practice with Meghan Barlow and Associates and Purposeful Growth and Wellness which also included social skills groups for children. I believe this is a skill that children are struggling to “just learn/develop” and could benefit from being taught and providing extra support.



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MEGHAN BARLOW
AND ASSOCIATES
TURNING CHALLENGES INTO GROWTH



PURPOSEFUL GROWTH & WELLNESS
INDIVIDUAL • COUPLE • FAMILY THERAPY

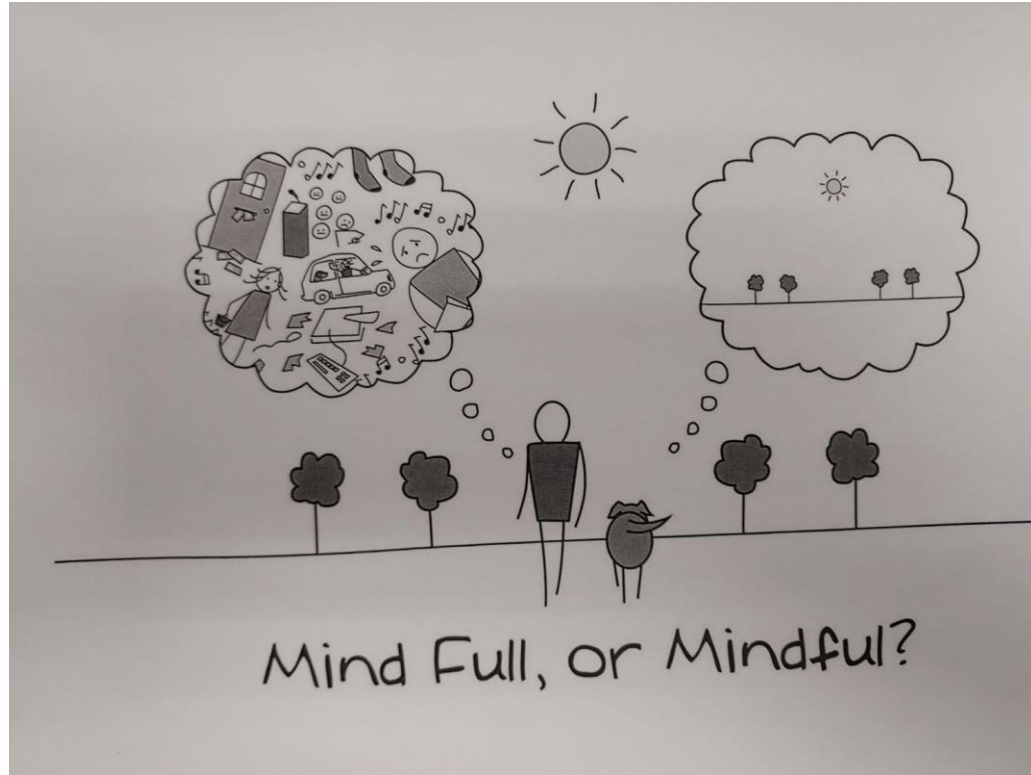
Understanding Anxiety

- Anxiety is more than nervousness. Periods of nervousness, anxiousness are normal and protective for all of us.
- Persistent anxiety can present as anger, avoidance, shyness, oppositional behavior.
- Social anxiety can begin at point of contact OR up to hours/days before.
- Children have negative thoughts about the situation whether true or not:
 - “What if people judge me?”, “What if I’m alone?”
 - “What if I don’t know what to say, or don’t have anyone to talk to?”
 - “What if I don’t know what to expect? What if it’s different?”

Recognizing signs and symptoms of your child's anxiety

- Declining invitations to go places
- Staying in their room when people/family are over
- Refusal to go out with family or friends
- Hiding behind caregiver's back
- Looking to parents to answer questions
- Irritability, tantrums before social events
- Somatic or body complaints

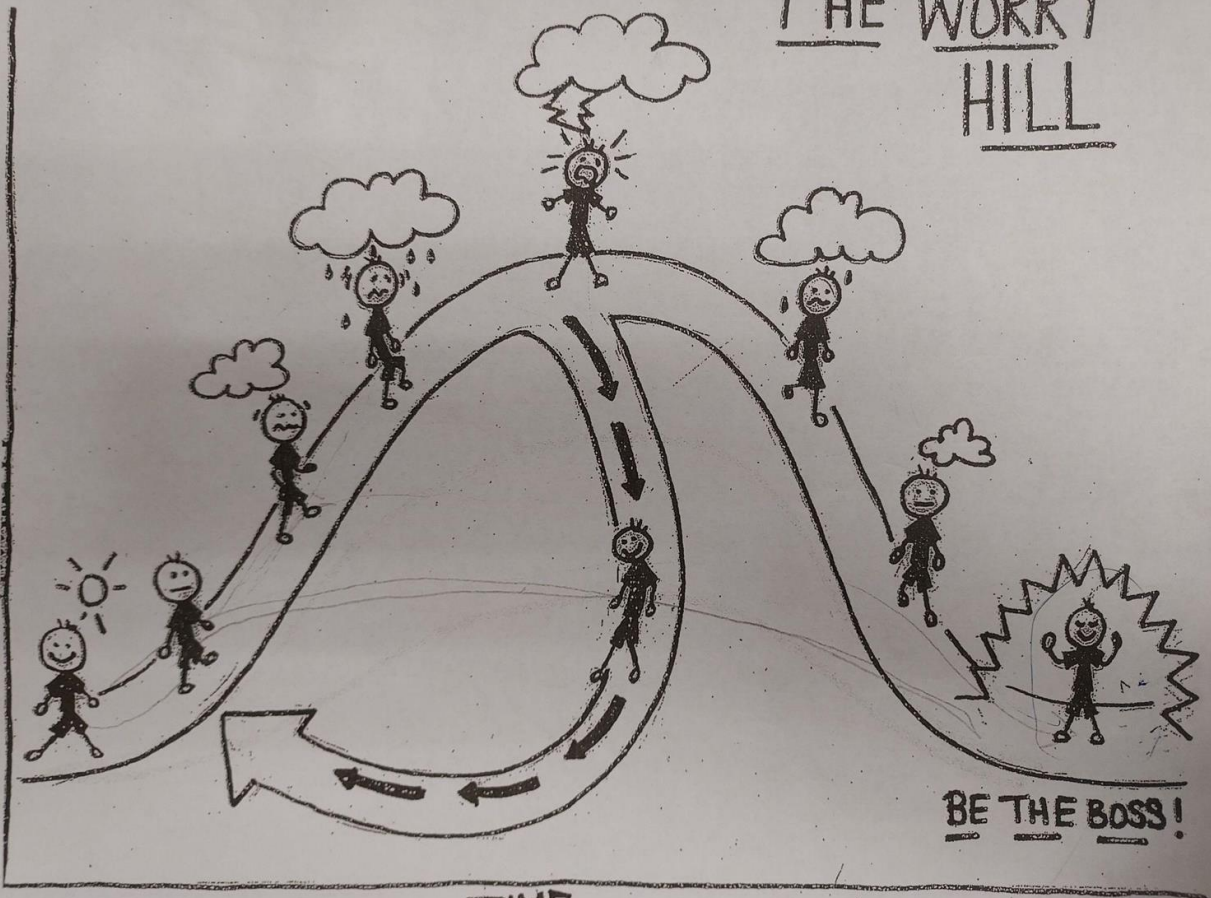
Calming the mind



Calming the mind (continued)

- Help kids to take a break from worry with deep breaths, or noticing something in the present moment.
- Come up with thought helpers together, like:
 - “I can do this. I can get used to this.”
 - “New things make me uncomfortable, but they usually work out.”
 - “I often get upset before new new things, but then I find out it is fun.”
 - “People (insert a specific person too) will help if I need it.”

THE WORRY HILL



BE THE BOSS!

Helping your child prepare- setting the scene

- Provide information ahead of time, just share the facts:
 - “Justin is having a party at Jump zone. There will be other friends from school there. The party is from 2-4pm and I be there at the beginning and at the end.”
- Use the internet to see pictures of where your child is going and what the activities will look like.
- Ask them open ended questions: “How are you feeling about this?” “Do you have any questions?” “Are you having any ideas about it?”

Take small steps to “ease in”

- Information is the first step in easing in.
- Practice small parts of the experience in order to help kids adjust.
- Review past experiences that were similar, and successful parts of those experiences.
- Treat all forms of “trying” as successes!
 - Including entering the space, watching, staying for some of the event.

Small steps are easier

My Ladder

	Pre	Post
5 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1 _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Anxiety Scale: *Least Anxious* ← 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 → *Most Anxious*

Creating a ladder

- Ladders can help a child take small steps toward success.
 - This is a way of structuring “easing in” or exposure to new situations.
- There are no deadlines, just an agreement to move to the next step when the step before it feels easier.
- You may need to create extra social situations to practice exposure, such as play dates, visits to new locations.
- Steps can be developed together with your child.

Practice Social Communication

- Practice eye contact
- Talk about empathy
- Practice back and forth conversations
- Teach listening skills
- Practice turn taking
- Social stories
- Teach personal space
- Watch age appropriate television shows together that model positive communication

Ways of helping that don't help

- Answering or talking for kids.
- Preventing or avoiding stresses to reduce anxiety.
- Telling them “Don't be nervous” or “There is nothing to be nervous about.”
- Forcing them into a situation and hoping for the best.
- Assuming they will be okay because they've done it before.
- Assuming we know how/what they are feeling/thinking.
- Hoping they will grow out of it, or this time will be different.

Social Skill Groups:

- Cleveland Clinic Center for ADHD: 216-448-6310
- Friendship in Teams (FIT): 216-292-7370
- Peak Potential Therapy: 330-405-8776
- J Berk and Associates: 216-292-7170
- Meghan Barlow and Associates: 440-409-0307
- Holding Space: 440-310-6361
- Frazier Behavior Health: 216-446-2944

Podcasts:

- The Teen Life Coach
- The Coping Toolbox, A Child Psych Podcast
- Ask Lisa(Damour): The Psychology Of Parenting