



**WELL** *moment*

*Better Conversations. Better Health.*

AN EDUCATIONAL EVENT BY VHAN

# COVID'S Impact On Anxiety In The School Setting

# Housekeeping Notes

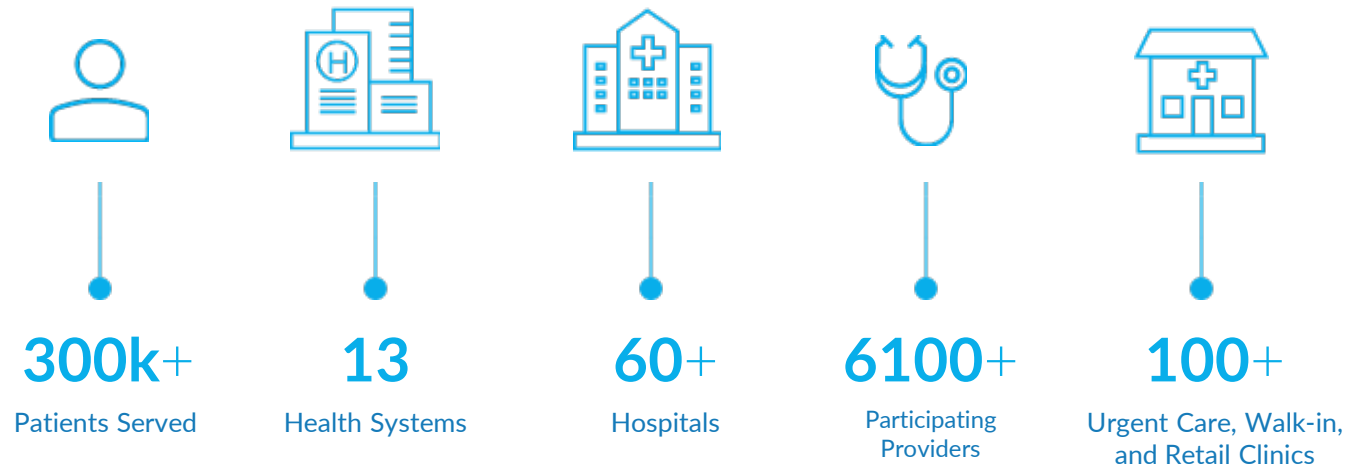
- Our goal is to have this be an interactive session, so please submit your questions throughout the presentation and we will be sure to answer as many as we can in the last 15 minutes.
- As a follow-up, we will send an email of the video recording and the presentation slides, along with links to resources discussed.
- We invite you to participate in the surveys featured after today's presentation.
- We'd love to hear from you! If we don't cover something, or if your question isn't answered, contact us.

Email us at [memberinfo@vhan.com](mailto:memberinfo@vhan.com), and we will get you a response as soon as possible.

# Overview

## Vanderbilt Health Affiliated Network (VHAN)

The Vanderbilt Health Affiliated Network includes more than 6,200 clinicians, 70 hospitals, 13 health systems, and hundreds of physician practices and clinics working together to provide the best care, at the right time, and at the right cost.



*\*This is a summary of organizations who participate in programs and/or contracts with the Vanderbilt Health Affiliated Network (VHAN). Please refer to your insurance carrier's provider directory for a complete list of in-network and out-of-network options specific to your health plan.*

# Today's Discussion

- New observations regarding mental health challenges in the school setting during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Signs of anxiety to look for in children and adolescents
- Practical coping strategies to support a child who is experiencing anxiety
- Tips and tricks for improved sleep when returning to school
- Potential warning signs of behavioral health concerns and home safety recommendations



## POLL QUESTION

**Have you observed  
increasing anxiety in your  
children or pediatric patients?**



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# Mental Health Challenges at School

## BEFORE Covid

1. ADHD
2. **Anxiety**
3. Behavioral dysregulation
4. Mood
5. Family conflict

## DURING Lockdown & Virtual School

1. **Anxiety: All kinds of anxiety**
2. Adjustment to new learning format
3. School Avoidance
4. Mood: more depression/safety concerns
5. Different Family conflict (virtual learning)
6. ADHD (maybe worse now? new onset? situational?)

## AFTER Return to School

1. **Anxiety: especially social anxiety**
2. Adjustment back to structured learning environment
3. Mood: for some kids, depression symptoms reduced with return to “normal,” for others mood symptoms worsened.
4. **Struggles adjusting & regulating sleep patterns**

# Anxiety Signs to Look for

- Trends of increased anxiety: look for it where it didn't previously exist.
- Kids often don't have the words: watch for somatic/body complaints (tummy aches, headaches) – older kids often express anxiety as anger/irritability.
- Excessive worries about things before they happen.
- Low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence - “I can't do it,” “I'll never be able to do it,” “I'm not smart”.



# Anxiety Signs to Look for

- Repeated intrusive (unwanted) thoughts or repeated actions.
- Not engaging back with prior friend group, wanting to isolate more.
- Fears of being separated from parents/caregivers.
- Fears of being back in the classroom – “is everyone looking at me,” “what if I say the wrong thing,” “I hope the teacher never calls on me.”
- Trouble sleeping.

**As a parent,  
what do I do?**



# What You Can Do

- If you're anxious and they know it- own it and talk about it (***anxiety is contagious!***).
- **Be available to talk:** "I'm here." Carve out times daily to hear your child's concerns.
- Don't assume you know how your kids are feeling – **let your kids tell you how they are feeling** (open ended questions).
- **Ask what's been hard for them** (school and not school related).
- **Volunteer what's been hard for you** and things that have helped you feel less anxious.

# What You Can Do

- **Provide reassurance-** use positive messages; we all need kindness right now.
- **Manage media** and internet exposure.
- **Model good behavior** – when you feel anxious, model anxiety-reducing behaviors (mindful breathing, etc).
- Power of **fresh air and exercise** (daily or multiple times per day).
- **Physical contact** – kids (especially young kids) need adults to help them regulate their emotions.
- **Open communication with school** – what are teachers seeing at school?

# Practical Tips

- **4-7-8 breathing**: breathe in deeply for 4 seconds, hold it for 7 seconds, release slowly for 8 seconds. Repeat several times.
- **Grounding**:
  - \*What are 5 things you **SEE** right now?
  - \*What are 4 things you **FEEL** right now?
  - \*What are 3 things you **HEAR** right now?
  - \*What are 2 things you **SMELL** right now?
  - \*What is 1 thing you **TASTE** right now?
- **Worries Jar** – have your child write down what’s worrying them and put it in a special jar. At the end of the day take a few minutes to look through those together and problem solve.
- **Get creative!** – draw, paint, listen to music

# Dysregulated Sleep

Return to school means a **return to a “normal” sleep schedule**. Don't expect sleep habits to change overnight, **it is a gradual process**.

## Sleep Hygiene

- Keep a consistent sleep schedule.
- Establish a relaxing bedtime routine.
- Use your bed only for sleep (not for school).
- Make the bedroom quiet and relaxing.
- Keep the room at a cool temperature.
- Turn off electronics at least 30 min before bedtime.
- Don't eat a large meal before bed (small snacks are ok).
- Exercise regularly.
- Avoid caffeine after lunch.
- Reduce fluid intake before bed.

# WARNING SIGNS

## RED FLAGS

- Suicidal thoughts/behavior
- Not engaging while in school/zoom
- Increased irritability/mood swings
- Previous high achiever now not turning things in
- Expressions of hopelessness, worthlessness (“it doesn’t matter...nothing matters”)
- Substance use (athletes, highly involved kids still with no school-approved activities but back in the structured environment of school)

# Connect your Child to Resources when...

- Safety concerns: thoughts of wishing they were dead, self-injurious behavior
- Hopelessness
- Obvious depression/anxiety – look for those consistent somatic complaints and behaviors that are out of the ordinary for your child.
- Not functioning (deteriorated) – not completing school, not attending to hygiene

**When these concerns are present you will want to schedule an appointment with your pediatrician immediately.**





# **Safety Planning Recommendations**

# Safety Planning Recommendations

- **Secure all medications** – over the counter and prescription medications, even vitamins and supplements
- **Remove firearms**
  - Second-best: secure storage inside the home with lock box, cable lock, or firearm safe and ammunition stored and locked separately from firearm
  - We do not recommend parents “hiding” firearms in the home as almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of children living in households with firearms know where they are stored (AAP, 2017)
- **Secure all sharp objects** (knives, razors, scissors, etc.)
- **Increase supervision**
  - Not leaving a child home alone
  - “Eyes on” supervision

# When is it an Emergency?



**TENNESSEE STATEWIDE CRISIS LINE**  
**There is hope.**  
**855-CRISIS-1 (855-274-7471)**

Do you feel like you are experiencing a mental health crisis?

Our Statewide Crisis Line is here to help individuals struggling with a mental health emergency.

If there is a mental health emergency (**dangerous or life-threatening situation**) the recommendation is to do one of the following:

- **Present to the nearest emergency department for emergent evaluation**
- **Call 911**
- **Call the TN State Crisis Line**

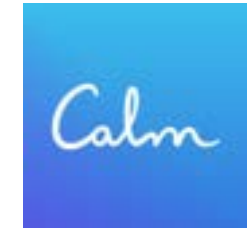
# Mental Health Apps



**Mindshift CBT:** Relief app that helps decrease anxiety, stress, and panic using CBT.



**MindDoc - Depression & Anxiety:** Monitoring and self-management app for mental health. Monitors symptoms and provides insights and tips.



## Mindfulness and Meditation Apps:

- Smiling Mind
- Mindful Powers
- Headspace
- Calm



One message  
for these kids:

**You will get  
through this**

# Resources

- Apps: SAMHSA suicide safe (crisis lines and behavioral health treatment locator) + SAFE-T (suicide assessment tool) + conversation starters
- The Clay Center for Young Health Minds ([mghclaycenter.org](http://mghclaycenter.org))
- Resource: Parenting Through Community Crises and Disasters: <https://www.mghpact.org/covid-19-resources-for-parents> –  
From: Mass General Marjorie E. Korff PACT (Parenting at a Challenging Time) Program
- AACAP: [aacap.org/aacap/families\\_and\\_youth](http://aacap.org/aacap/families_and_youth)
- Child Mind Institute: [childmind.org](http://childmind.org)
- <http://sleepeducation.org/essentials-in-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits>

# Online Discussion Forum

- 5/20 – 5/27
- Invite email sent to registration email and will come from “Advise Vanderbilt”
- Click the link in the email to join
- Ask questions of behavioral health clinicians



Email [memberinfo@vhan.com](mailto:memberinfo@vhan.com) with any questions.



Questions ?