Development of Anxiety and Mood Disorders in Children
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Today’s Discussion

• The signs of anxiety and mood disorders in children and adolescents

• How to identify early risk factors for internalizing mood disorders in young people

• The treatment options for mood and anxiety disorders
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.

• 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 polls featured during 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, and we will get you a response as soon as possible.
What concerns do you have about your child’s emotions?
What is anxiety?

- State of worry, fear, nervousness
- We all experience anxiety sometimes and this can be adaptive and keep us safe
- Anxiety disorders = worries and fears that are out of proportion to the situation and interfere with daily life
  - Many types: separation anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, specific phobias, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder
How common are anxiety disorders in children and teens?

- Among the most common psychological disorders

- Approximately **10-12% of children and teens** experience an anxiety disorder
  - In young children, separation anxiety and specific phobias are most common
  - In teens, social anxiety and panic disorder become more common

- Average **age of onset** around 8 years old

- Slightly more common in girls than boys
What is depression?

- Persistent feeling of sadness, irritability, loss of interest or pleasure

- Clinical depression is characterized by associated changes in thoughts and behaviors
  - Increased or decreased appetite
  - Sleeping too much or too little
  - Restless/fidgety or moving more slowly than usual
  - Impaired concentration and decision making
  - Feelings of worthlessness or guilt
  - Thoughts of death or suicide

- Lasts for 2 weeks or more or milder symptoms for 1 year
Other types of mood disorders

• Disruptive mood dysregulation disorder – irritable mood most of the day, nearly every day with severe temper outbursts throughout the week
  • Beginning before age 12

• Bipolar disorder – extreme mood swings; happiness, elevated mood, irritability and high energy, along with depressed episodes
  • Typically, onsets in young adulthood but can emerge in teens also
How common is depression in children and teens?

- 1-2% of preschoolers using modified criteria
- 1-3% of school age children
- 5-6% adolescents (15-20% lifetime prevalence in adolescence)
- More common in girls than boys beginning in adolescence (around age 12)
- Anxiety and mood disorders often co-occur
What are risk factors for anxiety and mood disorders?

- Genetic influences
- Biological factors
  - Dysregulation in stress response systems (HPA axis)
  - Brain function (e.g., amygdala, ventral striatum, prefrontal cortex)
  - Neurotransmitter systems (e.g., serotonin)
- Stress, maltreatment, and trauma
- Family environment – conflict, low warmth, overcontrolling parenting
- Early temperament – low positive affect, high behavioral inhibition, high negative affect
- Thought patterns – attention towards threat, negative interpretations
What warning signs can parents look for?

- Anxiety and depression can present in many ways (e.g., temper outbursts, aggressive behavior, quiet/withdrawn)
- Changes in child’s mood and behavior (e.g., less interested in activities, spending more time alone in room, avoiding activities or places)
- Physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, stomachaches)
- Trouble sleeping
- Difficulty concentrating (e.g., drop on grades)
- Loss of energy, fatigue
- Worries or fears
- Negative thoughts, low self-esteem (e.g., “I’m bad at everything!”)
Treatment of anxiety and mood disorders

• Cognitive behavior therapy
  • Effective around age 7
  • 45-80% recovery rate
  • Focus on thoughts, feelings, behaviors
  • Concrete skills, homework, practice
  • Short-term

• Medications (e.g., SSRIs)
  • Can be used in combination with therapy

• More intensive services for safety concerns (e.g., partial hospitalization)
What can parents do to help children with anxiety?

• Listen and validate feelings
  • “I understand you feel nervous”
• Avoid telling them how they should feel
• Encourage facing fears
• Help child learn to tolerate anxiety, not avoid
• Set realistic expectations
• Talk through what the child is afraid will happen, help to problem solve
• Model coping with anxiety
What can parents do to help children with depression?

- Validate experiences
  - “That sounds very difficult”
  - “I can see you are having a hard time”
- Show empathy and support
- Ask questions about how they’re feeling and listen in a nonjudgmental way
- Notice the positive
- Give opportunities to engage in more social interactions and activities
- Avoid criticism
Talking with children about suicide

- If you are concerned your child may have suicidal thoughts, talk with them about it
  - Asking about suicide does not make people more likely to harm themselves
  - “Sometimes when people feel the way you do, they think about death or even killing themselves. I’m wondering if you’ve ever had these thoughts?”

- Show them that they have a safe person to talk with, show empathy and validate

- Stay connected with your child, know what they are doing and who they are with

- Make the home safe (e.g., restrict access to firearms or medications)

- In case of immediate threat of harm, call 911 or go to the emergency room
Resources

• National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) https://www.nami.org/
• National Suicide Prevention Lifeline https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/
• Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide https://sptsusa.org/parents/
• The Child Mind Institute https://childmind.org/
• Anxiety and Depression Association of America https://adaa.org/find-help
• Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies https://www.abct.org/get-help/
• NAMI HelpLine 800-950-NAMI
• Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-8255
• Crisis Text Line - Text HOME to 741-741
Questions?