

# Child & Adolescent Anxiety: What Every Parent Should Know

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INTERMOUNTAIN MEDICAL GROUP

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Identify when anxiety is a problem
2. Understand the range of treatments, and when professional help may be needed
3. Learn what a parent can do
4. Introduce additional resources

# From the Parents

*Until he knows for sure, he can't, he won't. How do I convince him life is okay?*

*I feel like the worst parent. I want to help my son, but I lose it and I know that's not helping anything. I start out patient, but nothing I say makes him feel better. Then I get frustrated and it's a mess*

*The day I learned that my son had been eating his lunch in a bathroom stall rather than face the kids in the cafeteria, I died a thousand deaths. I knew he was shy, but I didn't realize how unbearable life had become for him*

# OVERVIEW

- ✓ When to be concerned
- Empathy and Connection
- Relabel the worry
- Rethink and shrink the worry
- Calm the body
- GUTI (Getting Used To It)
- Reinforcement and Praise
- Managing your own anxiety
- Professional help



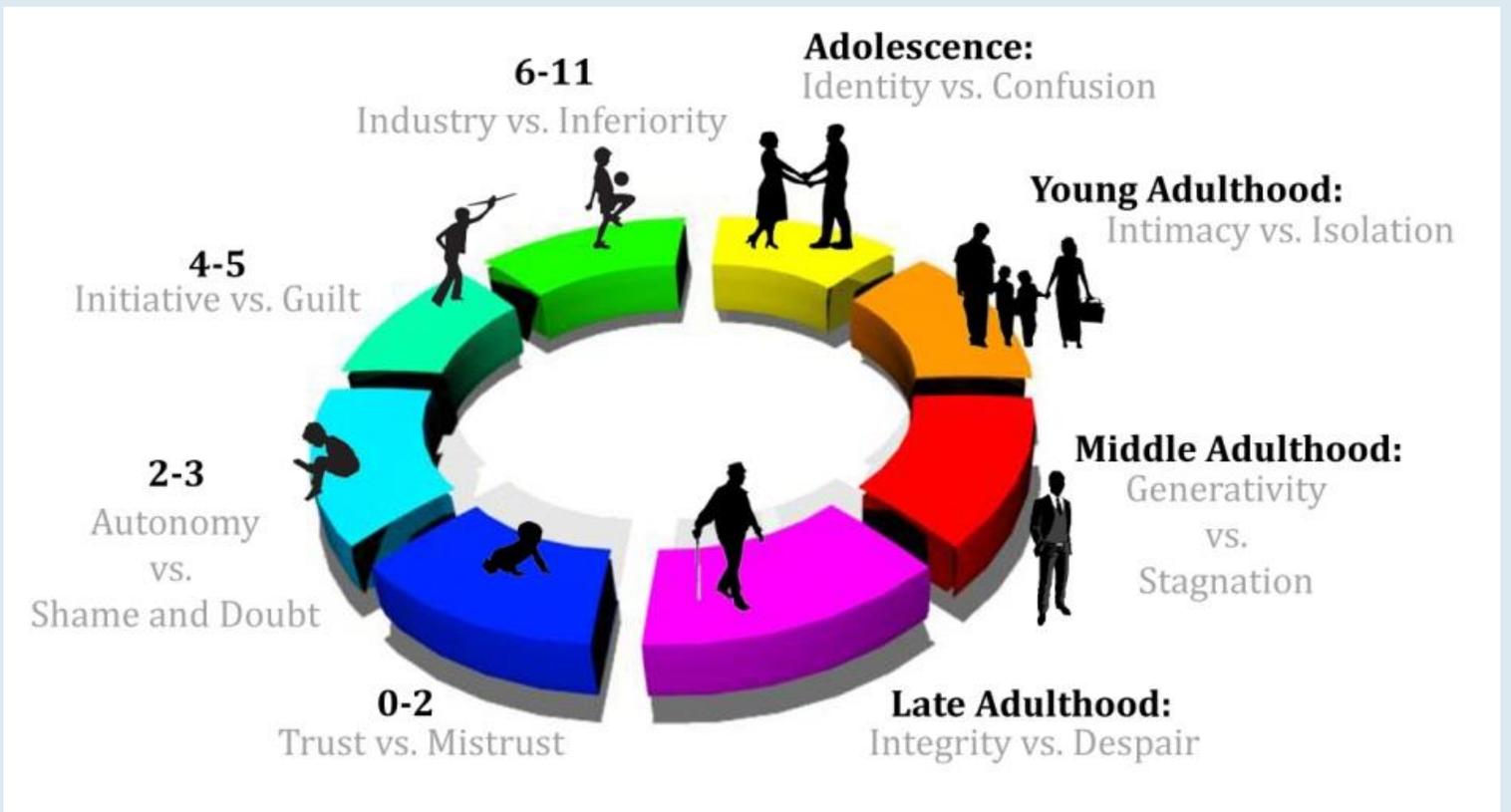
- Avoids social relationships
- Sleep difficulty
- Chronic or persistent body aches
- Refuses to attend school
- Unusually irritable or moody
- Needs excessive reassurance



- Loud noises or separation (infants)
- Darkness, dogs, burglars or monsters (preschool)
- Fear of failure, sickness, being alone, snakes/spiders/bats (school)
- Fear of rejection, spending time away from home (teen)

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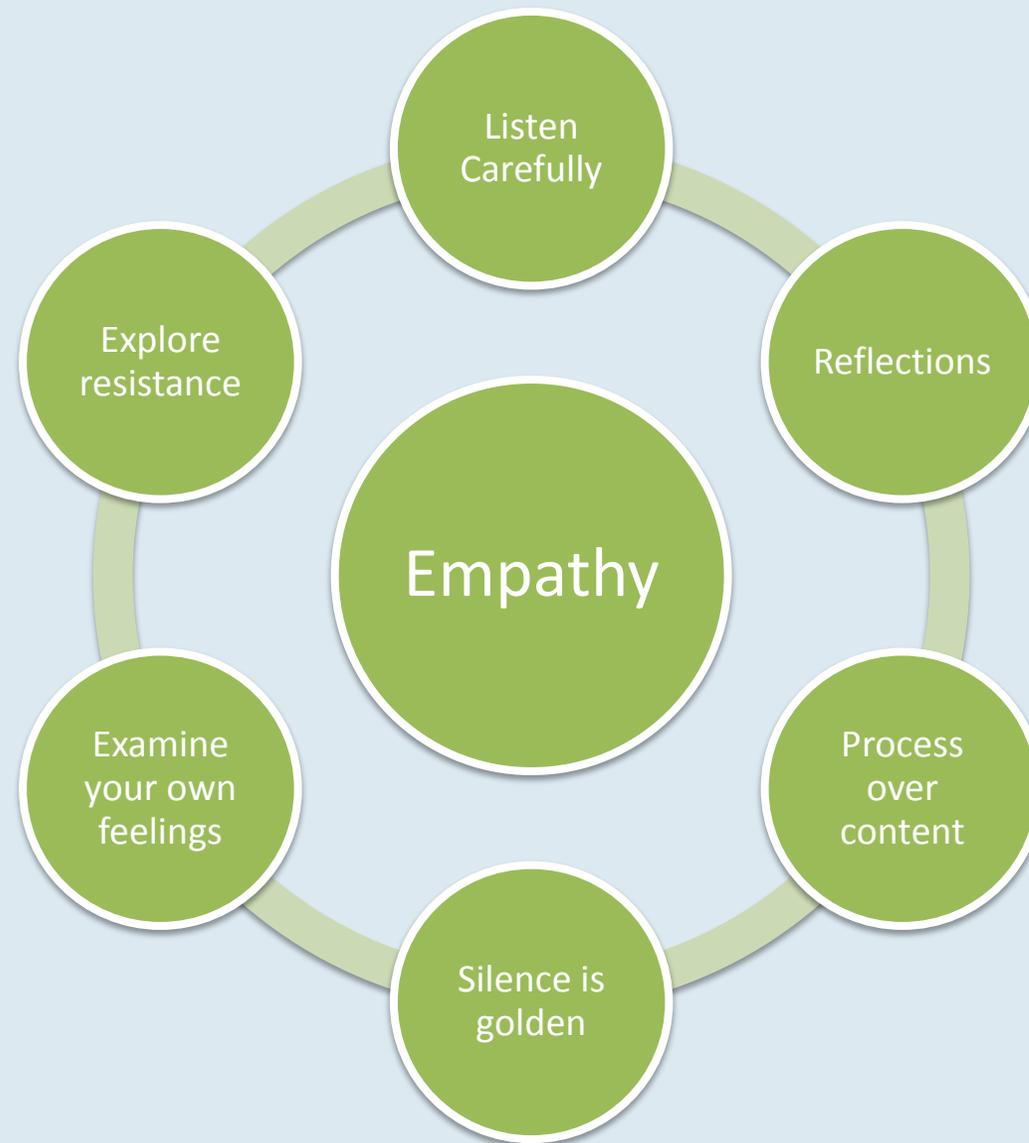


*Does my child feel...*

- Connected & Safe
- Independent
- Powerful
- Achievement & Mastery
- A stable sense of self
- Closeness / Intimacy

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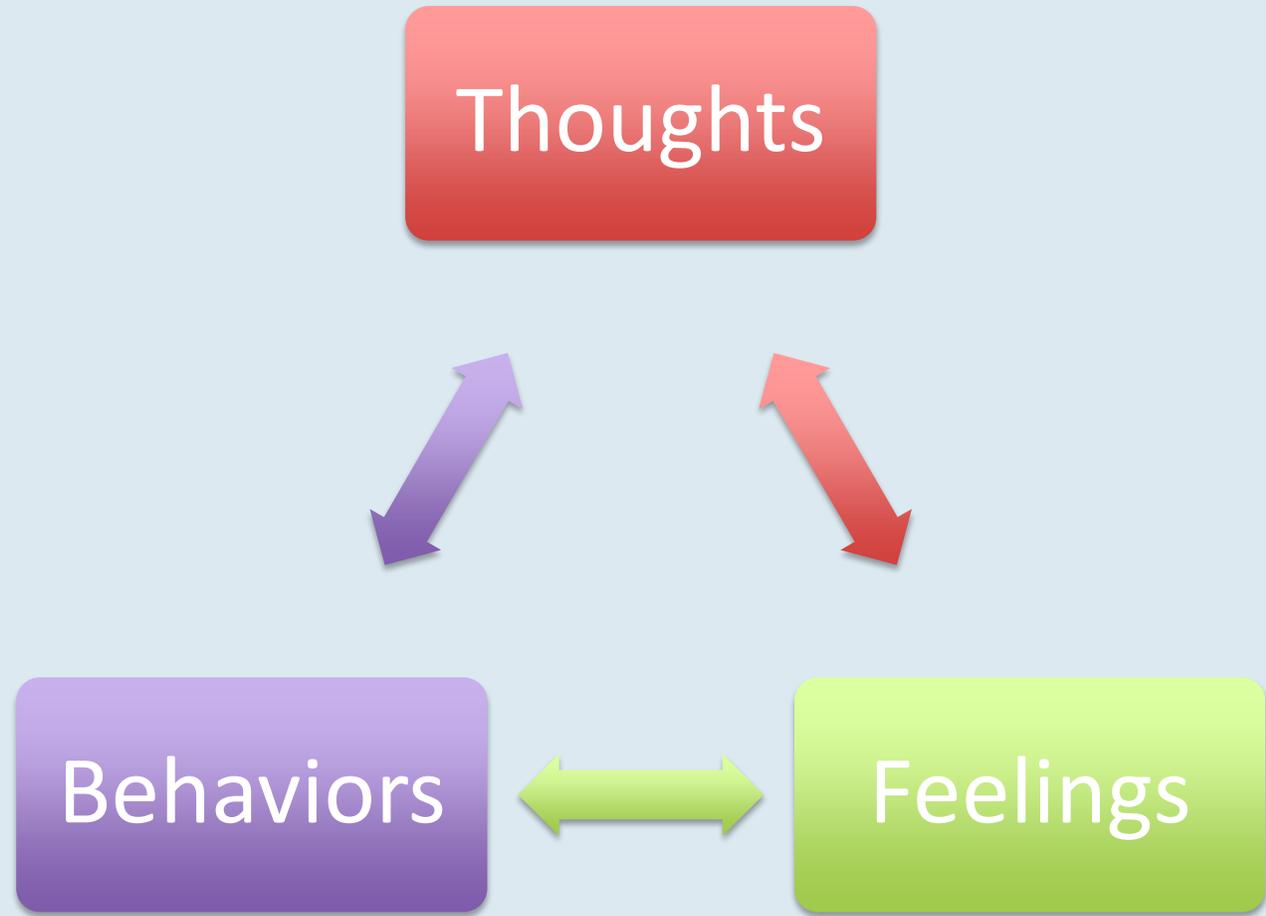
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- The problem is not the peer, the dog, the school, the class, the project or even the date-night you are trying to go on; the problem is *the worry*
- Worry is a choosing moment: what part of your brain will you choose to listen to?
  - “This is a tough situation. What part of your brain do you think is best for this job, your worry brain or your smart brain?”
  - “Is that what worry is telling you?”
  - “What is worry bugging you about?”
  - “Looks like the yikes button got pushed! Lets do a system reset. Is this really a yikes moment?”
  - “So part of you is scared. What does the other part of you think?”
  - “Whose job is it to ask ‘what if’ questions, Widdle or Til?”
  - “Krank must think this is an emergency, what do you think?”

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## Thoughts

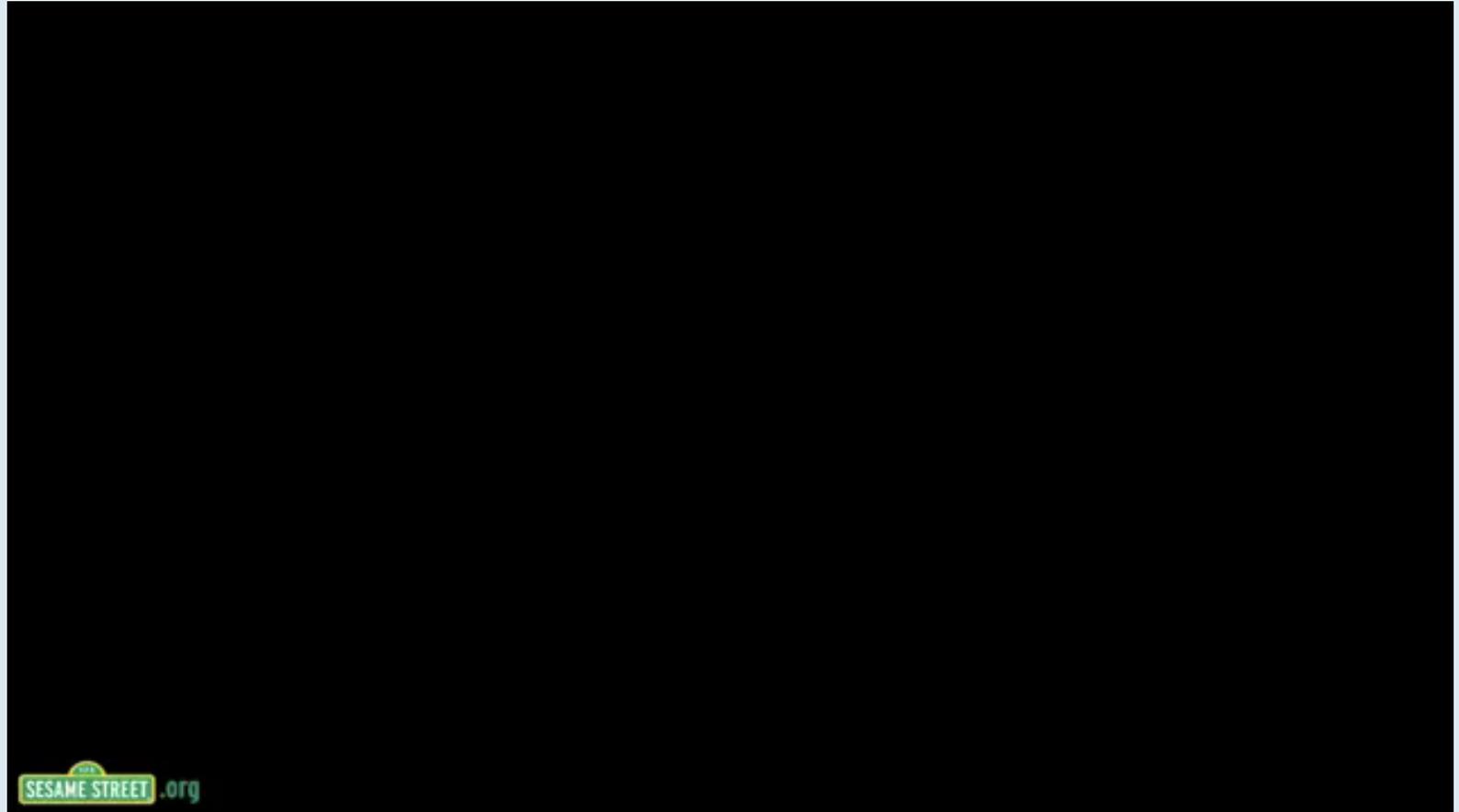
Cognitive Distortions = Thinking Errors = Thought Holes = Dark Shades

### Example Strategies:

- Debate yourself
- Million dollar question
- Humor
- Change the voice
- Train of thought (side by side)
- Practice tests (true/false) or 'find the facts'
- Imaginary or real panel or survey
- Separate into parts (one part of you is nervous...)
- Set up a worry time

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See Sesame Street and Electric Company apps and toolkits

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- Breathing
  - “belly” breathing
  - With imagery like balloons, sailboats or hot cookies
  - For older kids, explain “diaphragmatic breathing” and use age-appropriate imagery or self-talk
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  - Rag doll / Robot
  - Squeeze Lemons; stretch like a kitten, move head/neck like a turtle, get a pesky fly off your face without using hands, tighten your stomach before the cute baby elephant steps on you, work your feet as if in a mud puddle. ALWAYS pause afterward to notice how good relaxation feels.
- Get moving!

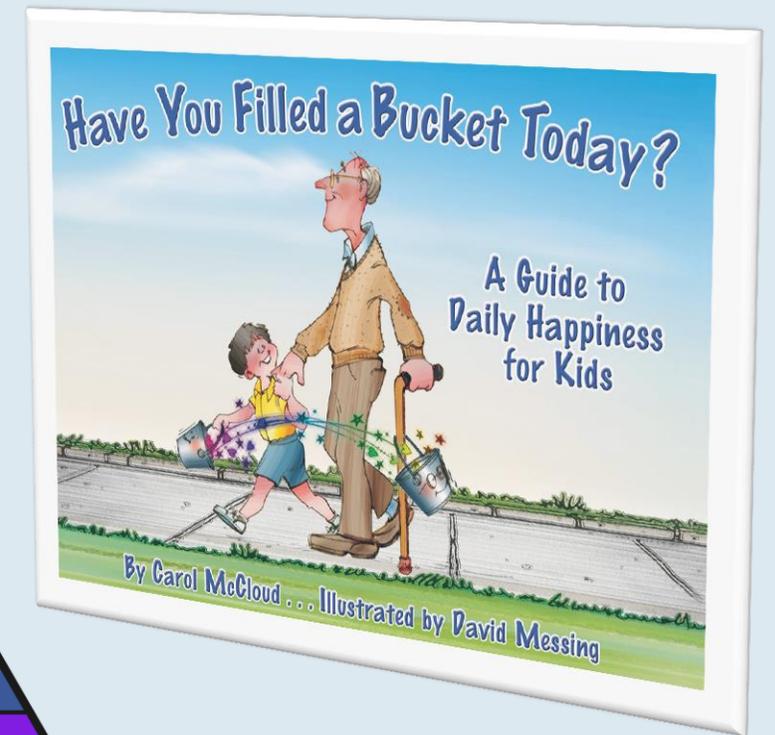
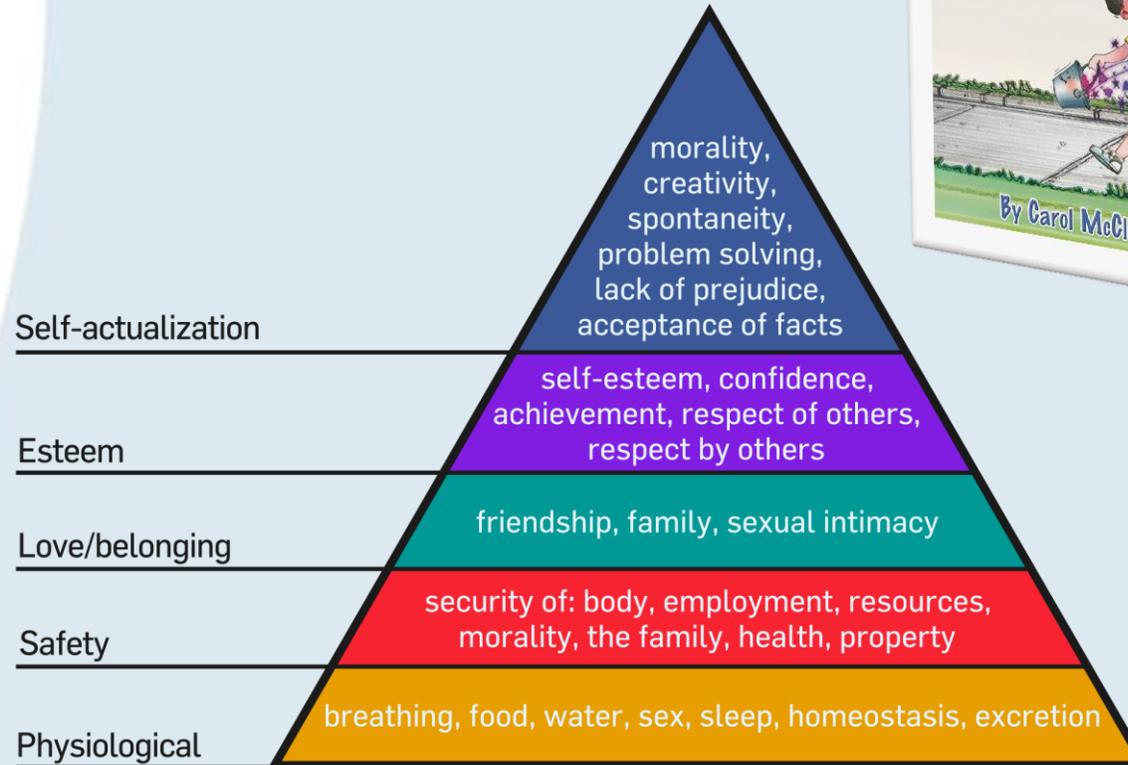
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- Exposure = Uncomfortable on purpose
- Hierarchy of fear challenges
  - “How many times do you think you’ll need to get used to it?”
  - “How do you think you’ll feel after doing this three times?”
  - “What are the things you need to practice and get good at before you can do that?”
  - Too easy: “Lets keep trying.” Too hard: “That’s fine, but now you need to find a goal that you can say yes to.”
- End on a success, not escape
- Talk in a matter-of-fact way
- Don’t accept avoidance or “I can’t” statements
- Add humor
- Consider imagination exposure
- Roll with resistance (don’t get stuck)
  - “What part of this can you do?”
  - “Can you think of a way that you and I can share this job?”
  - “I know you really want to be able to \_\_\_\_\_ someday. This can really help you get there.”

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Caretaker Modeling:

Nature's little way of  
making sure your  
anxiety  
disorder  
outlives you.

som<sup>ee</sup>cards  
user card



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- Put limits on your own worry and imagination
- Show confidence that we can live with uncertainty
- Emphasize “getting better” over “doing good.”
- It’s not what you say, its how you say it.
- Stop focusing on the risks. Focus on resilience and safety
- Give up predictions and control. Try viewing your parenting role as ‘showing up to discover’ where their life will go and who they will become . Allow yourself to be delighted in their life-education.

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- What is the problem? Get specific!
- “Children must be in school”
  - Don’t mention home school, changing schools or other escape strategies
- Laddering
- Partner with the school
  - Coach teacher how to talk about the “worry brain”
  - Perspective on oppositional behavior
  - Free pass to check in with counselor. CAUTION phone calls home.
  - Accommodations? \*While remembering that the *situation* is not actually the biggest problem
- Other tips
  - Keep routine moving in the morning
  - If you have the flexibility, consider taking them to school yourself
  - Try to be one of the first in the classroom
  - Consider having a teacher or counselor meet you or call the night before
  - Use rewards for success

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## Medications

Less time and cost,  
not provider  
dependent

“anti-depressants”  
like Prozac, Zoloft or  
Celexa

50-60% Respond

## Therapy

Clearly better for  
OCD and Trauma

Skill building =  
Sustained benefit

50-60% Respond

# Turnaround: Turning Fear into Freedom



# GoZen!



## Module 1: What is Worry?

In the first module, we dive right in to explore what causes one to worry. Kids are fascinated by facts about the brain. It helps them demystify what they are going through and shows them the control they have over their worry.



## Module 2: Worry Affects Your Body

Increased heart rate, shortness of breath, tummy aches—we talk about how worry makes us feel and kids learn special techniques to help calm them down when worry takes over.



## Module 3: Worry Affects Your Thinking

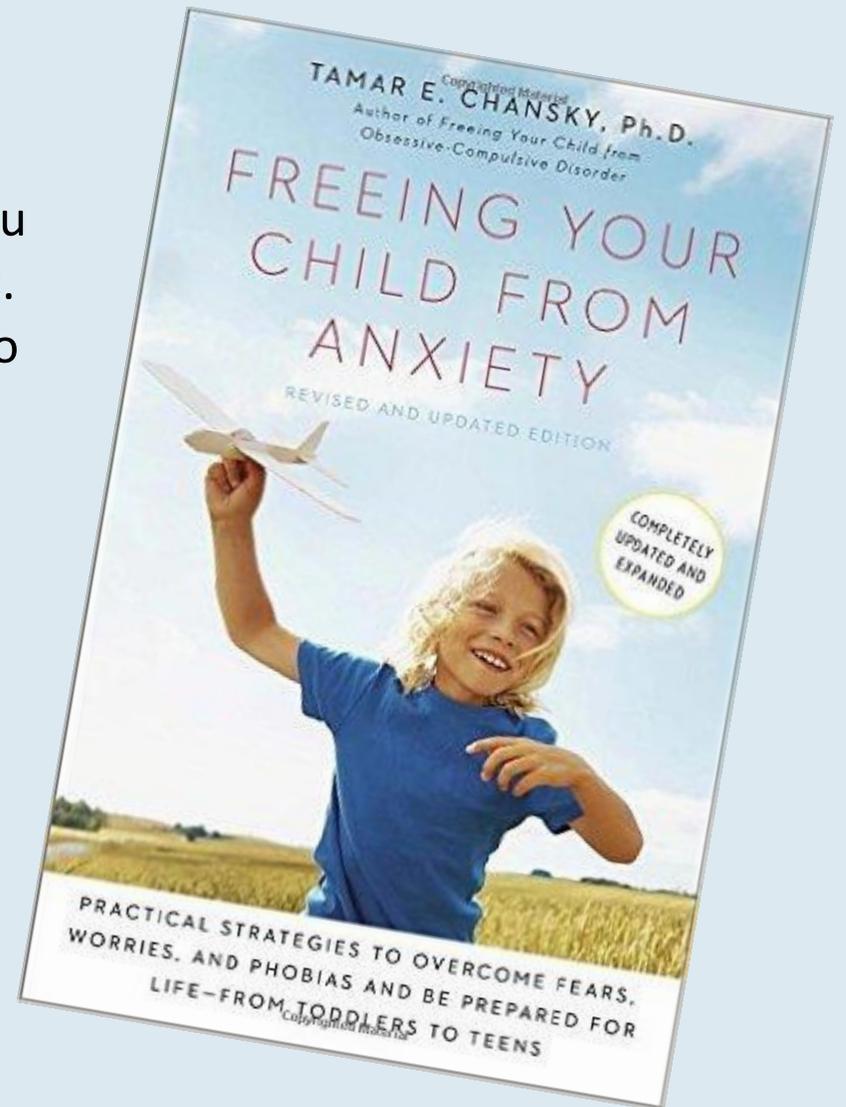
We go over the the 3 major thinking errors that causes kids to worry—Avoiding, What Ifing and ThoughtHoles—and how kids can change their thinking style.



Peace within Reach

# Freeing Your Child From Anxiety

450 pages but a great place to go if you feel you are running out of ideas. Organized by problem so you don't have to read the whole thing.



UACAP.org

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Utah Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry (UACAP). At the top left is the UACAP logo, which consists of a stylized mountain range icon. To the right of the logo is the text "UTAH ACADEMY OF CHILD & ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRY" in a serif font, with "OF" in smaller letters. Below this is the tagline "A Regional Organization of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry" in a smaller, italicized font. A horizontal navigation bar contains five menu items: "HOME", "PATIENTS & FAMILIES", "CLINICIANS", "UACAP MEMBERS", and "ADVOCACY". The main content area features a large image of a whiteboard with the word "Welcome!" written in red marker. Below the text is a photograph of seven diverse children standing in a line. To the right of the whiteboard is a dark green section with the heading "OUR PURPOSE" in green. Below the heading is a paragraph of text: "Provide *education* to patients and their families, strengthen *collaboration* with primary care clinicians, and unify *advocacy* efforts to broaden access to care and improve school and community-based interventions." At the bottom right of this section is a green button with the text "Contact Us".

UTAH ACADEMY  
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HOME PATIENTS & FAMILIES CLINICIANS UACAP MEMBERS ADVOCACY

Welcome!

OUR PURPOSE

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