

My Worry-Free Kid

**Learn How to Support Your Child In Facing Their
Anxious Thinking And How Your Good Intentions
May Be Making it WORSE**



Kara Czerniak, MSPP

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IS MY WORRY-FREE KID FOR YOU?

Do you have a child that you suspect is dealing with anxious thinking? Or perhaps you are a family member or good friend of someone who does. Maybe you have been wondering if the child in particular could benefit from therapy. Or like thousands of others, your child is on a waiting list of a year long or more, just to be evaluated by a therapist. You are here because you are looking for something that could help in the meantime.

You are probably wondering if there is something you can do as the parent to help. Or, you may even be skeptical that you actually *can help*.

Well, I'm here to give you good news. *Really* good news. By the end of the short book, you will have a better understanding of what anxiety is, if your child is exhibiting its symptoms, and the things that can actually make it worse. Pretty important stuff to know, especially the part about making it worse, right? If you opted in to the free video series as well, you're going to meet me, and hopefully get even better insight on why I believe that YOU as the parent are **VERY** capable of helping your child, and in many cases, are even the BEST answer for your child!

All you need is a desire and willingness to help your child, and a belief that it IS possible. I look forward to taking you on this journey, and giving you the info that can actually start to help and change your family's life!

DEDICATION

This book is for you - the mama (and papa) bears that love their children more than life itself, and would do anything - within and without reason - to help their children. I am behind you all the way!

As always, I honor my husband, Paul Czerniak, because he always believes in me, and supports every new step I take. He understands that you can be happy and still restless at the same time. There is always more to learn, more to see, and more to do. If you're not growing, you're dying, right, 'Hon?

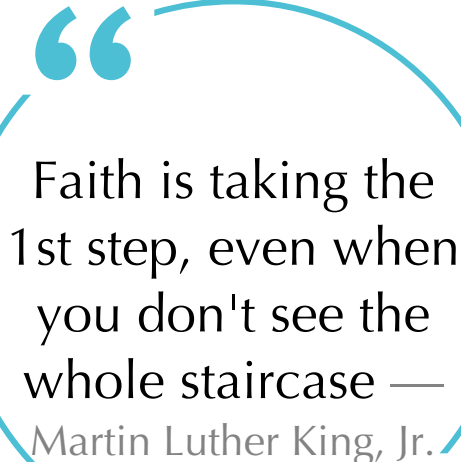
I thank all the teachers and mentors that have made it possible for me to implement the concepts of personal development, changing my life wildly in the process. Thank you Tony Robbins, Dean Graziosi, Mike Koenigs, and Michael and Debra Bernoff especially. The Bernoffs are masters at helping adults, and they have always supported my desire and obsession to take what 'till now have only been adult concepts, and apply them to children.

And finally, I thank God and my Council above, for helping me to connect the dots along the way.

INTRODUCTION

The method in which I create my books is unusual, I'm told. I like to dictate my books rather than type them. This is for a couple reasons. One, dictating my books keeps them flowing in more of a conversational tone. Having a conversational tone means it's more likely that you will find this book easy to read, and that you will finish it. It also means that I can talk to you parent to parent. For you, I want this book to read like a conversation, rather than a textbook.

Second, dictating my books in a conversational tone keeps them from being too technical, or too “teachy,” so to speak. I find that so many parents become intimidated by all of the technical jargon and therapy speak. They just want someone to present information to them in an easy to understand way, respectfully.



Faith is taking the
1st step, even when
you don't see the
whole staircase —
Martin Luther King, Jr.

The final thing that makes my books unusual is that I like to keep them short. A study by Goodreads showed that fewer than 50% of people will finish a book having less than 100 pages. And that number dramatically drops when the book goes beyond 100 pages.

It is more important to me that you digest all of the information I'm giving you, rather than packing in as much information as humanly possible in order to convince you of my "expertness" or to feed my ego. If you finish this book, you are much more likely to take action. And that is where life starts to look better for your child.

THE 1% RULE

“

The big leaps will never
happen if we don't get used to
taking the small ones.

-- Tommy Baker

”

The 1% Rule

And How It Can Apply to Your Child's Success

In writing this book, the coach in me couldn't help herself from adding in some little nuggets of personal development. I also struggled with where to put this in the book. Should it come last, after you had all the information? This is where it would typically go, but I wanted it to come *before* you had the information. Why? Because I want you to *think about* how you are thinking about the material. Meaning I want you to be on the lookout for what are your beliefs you hold about the situation. This will influence your digestion of this information, trust me.

The world of personal development is vast, but individual success is fleeting. Why? Because everyone wants the information, but no one bothers to work on their mindset while trying to solve a problem. What is mindset, and why does it matter? The website Verywellmind.com defines mindset as “a set of beliefs that shape how you make sense of the world and yourself. It influences how you think, feel, and behave in any given situation.” There are two basic kinds of mindsets: fixed and growth. A fixed mindset doesn't believe that things can change, and is kind of fatalistic. A growth mindset is more action-oriented, and believes that you have a role in changing your circumstances.



My success isn't a result of arrogance - it's a result of belief.— Connor McGregor

Why is it important to know which mindset you have? If you have a fixed mindset, you may read through this book and think, “It doesn't matter. Nothing will change this.” Or, “I can't do it, I've tried already.” Whereas if you have a growth mindset, you will be more open to how you can make changes to your situation, your environment, and your relationship with your child. A fixed mindset will trip you up before you even begin. So even if you think you have a fixed mindset, it can be changed. The first step is being aware of it.

Which brings me to the 1% rule, and why I think it's important to this process. Being a parent of a child who may have anxiety problems is already overwhelming at times. And now, I'm asking you to take a journey with me through this book to see how you can start to change it. You may be hesitant, or you may want to jump in headfirst! Either way, the 1% rule will help to keep you from feeling like you have to change EVERYTHING to be successful.

The 1% rule, as described by author James Clear, says that if you were able to improve my 1% each day for an entire year, and those gains compound, you would end up 37 TIMES BETTER at the end of the year! Can you improve 1% every day? It sounds a lot easier than trying make BIG changes, doesn't it?

He mentioned "compound gains." How do you make these gains compound, so to speak? The answer is through habits. Habits are the compound interest of self-improvement. He talks about the four stages of habit formation as 1) Noticing, 2) Wanting, 3) Doing and 4) Liking. But I'm going to focus here on **Noticing**. Clear says that many people think they lack motivation, when what they really lack is clarity. They think they need willpower, when what they really need is a plan. And not just a plan for how to get started, but a plan for how to *keep going*. The biggest monkey wrench in building a habit is when you slip up and don't do it one day. The vast majority of people, in my opinion, use this as an excuse to stop. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy. "See, I knew I couldn't do it," you tell yourself. Or you promise yourself you'll start again – when you're ready. Only that time never comes. There's never the perfect time to restart, and even when a time is suitable, you'll be really good at talking yourself out of it.

How do we get around this? Clear calls it a "Failure Pre-Mortem." That means having a plan for when you fail that will take you back on course. You make this plan BEFORE the failure actually happens. He says to imagine yourself 6 months from now, and you have failed this goal. Tell the story of why you failed, what happened, and what challenges you encountered that took you off course. Once you've done this, you'll know all the possible roadblocks, and you can start to develop an if-then plan. "If this happens, then I will do that. If I miss my regular Monday at the gym, then I will go on Tuesday at 7 am," and so forth. Having a plan will make it more likely for you to keep going, and to not beat yourself up for slip ups along the way. As you'll see in the upcoming chapters, I'm big on making plans. Knowing your own mindset, and having a good solid plan will make it less likely for you to give up when the going gets tough while working with your child.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD'S FEARS

“

It's a universal truth that no parent wishes to acknowledge that the fear and phobias we are in thrall to in adulthood almost invariably connect back to childhood experiences.

-- Mariella Frostup

”

Understanding Your Child's Fears:

Could This Be Anxiety?

Every parent has concerns and questions at some point about their children's behavior. Are these typical childhood worries? Are they developmentally appropriate? Or are they something more? In order to know, we first need to look at the definition of anxiety. Everyone, whether child or adult, experiences anxiety at some point in their life. We experience anxiety in response to the stress that we feel coming from a problem we perceive, whether that problem is real or imaginary. Anxiety is a physical response that our bodies natural, internal alarm system gives us to alert to possible dangers or threats. Anxiety is designed to keep us safe.



At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents.

- Jane D. Hull

All living things have an internal alarm system to alert them to possible dangers. This is a critical evolutionary trait that allows the species to stay alive. Sometimes, the alarm system comes in the form of smell. Sometimes it comes in the form of taste. And other times it may be enhanced hearing. As humans, we have a unique ability that animals don't. That ability is to imagine danger, even before it happens. Our imagination becomes part of our alarm system, and can create an anxiety response in our bodies just as real as if the danger was actually happening. This special ability is responsible for the success of the human race beyond its ancestors. However, this special ability comes with a cost. We as humans may become susceptible to worrying about things that are not likely to happen, or even realistic. The wiring system meant to keep us safe has now gone haywire itself.

How your child's decision making process might be hijacked

Making good, solid decisions always requires two things: One, making judgments about which scenarios are MOST likely to happen, and two, being able to designate a value as to exactly how good or how bad the outcome of the scenario is likely to be. Just as there is a continuum of personalities in life, there is a continuum of values assigned to outcomes depending on the personality of the individual. Risk-takers tend to assign higher values to good outcomes, while cautious people will assign higher values to negative outcomes. Most people tend to land somewhere in the middle of the continuum.

Children dealing with anxious thinking experience a double whammy in a sense: they typically overestimate the likelihood of negative events while simultaneously downplaying the likelihood of positive events. Adding to this skewed perception, they will view negative events as intensely negative, while also viewing positive events as less positive than a non-anxious individual would view them.

A typical exchange (when viewing a positive event) may go something like this:

You: “Wow! Wasn’t that parade just fantastic! Did you see all the fire trucks and flashing lights? That was so cool!”

Your child: “Meh... it was ok.”

Because of this lackluster view of positive events, the promise of a positive outcome has little influence in their decision making. They just won’t be as apt to buy in to the payoff you are promising.

So, if negative events seem highly probable and very intense, while positive events seem less likely, and the payoff not that great, it makes sense that anxious children tend to gravitate towards the more cautious side of the behavior road. After all, why engage in what they perceive as “risky business” when the payoffs are mediocre at best?

And you know what makes it even worse? Kids who have anxious thinking styles are REALLY good at using their imaginations to come up with negative outcomes and often, worst-case-scenarios. In fact, their creativity can rival even that of the best sci-fi or suspense director, coming up with outcomes that you or I would never even come close to thinking up.



A crust eaten in peace is better than a banquet partaken in anxiety. – Aesop

For example, given an ordinary birthday party scenario, most children would get excited about the typical things a fun party brings: cake, presents, and the anticipation of having fun with friends. If they even come up with a possible negative, it would be something minor, such as not having as many friends there as they hoped, or a particular friend not showing up, or not getting a certain present they had hoped for. For anxious children, the thought of the party STARTS OFF with the possible negatives, including those that wouldn't occur to non-anxious kids. They may imagine a storm raining the party out, someone getting sick and throwing up because they were allergic to the cake, or even the house catching fire while all the guests are inside and the party is going on.

Because these scenarios are SO intense and SO negative, in their mind the **cost** of the party TOTALLY outweighs any benefits that may come from it. The risk is just not worth it, and furthermore, they can't imagine WHY you don't quite get the danger that you are putting them and everyone else in, all for a silly party!

So, to recap. Kids with anxious thinking see all the bad that can happen, and believe that it will be intensely, over-the-top REALLY bad. They are unable to buy into the fact that things could turn out good, and even if they did turn out good, they won't be THAT good, so the little bit of good is not worth the risk of the REALLY, REALLY bad. Sound like your kid? Well... good news. Your child may have anxious thinking, but that does NOT mean they have an anxiety disorder. What exactly do I mean by that?

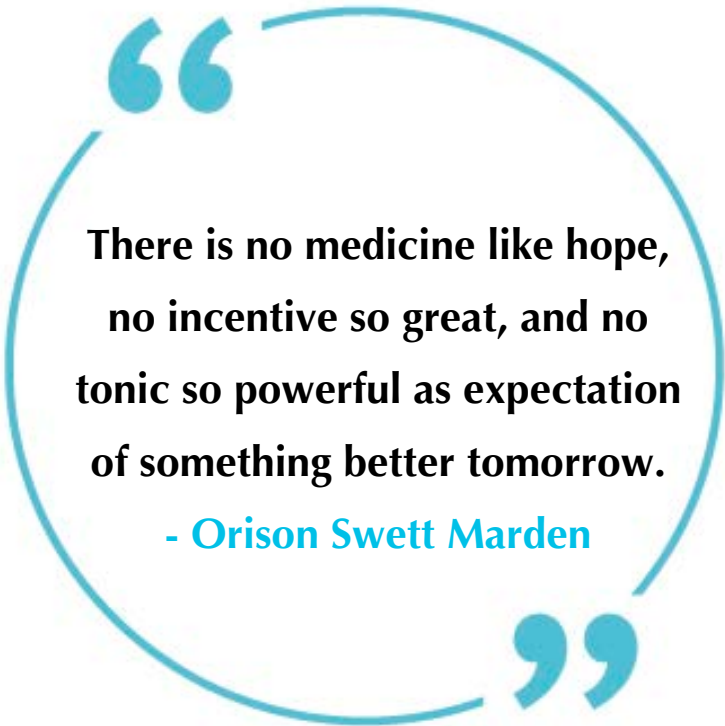
Anxious problem vs. Anxiety disorder

If anxiety is interfering with your child's functioning, then your child has an anxiety problem.

Your child does NOT have to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in order to receive help from my programs, or any other. In fact, having a diagnosis of an anxiety disorder does NOT explain WHY your child is anxious, it only gives an acknowledgment that she IS anxious.

So many times, I see parents who explain their child's anxious behavior away in this manner. "She's hiding behind me and won't talk because she has an anxiety disorder." Or, "She has generalized anxiety." When really, it's the other way around: Your child may have an anxiety disorder because she is exhibiting those behaviors (hiding, selective mutism), but the disorder does not cause the behavior. Does that make sense? The term anxiety disorder is only a LABEL for the set of symptoms your child may be showing. It is not the CAUSE of the behavior. Again, your child does not need to have a diagnosis to gain benefit or help. You do not need to be a clinical professional in order to help your child with her anxiety. I prefer to use the terms "anxious thinking," or "anxiety problem," rather than "anxiety disorder," because it allows the parents to focus on facing the concrete symptoms, rather than explaining them away as the inevitable outcome of having a disorder.

COMMON SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY IN CHILDREN



There is no medicine like hope,
no incentive so great, and no
tonic so powerful as expectation
of something better tomorrow.

- Orison Swett Marden

Common Symptoms of Anxiety in Children

Now that we have talked about how the thinking of anxious children may be different, let's look at how anxiety may manifest itself in outward symptoms or behaviors. Does your child exhibit one or more of the following symptoms?

- Not being able to sleep because his mind is stuck in overdrive
- Strong preference for a daily routine, and resistant to new options
- Overreactions to just about EVERYTHING
- No tolerance for spontaneity
- Seeming to be unable to make simple choices or decisions
- Seeming to be cranky all the time, or having a very short fuse
- Panic is the go to emotion, for even small things or situations
- No desire to make friends, even when friends reach out to them
- Constant predicting of the future, especially with catastrophizing, i.e. finding the worst-case scenario

Anxiety tends to affect children's lives in 4 different areas, or domains. These domains are body, thoughts, behavior, and feelings. Your child may be affected in all four to some extent, but most parents tend to see one domain clearly affected in their child above all others.



There are risks and costs to action. But they are far less than the long range risks of comfortable inaction. — John F. Kennedy

Thoughts

Scary thoughts. We all have them. Most of us let them come and go like dried leaves blowing in the wind.

The fundamental problem for kids dealing with anxiety is that they are taking action on thoughts that don't need to be taken action on.

As I explained in the last chapter, anxious kids are very good at using their imaginations to come up with negative outcomes. They assign higher likelihoods to negative possibilities, and believe that the effects will likely be intense in nature. Because their minds are occupied with more worried thoughts than what others experience, you may find that your anxious child wants to talk about nothing else! It may help to understand that this is part of the evolution of the human brain.

Human brains developed to attend to threats above all else. Everything else must come later. Knowing this, it makes perfect sense that an anxious child would want to focus on what they perceive as a threat to the exclusion of all else, at least until they feel the threat has passed. Let me give you an example.

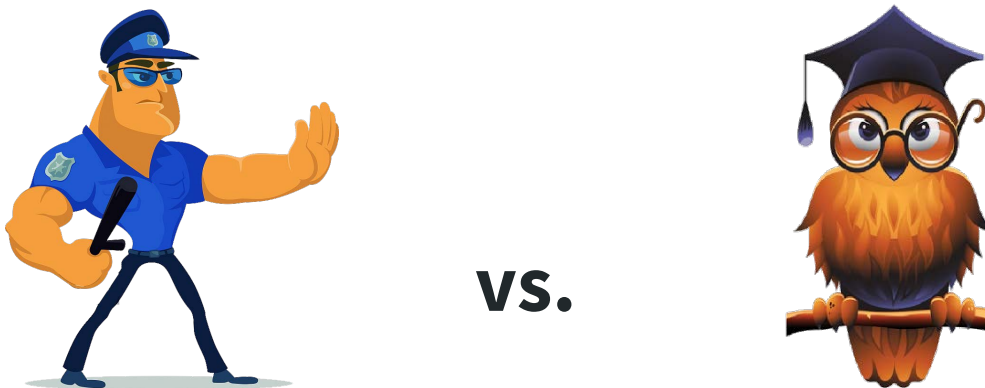
The fundamental problem for kids dealing with anxiety is that they are taking action on thoughts that don't need to be taken action on.

Imagine you are meeting a famous person, one you have dreamed of meeting for so long! This person has been a hero of yours since childhood! Now, during the meeting, imagine a tarantula crawling up your leg. Once you spot it, you would think about nothing else but getting free (unless you are a spider-lover, but you get the point). The meeting with your hero would take a backseat until your brain assessed that the threat was over. You might even make a complete fool of yourself in front of your hero, yelling and screaming, until the spider was neutralized.

Meeting that person was SO important to you, but your brain had to make a choice and prioritize what was important RIGHT NOW. When it comes to the human brain, it is always survival first.

For anxious children, they may feel in survival mode all the time. This is because there IS no action they can take to put out the fire, or neutralize the creepy-crawlies, because these threats exist solely in their mind.

A few years ago, I used to teach a leadership class for children. Part of the class was learning to think about how they think. We learned about the survival part of the brain (the amygdala) and gave it the label of the “security guard.” We learned about the reasoning part (the pre-frontal cortex) and gave it the name “wise old owl.” It was the job of our security guard to protect us from threats. But in the case of anxious thinking, our security guard has gone a little overboard. He is now bringing things to our attention that are totally benign, yet telling us that they are ticking time bombs, or death threats! Part of the learning process was dissecting our thoughts, and asking, “Who is giving me this message, the security guard or the wise old owl?” If it was the security guard, we would then ask, “Well, what would the wise old owl say to this?” It was a way of helping the children to reframe their thoughts, and to not accept them as just facts, but rather to investigate them and to understand that they may be subjective.



As humans, we don't get to pick what we think about. Just try not to think of a purple elephant. You just pictured a purple elephant, didn't you? You can't help it, because your brain does not process negatives. Trying to stop thinking about something only makes it more likely that you will think MORE about it. For some children, this becomes an endless cycle of pushing away thoughts, and trying NOT to worry about them. It is always better to help them face their fears and neutralize them in the process.

Feelings

Most of us have heard of “fight or flight.” This is when the body has an automatic response to a perceived threat. In response to this, the body's sympathetic nervous system is activated by releasing hormones from the adrenal glands, resulting in an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing rate. After the threat is gone, it takes between 20 to 60 minutes for the body to return to its normal levels.

While we can usually recognize the physical signs of fight or flight, such as dilated pupils, flushed skin, rapid breathing, and trembling, parents can often overlook the FIGHT component of fight or flight. The mistake is in assuming that your child is anxious only when she is fearful. You could be missing the FIGHT behaviors that are also indicative of anxiety. You may be seeing them, and even labeling them as something other than anxiety.

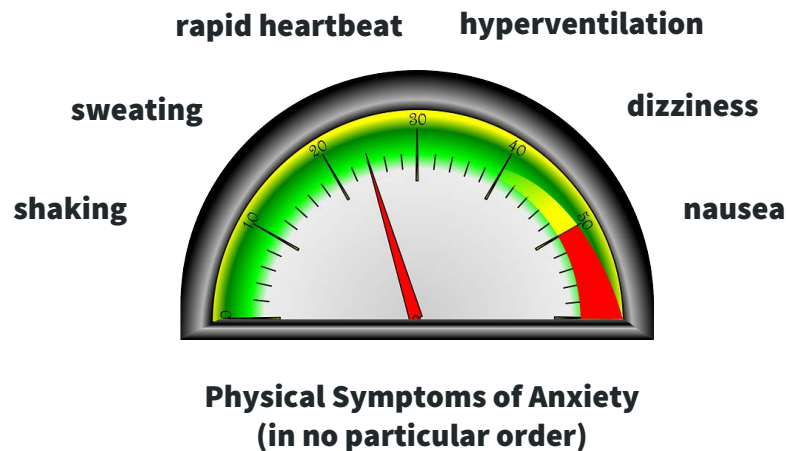
What are these fight behaviors? They can be seen as irritability, or “crankiness,” or can even show up in an increase in temper tantrums. If you are seeing more of these behaviors, you may want to investigate further if this could be the result of anxiety in your child.

And finally, high levels of anxiety can not only increase the frequency of negative emotions, it can also show up in the guise of an absence of positive emotions, such as curiosity, excitement or happiness. Remember the whole idea about not experiencing positive outcomes as particularly likely or intensely good? Imagine if you felt that way a good bit of the time, you would not necessarily be excited or happy either! As a parent, noticing these changes are the first step to being able to discern if your child has an anxiety problem, and then being able to offer a solution.

Body

These symptoms are often detected first, because they are so visible. They are also the symptoms that can be the most scary, because the child and the parent often do not know what is going on at first. They can include changes in breathing, trembling, pounding heartbeat, dizziness, nausea, increased fidgeting, or an increased rigidity to their muscles.

Though these physical symptoms can be very unpleasant and even frightening in the moment (to both the child AND the parent), it is important to know that the symptoms are not dangerous to an otherwise healthy child in the short-term. An increase in heart rate that results from anxiety is just as safe as one that results from physical exertion. It just may be more frightening because the cause of the increase in heart rate is unknown, whereas the cause of the increase after physical exertion is expected. Helping your child to understand that the body knows what to do, and knows how to calm itself can be reassuring and an anchor point in any subsequent anxiety experiences.



Just as we develop our physical muscles through overcoming opposition - such as lifting weights - we develop our character muscles by overcoming challenges and adversity. - Stephen Covey

Behavior

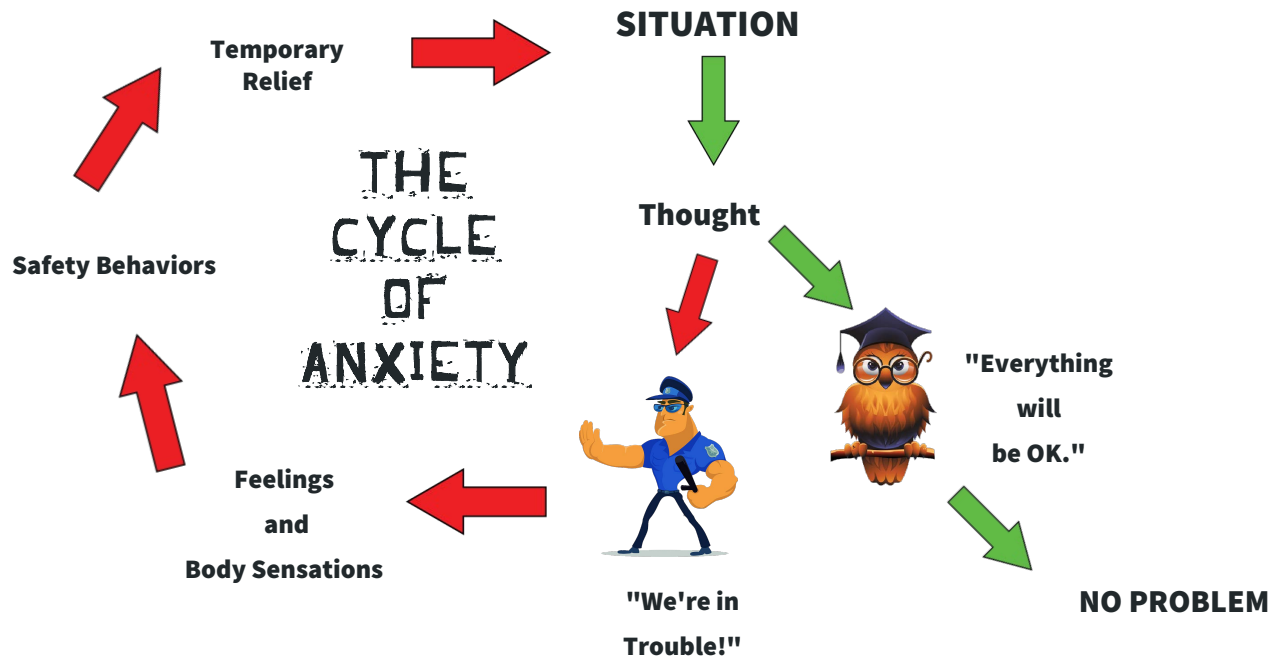
It is the brain's evolutionary job to keep us out of harm's way, and the main way it accomplishes this is by avoidance. In particular, we avoid the things we perceive as threats. For those without anxiety, this part of the brain works when it's supposed to; for those with anxiety, the brain gets a little more ambitious. Children with anxiety problems will gradually increase and broaden the circle of things they avoid. This phenomenon is called "avoidance creep," and it means that they will eventually generalize their anxiety to other things, whether they are related to the original problem, or not. As you can imagine, this causes more and more of a negative impact on their daily functioning. As the avoidance of more and more things increases, the things that feel "safe" shrink to a smaller and smaller number.

Another problem begins from the increased avoiding behavior. Now, because he is avoiding more things, he is also losing out on the opportunity to learn. He will now never find out (as long as he is avoiding) whether those things actually ARE dangerous. Second, he will never learn that he can actually COPE with the fear and tolerate the feelings he is experiencing, based on that situation.

Though we have been talking about avoidance, keep in mind that it is the FEELING he is trying to avoid. When avoiding threats, the natural thing to do is to turn to the parent for relief. In fact, it is biologically wired into children to do this. These are called "safety behaviors." So in the pursuit of avoiding this discomfort, anxiety will also cause your child to DO things, as well as NOT do things. The thing is, most of the things he is doing will involve the parent to some degree or other. For example, a child who doesn't want to feel fear from separation will constantly check in with his parent, from room to room. As this avoidance progresses, the parent may not be able to leave the room anymore without the child following. The anxiety is causing the child to do the check in behavior, in order to avoid the fear of being separated.

Another child with a particular fear may ask the same questions over and over. As the parent continues to answer the questions, the list of questions may start to get longer and longer. The anxiety is leading to the child's questioning behavior, in order to avoid the discomfort.

A child may have one behavior, or more than one behavior he uses to avoid the anxious feelings. Left unaddressed, the list of behaviors can become longer and longer over time. Chances are, the list will involve you as the parent more and more.



The Cycle of Anxiety

Anxiety operates in a cycle. It begins with a thought that the child has, which leads to a feeling of being unsafe in some way. The “unsafeness” (I know it’s not a real word, but it works here) can be either a physical safety issue (“What if the school bus gets into an accident?”), or a mental safety issue (“I don’t wanna look dumb if I have to order off the menu for myself.”) The outcome is the same: Your child’s body will have a response to the feeling. The child will become alarmed by this response, and seek you out to soothe him, and to relieve the stress he is experiencing. You will do a behavior (drive him to school) or not do a behavior (avoid going to restaurants) in order to make him feel better. The problem is, this relief is like a drug, and the effects are only temporary. However, the “hit” of the relief that you offer only leads to needing more and more “hits” in order for your child to feel safe. Nothing stops the next scary thought from coming, and the whole cycle begins anew.

WHY DO SOME KIDS STRUGGLE WITH ANXIETY WHILE OTHERS DON'T?

“

Wisest is he who knows
what he does not know.

- Plato

”

Why Do Some Kids Struggle with Anxiety while Others Don't?

Anxiety problems are the most common mental health problem in children and adolescents. Between 5 and 10 percent of children from preschool through adolescence have a current anxiety problem and data suggest that as many as 30% of children will have an anxiety problem at some point before adulthood.

So, why do some kids struggle with anxiety while others don't? Unfortunately, science doesn't have a really good answer for this. This is for two reasons: One, because both psychiatry and psychology are relatively new disciplines of medicine, studying topics related to these 2 disciplines is also a relatively new phenomenon. And two, the human brain is extremely complex and a challenge to any study. The tools we have for examining it are limited, at best.

It's a very common thing for parents to wonder if having a child with anxiety is because of genetics, or if maybe they have done something to cause this. However, anxiety is a combination of genetic and environmental factors. As stated above, science doesn't yet have a really good handle on either factor. There is no single gene marker for anxiety. And it would be wrong to assume that a child's anxiety problem is the result of any single or particular event in her life.

So why do parents sometimes get the bad rap as the cause of their child's anxiety problem? Well don't worry, you aren't just blamed for your child's anxiety; in the relative recent history of psychology, you have been held accountable for just about every malady or maladjustment your kid may have exhibited! The idea that you, the parent are the cause of your child's emotional and behavioral problems stems from a few different series of unfortunate scientific events.

One, there have been inaccurate assumptions about human development – mainly that children are born blank slates, molded by the actions of their parents. As any parent knows, this is not true at all. Children are not born blank slates, in fact they are born with very distinct personalities.

Every parent with multiple children can attest to the fact that though each one was raised in the exact same environment, they all turn out completely unique.

Number two is relying on outdated psychological theories from the last hundred years. New research is rapidly proving many of these theories outdated and completely off-course. Third are misunderstandings of research on the links between parents' behavior and childhood disorders. Research often compares parents of an anxious child with parents of non-anxious child at the same point in time, without regard as to the factors that got them there. And the fourth cause of blaming the parents is based on an incorrect interpretation of family dynamics. Statistically, parents who fall on the more controlling, low-autonomy granting, and protective end of the continuum are more likely to have children with an anxiety problem. However, this can't be scientifically proven, and the question needs to be asked: are these parents developing this authoritarian parenting style as a result of their OWN anxiety?




One of the most important gifts a parent can give a child is the gift of accepting that child's uniqueness. – Fred Rogers

OK... then we don't know exactly the where or why of your child's anxiety problem. So you say, "How are we going to be able to address it then?"

The great news is that there are effective ways of overcoming your child's anxiety problem without knowing the whys of its origins.

YOU DIDN'T CAUSE IT, BUT ANXIETY IS STILL A CHILD *AND* ADULT PROBLEM



**When love and skill
work together, expect
a masterpiece.**

- John Ruskin

You Didn't Cause It, but Anxiety is Still a Child AND Adult Problem

Your child's anxiety is likely to have an impact on you, as the parent, as well as on the rest of the family. Many parents report feeling like their child's anxiety has taken over their OWN lives completely. As children's anxiety creep and their anxiety problems progress, boundaries between parent and child often become blurred, at times seeming to be non-existent.

Even when you know your child's anxiety is not realistically justified, and that he is actually safe, you are still going to feel motivated to help him **feel** safe. It is hardwired into your brain as a parent, both to protect and to soothe afterwards. But when your child comes to over-rely on your power to soothe him, it can start to feel more like a burden than a natural response.

Remember the cycle of anxiety? Well this is a whole new cycle, very similar to the cycle of anxiety, except this time, it is based on YOUR behavior as the parent. You may find yourself doing things you do not normally do, such as being constantly in your child's presence because she is afraid to be alone or without you. Or you may be regularly expected to provide reassurance for your child. It may take the form of becoming your child's literal mouthpiece in social situations or being responsible for relaying her thoughts or wishes to others.

These behaviors are called Participations or Modifications, and all fall under the umbrella of **Accommodations**.

What is Accommodation?

Accommodation is a parental response to their child's anxiety. It is what you do (or do not do) to try to reduce your child's anxiety. As a definition, it must come AFTER the child has exhibited anxiety, and therefore, it is not the CAUSE of the anxiety itself.

Accommodations take the form of participations or modifications. Many times, parents will get really good at anticipating their child's anxious response and will act preemptively, heading it off at the pass. This is **participation**, and participation can be active or passive. For example, you may cut your child's food into miniscule pieces before they will eat, even though they are capable of cutting their own food (Active). Or, you may allow your child to accompany you from room to room so they won't have to be alone, even including the bathroom (Passive).


Modifications are when you change or organize your life or the life of your family around your child's anxiety problem. For instance, you may take the same route to school everyday, because an unfamiliar road makes your child anxious and can send him into a panic, interfering with him getting to school on time. Another example would be not allowing a sibling to have a friend over to the family's home because it sets off the anxious sibling. Modifications happen when you change what you would normally do for the sole purpose of soothing your anxious child.

Accommodations do not benefit your anxious child in the long run. In addition, they are not necessary for your child's recovery. So why then do parents accommodate?

The main reason is to reduce their child's distress. Though well-meaning in the short-term, it is actually a form of negative reinforcement that shapes both the parent and the child's behavior for the future. For the child, it reduces anxiety in the short-term, but it makes it more likely that future episodes will occur, because it is teaching them over and over that they need their parent's help for relief. For the parent, the reinforcement comes when their distress is lessened, because they no longer see their child in pain. This makes it much more likely that they will accommodate in the future, even before their child's distress levels become extreme.

Alternatively, not accommodating equals double stress. Parents have to actively contend with their own distress (and possible guilt) while simultaneously trying to lessen their child's. Some parents may even feel like they are actively hurting their child by not accommodating. These parents would be extremely surprised and even shocked to find that just the opposite is true! Research actually shows that coping with moderate levels of anxiety with healthy adult support actually increases the child's coping skills and promotes resilience!

Another reason that parents accommodate is the need to survive the short-term. They essentially choose the lesser of two evils in the moment. They may not be able to separate the choice to accommodate from the result that not accommodating would have on other family members. It actually becomes a mode of protection for them. Morning and bedtime routines are prime examples of this. Parents will accommodate an anxious child in order to avoid making other siblings late for school, or they may give in to their anxious child's demands at bedtime so that their spouse or other siblings are able to get a peaceful night's sleep.

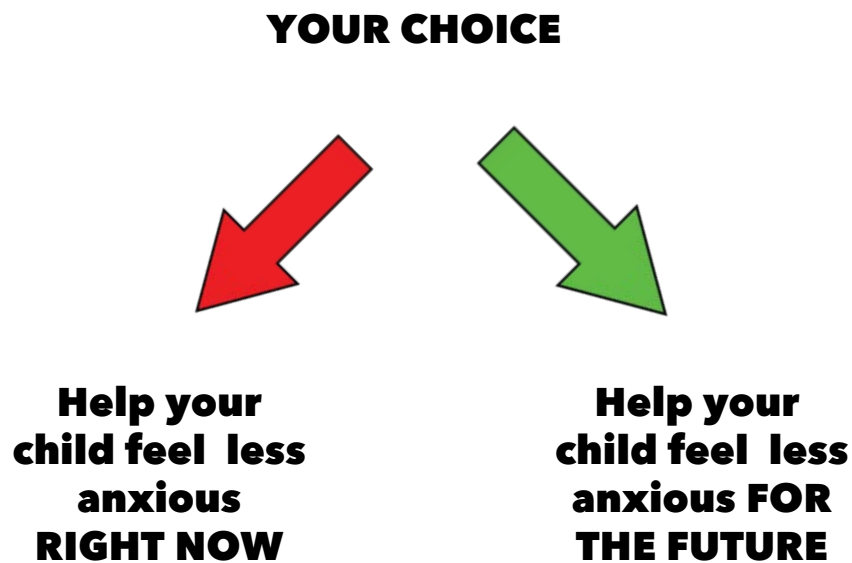
 **The greatest gifts you can give your children
are the roots of responsibility and the wings of
independence – Denis Waitley**

Parents will also accommodate to protect the child's social status. They believe that allowing their child to be anxious in front of others will cause their child to be negatively judged by their peers. They may speak on their child's behalf or accompany the child to school events. However, this is all just smoke and mirrors. No one is fooled by this behavior on the parent's part. Children are really perceptive and know when something's amiss, and no amount of dancing around the issue will be able to hide this from friends or classmates.

Accommodation may happen in response to aggressive child behavior. It is not uncommon for anxious children to use emotional blackmail on their parents to get what they want. To them, the end justifies the means. Parents may be surprised to discover that aggressive behavior can show up for the first time once accommodation is removed, even in children that have never been aggressive in the past.

And finally, and one that is extremely common is that parents will accommodate in response to their own anxiety. This parent may identify strongly with their anxious child and their distress because they may have been an anxious child themselves. Having their own anxiety makes them even more motivated to rescue their child, who they may see as being misunderstood, the way they felt misunderstood themselves. They may see themselves as an unrescued victim and feel bound and determined to rescue their child. An anxious parent is even more likely to believe that anxiety is harmful to their child, even though study after study shows that typical feelings of anxiety are not harmful to an otherwise healthy child.

As a parent with an anxious child, the most important choice you will need to make is do you help your child feel less anxious RIGHT NOW, or do you want to help your child feel less anxious OVERALL?



THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL ACCOMMODATION

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...Good intentions may
do as much harm as
malevolence if they
lack understanding.

- Albert Camus

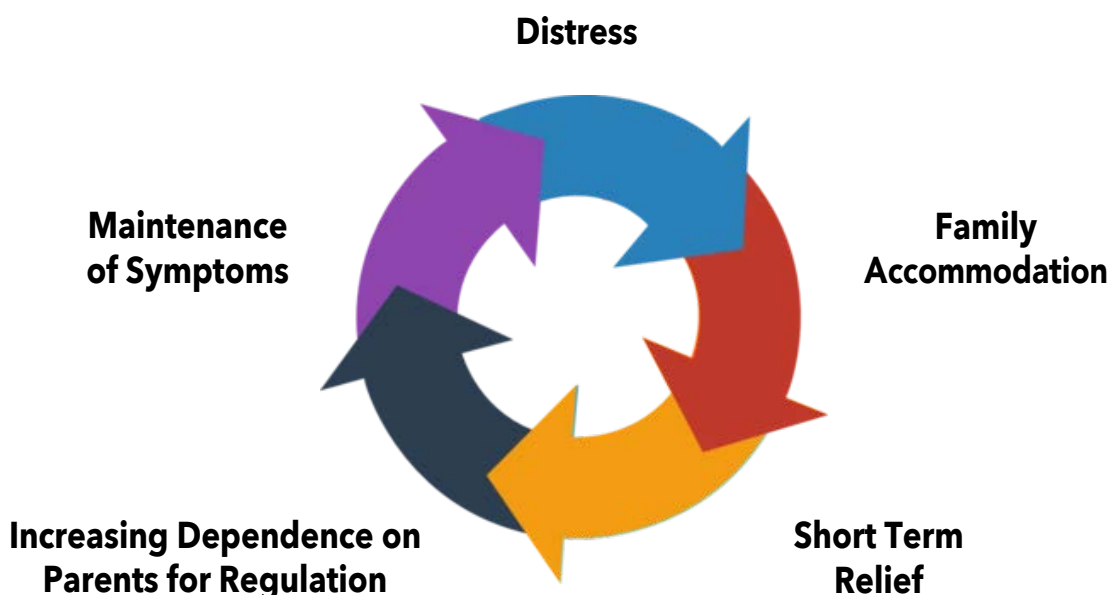
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The Negative Effects of Parental Accommodation

The cycle of accommodation is similar to the cycle of anxiety but it is related to the parents actions, behaviors, and feelings instead of the child's. Accommodation leads to more, NOT less, anxiety symptoms. Parents accommodate to reduce anxiety, but accommodation leads to MORE severe anxiety, which leads to even MORE accommodation.

The answer to reducing your child's anxiety is in helping him to form more independence, especially when it relates to coping skills. Accommodation undermines this goal by maintaining dependence on the parents, and actually increasing dependence over time, leading to more symptoms. Research studies show that highly accommodated children experience impairment in more areas of daily functioning. Not only that, they are less likely to benefit from treatments such as CBT and medication. In fact, accommodation was the main factor that predicted poor treatment response, no matter what kind of treatment the child received. Accommodation also increases the degree of interference that anxiety symptoms causes in a child's daily life, yet studies show that 99% of parents show some form of accommodation of their anxious child.

The Accommodation Cycle



Even more importantly, accommodation affects the parent-child relationship in the long-term. Parents frequently become resentful about the constant demands placed upon them by the child. The child's need for accommodation will overpower their discouragement about their parents' unhappiness, and the behaviors will continue. Yet, the child may be left with feelings of shame or inadequacy in the long term.

Need more confirmation of accommodation's negative effects? Accommodation promotes avoidance, leading to more "avoidance creep." It continually reinforces a less mature regulatory system, keeping your child parent-dependent. Accommodation reduces your child's self-confidence, strengthening his belief that he is not capable of handling his anxiety alone. When parents reflect to the child an image of helplessness and defenselessness, the child will eventually start to see himself this way.

Accommodation reduces insight, and can impede a child's ability to correctly label their anxious thoughts as exaggerated or improbable to occur. After all, the child may think, "If mom didn't believe it too, then she wouldn't be doing the things she's doing to help." And finally, accommodation reduces the motivation for treatment. Many children refuse to even participate in an initial evaluation. And even of those who are assessed, the number who declined treatment is high. Accommodation provides them with an "out" or an alternative strategy with the parents as a co-conspirator. By reducing accommodation, parents can help their child feel that overcoming anxiety is now critical, making them more likely to engage in treatment.

WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU DO NOTHING?

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Action cures fear,
inaction creates terror.

- Douglas Horton

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What Happens if You Do Nothing?

Now you know what a detrimental effect accommodation has on anxious children, what happens if you don't interrupt the pattern? Research shows that children who have an anxiety problem and do not get help often get worse. Anxious children become anxious adults. And anxious adults often have anxious kids. The cycle continues.

Clinical trials have shown that most children who receive treatment for anxiety no longer have a significant problem at the end of treatment. This does not necessarily mean the anxiety has been cured. The child may have to deal with high anxiety sometime in the future. However, coping with it again in the future with proper tools will be a less daunting task than encountering it the first time around. The high likelihood of the successful addressing and treating of anxiety, coupled with a low probability of anxiety going away on its own, gives a very good reason to address your child anxiety as soon as possible!

But What if My Child Doesn't WANT Treatment?

The great news is that it has been shown that anxious children who do not participate in therapy, but who have parents that have completed a program addressing family accommodation actually do as well as anxious children who undergo therapy.



Let me repeat that: Even when the child does NOT receive treatment himself, his outcomes can be just as positive as a child who undergoes therapy, PROVIDED THAT HIS PARENTS COMPLETE A PROGRAM ADDRESSING FAMILY ACCOMMODATION!

This method of addressing parental accommodation has been studied through clinical trial research and found to be just as effective as traditional therapies treating childhood anxiety today. When participating in a program such as this, it requires neither your child's consent NOR their participation. It requires only your willingness to take action on your part.

How Did This Type of Treatment Come About?

CBT and medications used to treat childhood anxiety were found to be insufficient in up to half of the cases studied through clinical trials. This has left doctors and the scientific community scratching their collective heads as to why. So, they decided to study child-only treatment vs. child/parent treatment. What they found was no clinical difference in the outcomes. Which means that the child did just as well being treated on their own as when they were being treated jointly with their parents. Which at a 50% success rate wasn't saying much. However, no prior studies included addressing the parent's accommodating behaviors. They all remain focused on the child's behaviors, even when parents were jointly included in the study. A research scientist from Yale changed all that.

He theorized that it is the parent's accommodation that is perpetuating the child's anxiety symptoms and behaviors. Remove the accommodation, and the behaviors will eventually extinguish themselves. He called the program SPACE, which stood for Supportive Parenting of Anxious Childhood Emotions. He studied 124 children with an average age of 9 ½, and divided the groups into two. In the 1st group, children underwent CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) with no parental involvement. In the 2nd group, the children did not receive therapy; instead their parents attended individual sessions of a specialized program designed to address parents' accommodating behaviors.

At the end of the study, the parent-focused program was deemed to be non-inferior (a scientific fancy term for just as good as) to the CBT treatment.

Another recent study focused on the effectiveness of group sessions of SPACE. This study found that group sessions provided parents with increased peer support and reassurance, and gave them an opportunity to see how their peers were dealing with their own situations, as well as an opportunity to get peer feedback on their own experience. The study found that group treatment significantly decreased parental accommodations, and reduced family power struggles and parental feelings of helplessness. This was accompanied by a significant reduction in anxiety and symptom severity.

Since its inception, SPACE has been studied in as a treatment for anxiety, OCD (Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder), ARFID (Clinically picky eating), and even failure to launch. In every study, SPACE had outcomes that were as effective as the more traditional therapy modalities, such as CBT. SPACE is the first program of its kind in that it does not require the child to be involved at all. It is solely focused on the parents identifying and reducing their own counter-productive behaviors. Because of the high incidence of treatment refusal by anxious children, coupled with the long waiting lists that currently exist to get into treatment, SPACE is uniquely positioned to be able to help more parents (and thus, their children) than at any other time in history.



At every step the child should be allowed to meet the real experience of life; the thorns should never be plucked from his roses. - Ellen Key

ONE CROSSROAD, TWO CHOICES

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**You always have two
choices: your
commitment versus
your fear.**

Sammy Davis, Jr.

”

One Crossroad, Two Choices

Congratulations for making it to the end of this book. You now know the indicators of an anxiety problem, as well as its effects on a child's thoughts, feelings, body, and behavior. You know that anxiety often affects the whole family, and left untreated is unlikely to go away on its own. In fact, just the opposite is true. Do nothing, and the anxiety is likely to grow and generalize to other areas. Do nothing, and the symptoms and areas of impairment are likely to get worse.

You have learned how a parent's accommodating behaviors affects their child's anxiety. Studies have shown that accommodation maintains anxiety and in effect increases its symptoms. Unfortunately, the only two common treatments for anxiety (CBT and medications) have a less than 50% success rate. It is theorized that this is because they do not address parent accommodations, and left untreated, parent accommodations will only undo any progress that conventional treatments can offer. The SPACE program has been shown through clinical trials to be as effective in treating childhood anxiety as CBT or medications. SPACE treatment does not require the child's consent nor participation to be effective, allowing parents to pursue treatment, even when the child is unwilling.

They say knowledge is power. However, that is not correct. It is only APPLIED knowledge that is power. Many of you will stop here, and take all that you have learned, and for many reasons that I will never understand, do nothing. At this point, there is only one choice, and that is... are YOU ready and willing to help your child?

“Most failures are one-time costs. Most regrets are recurring costs. The pain of inaction stings longer than the pain of incorrect action.”
— James Clear

I hope that you say yes. I hope that you decide to take the next step to help your anxious child recover their dignity, their power, and their PEACE. Don't wait... today becomes tomorrow, and tomorrow becomes next month. You get the idea. Take the info and the opportunity and take ACTION.

You can find information on My Worry Free Kid trainings (which teach parents the concepts proven in the SPACE research) at **www.MyWorryFreeKid.com/Training**

As a parent participant, you will learn:

- How to identify what is an accommodation, and what is not
- How to stop accommodating, and start supporting your child in gaining back his emotional independence
- How to identify and change your patterns as a parent that may be perpetuating your child's anxiety cycle
- How to plan and execute the changes you will be making as a parent
- How to anticipate, plan for, and respond to your child's inevitable reaction to the changes
- How to take the skills you learn in the trainings, and adapt and apply them to any future symptoms or situations

This program is LIVE with me, and is very hold-your-hand through every step in this journey. It is interactive, and not just a teacher/student style lecture. You will be actively participating, and in doing so, will be able to tailor your learning and your application of the concepts to your situation. You will benefit from the experience and support of other parents going through the exact same experiences and feelings as you. It is delivered LIVE through an online platform, which means you are not limited geographically in attending this program! I look forward to helping you to bring back peace to your family and your life!

Visit:

www.MyWorryFreeKid.com/Training



KARA CZERNIAK is an author, speaker, entrepreneur and CEO of Kara Czerniak Coaching Solutions, a coaching and training company focused on helping parents and children discover and utilize their maximum personal power and potential.

Kara has spent the last 30 years working with children, building programs that systematically build confidence, inner strength and power. She began to create programs geared to help parents understand and connect on a deeper level with their own children, based on her work and Master's Degree research. Post-pandemic, she saw a sharp rise in the number of children dealing with anxiety. Inspired by her foundational work in building confidence, she began to search for a solution that could be delivered by parents, leading to her **My Worry Free Kid Program**.

The **My Worry Free Kid** Program is based on the research of Yale Clinician Dr. Eli Leibowitz, whose clinical trials showed that anxious children whose parents completed a program addressing family accommodation had equally positive outcomes compared to anxious children who completed therapy.

ANXIOUS THINKING VS. ANXIETY PROBLEM VS. ANXIETY DISORDER - WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

You have a child who lately has been more than just shy. They're cranky, emotional, fearful... just not themselves. They may be having trouble socially, or in school. You're wondering "Does my child have an anxiety disorder? You're also wondering, "What can I do for them, I'm not a professional!" Perhaps, you have sought out professional help, but you are now on a waiting list of a year or more. What can you do in the meantime?

YOU DON'T HAVE TO FEEL OVERWHELMED. YOU DON'T HAVE TO FEEL HELPLESS.

In **My Worry Free Kid**, you'll learn about how to distinguish the symptoms of anxiety, and know the difference between an anxiety problem and an anxiety disorder. You will learn how you, as the parent, can take back your power and peace, and help your child regain their confidence in their ability to face their fears, supported by the one constant in their life - **YOU!**