Focus on the Shy and Anxious Child

With Meryl Silver
April 17, 2013
Meryl Silver, MS.Ed, received her bachelor’s degree in Early Childhood Education from Queens College and holds a master’s degree in Special Education from Bank Street College of Education. Meryl has close to 15 years of teaching experience, including four years as a resource room teacher at Yeshiva Har Torah and three years as a learning specialist for P’tach at the Yeshiva University High School for Girls. She has also worked as a co-facilitator for Schools Attuned and is a graduate of the SAFDA program. Meryl has also served as a Hidden Sparks External Coach at the Yeshiva of Central Queens and Shaare Torah Elementary School for boys. Meryl was recently hired by Teach NYS to coordinate a High School Academic Resource Center project which aims to help families access special education services for struggling students in Jewish high schools.
Overview of the Session

This session will present information that will enable teachers to help students who struggle with anxiety. We will aim to teach teachers how to recognize signs of anxiety in their students and to develop interactive scripts that will address the problem constructively.
Session Goals:

- Heighten teacher awareness of the classroom experience for the shy or anxious student
- Present systematic approach for responding to the needs of anxious students
- Offer suggestions as to how teachers can modify instruction for students who struggle with anxiety
- Destigmatize students who present as anxious or shy
Labeling is Disabling

• Retitling webinar: Exploring Strategies to Support Children who Struggle with Shyness and/or Anxiety

• Brief Moment to Distinguish Between Shyness and Anxiety
True or False?

The majority of adults with an anxiety disorder report that their symptoms began in childhood.
True or False?

The majority of children with anxious parents develop an anxiety disorder.
True or False?

The majority of children who experience trauma develop an anxiety disorder.
True or False?

If a panic attack gets too intense, the sufferer is likely to pass out.
True or False?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an empirically supported effective treatment for many anxiety disorders.
Contributors to Anxiety

- Genetics and brain physiology
- Temperament
- Parenting style
- Environmental factors including traumatic events
Parenting Behaviors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaviors Associated with Anxiety</th>
<th>Behaviors that Buffer Stress</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overprotection</td>
<td>Manages own anxiety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encourages avoidant behavior</td>
<td>Encourages coping behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian Parenting Style</td>
<td>Authoritative/Democratic Parenting Style</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rejection or Criticism</td>
<td>Development of Problem Solving Skills</td>
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Red Flags

• Demonstrates excessive distress out of proportion to the situation
• Demonstrates excessive avoidance of situations most children enjoy
• Excessive time coaxing child to perform normal activities
• Anticipatory anxiety – worrying days, weeks or years ahead of time
• Won’t respond to logical attempts of comfort and reassurance
Anxiety Disorders

- General Anxiety Disorder (GAD)
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Social Anxiety
- Panic Disorder
- Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD)
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)
- Phobias: Animal, Natural Environment, Blood/Medical Procedures, Situational, Other
The Anxiety Formula

Overestimation of Threat + Underestimation of Ability to Cope
= Anxious Response
Psychoeducation:
Demystification of the experience of anxiety
Fear Thermometer

THE FEAR THERMOMETER

"Yikes! Get me out of here!"

"This is hard, but I'm in control"

"No problem"
Somatic Management Skills

• Breathing Exercises
• Progressive Relaxation Techniques
• Visualization
• Yoga
• Meditation
• Prayer
Cognitive Restructuring

• Rewiring Cognitive Glitches

Brain Train

**Smart Track**
- Field trips are fun
  - We get to miss school
  - The teacher knows what to do
- Not nervous
  - Excited
- Want to go

**Thought**
- What if we get lost?
- What if there's an accident?
- What if someone throws up on the bus?

**Feeling**
- Nervous!

**Action**
- Ask Mom if I can stay home!

**Worry Track**
- Field trip

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I DON'T BELIEVE YOU!

THAT'S A BUNCH OF GARBAGE

LEAVE ME ALONE!

GET LOST

SCRAM!
Gradual Exposure Therapy

GUTI (Get Used To It) Exercises
GOAL: walk to school with friend

Walk to school with Mom

Spend 10 minutes out in yard when neighbor’s dog is out on a leash

Pet a neighbor’s friendly dog, stand in front of fence

Look at dog behind fence in neighborhood or from across street

STARTING POINT: Look at dog book with Mom
GUTI: Things to Remember

- Empathy
- Pacing
- Creativity
- Incentives and Reinforcement
- Humor
I never step on a line, I suffer from obsessive compulsive disorder!
“Therapy and medications are not the only options for your obsessive behavior.”
Thinking About Anxious Students

Anxiety has a measurable effect on academic performance.
Sample School Accommodations

- Excused latenesses
- Tests taken orally
- Reduced Homework
- Reduced Public Speaking: oral reports recorded, present to teacher rather than class
- Reduce note taking
- Untimed tests
- Safe place at school for breaks
What do you think is the opposite of anxious?
Questions for Reflection

• What is my classroom like for a student who struggles with shyness or anxiety?

• What can I do tomorrow to reduce perceived threats?

• What can I do tomorrow to develop coping skills?
Resources for Parents and Teachers

The Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy
www.aabt.org/aabt

Children’s Center for OCD and Anxiety
www.childocdandanxiety.org

Anxiety Disorders Association of America
www.adaa.org

Relief (a mental health referral service that works specifically with Jewish families)
(718) 431-9501
Bibliography

• Freeing Your Child From Anxiety: Tamar Chansky
• The Anxiety Cure for Kids: Elizabeth Dupont Spencer
• The Shyness Breakthrough: Bernardo Carducci
• Say Good bye to Being Shy: Richard Brozovich
• What To Do When You Worry Too Much: Dawn Huebner
About Hidden Sparks

**Hidden Sparks** is a non-profit whose purpose is to help children with learning differences reach their full potential in school and life. Hidden Sparks develops and supports professional development programs for Jewish day schools to help increase understanding and support for diverse learners.

Guided by a philosophy that by helping schools meet the needs of children with learning and behavioral differences, ultimately all students will benefit. Hidden Sparks’ programs combine professional development in learning and positive behavioral support, guided classroom observation and one on one coaching. The Hidden Sparks model and program is currently in 30 Jewish Day Schools/Yeshivot in New York, Baltimore, and Chicago through partnerships with SHEMESH and REACH, and with support from a Covenant Foundation grant. Additional day schools in New Orleans, Tampa, Hollywood and Nashville participate.

Over 20 additional schools in NY received Hidden Sparks services through No Child Left Behind.
Contacting Hidden Sparks

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