

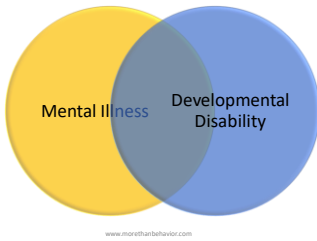


Neurodevelopmental Conditions and Anxiety
Common Causes/Effective Solutions
Webinar Sponsored by NJCTS

Presented by Christopher Lynch, Ph.D.
 Psychologist and Author of:
Totally Chill: My Complete Guide to Staying Cool
Anxiety Management for Kids on the Spectrum: Your Guide to Preventing Meltdowns and Unlocking Potential

Photo Courtesy of Pixabay

Diagnostic Overshadowing



What is Anxiety?

- Cognitive Symptoms: Worry, rumination, repetitive thoughts and images involving danger,
- Physical Symptoms: Tension, rapid breathing, increased heart rate, trembling, sweating, dizziness, nausea,
- Emotional Symptoms: Fear, panic, stressed, irritability
- Behavioral Symptoms: Avoidance, exacerbation of tics and compulsions, behavioral challenges

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https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2012.02500.x

Anxiety in Intellectual Disability

Dekker, M. C., & Koot, H. M. (2003). DSM-IV disorders in children with borderline to moderate intellectual disability. I: Prevalence and impact. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 42(8), 915-922.

474 participants, ages 7 to 20. Borderline to Moderate Intellectual Disability, 38.6% Had met criteria for at least one disorder, highest were disruptive behavior disorder: 25.1% and Anxiety Disorder: 21.9%.

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2012.02500.x

Anxiety in Autism

Van Steensel, F. J., Bögels, S. M., & Perrin, S. (2011). Anxiety disorders in children and adolescents with autistic spectrum disorders: a meta-analysis. *Clinical child and family psychology review*, 14(3), 302.

31 Studies, 2,121 <18yo with ASD, some used interviews (41.9%), some used questionnaires (58.1%) to assess

Findings: 39.6% at least one comorbid DSM-IV anxiety disorder

https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2012.02500.x

Anxiety in ADHD

D'Agati, E., Curatolo, P., & Mazzone, L. (2019). Comorbidity between ADHD and anxiety disorders across the lifespan. *International Journal of Psychiatry in Clinical Practice*, 23(4), 238-244.

Literature review of clinical studies across the life span
Report a 25% Comorbidity rate

Note that anxiety exacerbates symptoms of ADHD including deficient working memory and poor sleep

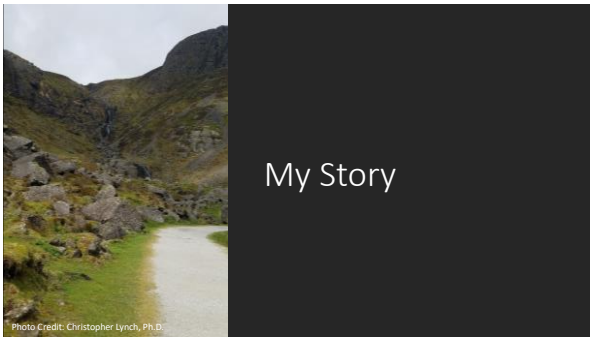
Anxiety in Tourette Syndrome

Marwitz, L., & Pringsheim, T. (2018). Clinical utility of screening for anxiety and depression in children with Tourette syndrome. *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 27*(1), 15.

Looked at 126 Children with Tourette Syndrome


Found 21% comorbidity with Generalized Anxiety Disorder

Recommend screening for both anxiety and depression



My Story

Photo Credit: Christopher Lynch, Ph.D.



Why are anxiety levels so high across so many neurodevelopmental conditions?

- Neuroanatomical brain differences
- Neurochemical differences
- Common psychological and neuropsychological characteristics of neurodevelopmental conditions
- Stigma, stress, and strain

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Cognitive Factors

Difficulty Adjusting to Change

Difficulty Adjusting to Transition

Inflexibility

Fixed Routines

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- Minimize Abrupt and/or Multiple Changes
- Ease into Transitions
- Prevent Routines from Forming in the First Place
- Provide Praise when Change and Transition are Handled Well

Cognitive Factors: Strategies

Sensory Sensitivities

- Noise
- Touch
- Sight
- Smell
- Taste
- Others (e.g. Vestibular, Pain, Temperature)
- Overall Narrow "Sensory Comfort Zone"

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- Minimize Unpleasant Stimulation
- Use Environmental Strategies
- Come up with a coping plan
- Be aware of and aim to keep in Sensory Comfort Zone


Sensory Sensitivities: Strategies

Social Challenges

- Language demands in social situations
- Sensory factors in social situations
- Social Skills Development
- Understanding Social Rules and Nuances
- Social anxiety due to tics and other behaviors

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- Set up social situations that are likely to foster success not failure (small, structured, strength based)
- Work on social skills to build up confidence (with a focus on Generalization)
- Foster a tolerant atmosphere

Social Challenges: Strategies

Language Demands

- Expressive
- Receptive
- Pragmatic
- Non-Literal




Language Demands: Strategies

- Use Visual Supports
- Clear Communication (Reduced Language when necessary)
- Give Means for Expressing Frustration and Anxiety

Task Frustration

- Motor Skills
- Executive Function Skills
- Abstract Thinking Skills
- Key Academic Areas

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- Give means to express task frustration
- Remediate, accommodate, or celebrate
- Consider the timing of tasks
- Present challenging tasks on a graduated basis

Task Frustration: Strategies

Tourette Syndrome, Anxiety and OCD

- More than a third of persons with Tourette Syndrome have comorbid OCD
- Anxiety and it's reduction through compulsions or rumination is a key component of OCD

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Teaching Stress and Anxiety Management Skills Why?

- Cannot eliminate anxiety
- Won't always be a supportive person nearby
- Helps to develop confidence, problem solving skills and independence



Relaxation Skills

- Deep Breathing
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Imagery
- Meditation
- Yoga/Tai Chi

Strategies for Children with Higher Support Needs

- Means to Express Anxiety
- Music
- Peaceful Place
- Comfort Object
- Active Strategies: e.g. Stress Ball
- Care for the Caregivers



Getting Professional Help for Anxiety Disorders

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
 - Relaxation
 - Exposure Therapy
 - Cognitive Reframing
- Coordinating with School
- Coordinating with pediatrician, specialists, psychiatrists, and other medical professionals

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The Challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic

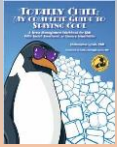

- Anxiety and fear over the virus
- Adjustment to new and changing routines
- Maintaining academic progress and motivation with less one to one support
- Coping with the confines of quarantine
- Practical challenges of virtual learning
- Less socializing and extracurricular activity
- UNCERTAINTY


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Coping with the Pandemic

- Answer questions honestly but at a level that the child can process
- Maintain structure with regular sleep/wake cycle, routines, and environmental cues
- Add in variety
- Watch for signs of stress (irritability, sleeping problems, change in appetite, crying, behavioral changes)
- Get Individualized Supports for Learning when needed
- Use virtual mental healthcare

Christopher Lynch, Ph.D. Resources



Christopher Lynch, Ph.D. Resources
(Continued)

Website: morethanbehavior.com

Blog: *Psychology Today: Autism and Anxiety*

Social Media:  @morethanbehavior



- Mental health needs are common in across a wide range of neurodevelopmental conditions
- There are things we can do to the environment to address mental health
- These are coping strategies that, with some modification, anyone can effectively learn and practice to improve mental health

Key Takeaways



Thank You!
Questions and Answers

Christopher Lynch, Ph.D.

Psychologist and Author
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