
Practical Access Transcripts

4-20-2020

S1 E14: Anxiety in this Online and World in General

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STARS Citation

Hines, Rebecca and Dieker, Lisa, "S1 E14: Anxiety in this Online and World in General" (2020). *Practical Access Transcripts*. 14.

<https://stars.library.ucf.edu/practicalaccess-transcripts/14>

Transcript

Lisa Dieker

Welcome to Practical Access. I am Lisa Dieker.

Rebecca Hines

And I'm Rebecca Hines. This next topic is one I think you'll enjoy. The question was, you know, how do we help kids handle anxiety and how is this impacting their learning? You know, there's a lot of anxiety obviously right now among all of us. What does that mean in school?

Lisa Dieker

Yeah, I was looking for some help with that topic myself. So yeah, no, not to make light of it because it truly is a time for kids and I think you know what you find is, again, we're not medical doctors. We don't claim any legal stuff. But what I think we both do know is under arousal and over arousal is dangerous. You know if a kid is too excited about everything, and they're running around your house. That's a level of anxiety just as much as if I'm not doing anything. And I think what we know is when people are less anxious when everything's in moderation, so I want to know your thoughts, so it's kind of one of my beginning thoughts and thinking.

Rebecca Hines

You really like kicked that over to me thanks Lisa. You know, I guess the first thing that pops into my mind when I think about this, this idea of anxiety and the interplay with school is it's not limited to staying in time. You know, certainly there are more people with anxiety right now likely than usual with kids who feel anxious in our classrooms face to face all the time. And you just, you just you don't always see it. You can't necessarily see it and there's a quote from I believe it's from a book called Begin with the Brain and it's from many years ago now. It resonated with me and that it was emotions are the gatekeeper to the intellect. And when you think about it and you think about in any person who's gone through a traumatic event, divorce, a death in the family, something we literally can't even think about, we can't even use that higher order thinking. The blood is not even flowing to that part of the brain, we're still in that fight or flight and self-preservation mode, so I don't know that they're, you know, it's not very real for some kids right now. The fact that they really literally physiologically may be unable to fully deeply process learning notwithstanding all of the online piece of it. So, I think first and foremost, we all need to understand the impact that anxiety is going to be playing on kids' actual performance right now, I think that's a huge part.

Lisa Dieker

And I think we have to remind ourselves, I mean, I think if you ever have a pet, it's one that I try to remember when I'm working with kids or you know, with my own son even as a family unit is, if you're really stressed about something, your pet senses it very quickly. And I think when we're at home and we're stressed out and the phone's ringing and the online teacher wants to talk to us, and the pot is boiling over because you're now the take-out, carry out, cook everything in your house, you become stressed and then that can go over to the child. And so, I think as teachers, we have to remember that our job is to be less stressed when we approach an online environment. I'm really big when somebody

comes online and you know me Becky, I'm a little on the hyper side. But when someone's there I'm like click the button, move the mouse, it's ok. I think the tone of voice that we use with kids can deescalate some of that, and yet, I think if they're under aroused and they're like sitting at the level out, you know, try something that's funny, get some laughter, get something that will kind of grab their attention, to arouse them a little bit, or if they're over excited, really kind of approach that. I think that's where I was talking about this moderation is making sure we get kids in that sweet spot of not too anxious and not lack of any anxiety because then I don't feel the need as you said, to be motivated to do anything and the other thing I keep thinking about anxious children is they tend to overestimate the situation. You know, my dog's going to get this. My cat's going to get this. My, you know, and again it is scary. And yet their ability to cope with that, they often underestimate. So, having a lot of conversations like, well, what could we do? We know about that; we know a friend. Having that kid have dialogue with you because normally when they think aloud, the scenario in their head is often worse than what it really might be, or they don't have any coping strategies, and I think it's the blend of those two that really can help lower anxiety.

Rebecca Hines

You said the exact term that I was just thinking about and that is, think aloud. Yeah, actually thinking about that from the teacher standpoint, it's a good time for every, every teacher right now to Google: how do I manage stress, and how do you interpret stress? So that you can literally be meeting online with your students, use think aloud strategies to say wow, I'm feeling anxious about being on this computer so much. But I just keep reminding myself, you know X, Y or Z or when I feel like this. Sometimes I like to sit down and take 5. So that idea of using think aloud to help kids learn to manage their stress but of course it only works if the kids are talking actually to teachers. Some things you think maybe they could do, Lisa, if they're not having these synchronous discussions with teachers. How do we help kids deal with anxiety if they don't have direct contact with the teacher?

Lisa Dieker

You know, I think some really simple things like giving them assignments like cosmic yoga and go do a little bit of deep breathing. I mean, I think we all need to do that right now. I love Goldie Hawn has kind of committed ourselves to something called mind up where the kids can go and learn about their brain and what causes stress. So again, if a kid is of the right age and they can understand that. But I think assigning a walk, again, if kids can't walk far because there's not a park, it's not safe for them, they're by themselves. But think about that. How can I get them out of nature and then my favorite people on the planet are the art teachers. Can they assign some things about your fears are drawing or the guidance counts are having open lunches? I think it's that type of world that we need now more than ever, but I think we need it even when we're back in a brick-and-mortar building.

Rebecca Hines

Definitely needed both places. One other thing that I always use when I was working with kids with severe emotional behavioral disorders, most of whom have anxiety and a lot of times, their behaviors were just a manifestation of those anxieties. So, one of the things that I taught my students very early on were general principles of biofeedback, and this might be a good chance to do that whether a student or a teacher. I taught my students to monitor their own heart rate in the old-fashioned way, where they literally just count the beats per minute. Then I would have them do jumping jacks and

monitor the beats per minute and then I have them drink soda. Then I would have them do different things and chart it so they would become aware of what impacted their heart rate. So, once I got them really understanding that, then I could teach them hey, did you know you can also make it go down? Let's try ways to make it go down. Now let's see what it feels like if we play music, let's see what it feels like. If we bang on the drum, is it going up or down? But getting kids literally to start learning some techniques to manage their own stress, because at the end of the day, they're not going to be in school forever. We need to know how to manage our own stress as adults. So, I did use basic biofeedback, one of my very favorite things to do and you could try it and sometimes it works.

I'm not going to tell them about my app but I'm going to tell them about a marshmallow on your palm with a toothpick in it. And if you're very still, and if your heart is beating enough, you can literally count the number of times the toothpick wiggles. So that's my low-tech version. Now, of course, I have apps. To measure things like heart rate and of course, I have an app it's called finger scan. It would just tell me what my mood is. Yeah, because I do teach kids every chance, I get to monitor their own mood, to monitor their own well-being so that they can start to take control of that.

Lisa Dieker

And so, your mood app, let's just put it into retro fashion for some of our listeners that are not app friendly would be what we were when we were in school and thought we were cool; a mood ring. Right? It would change to black when your temperature was high and your boyfriend broke up with you or it would turn to blue and calm so the app does something similar to that which I know you're really famous to hand that to kids when they're anxious and angry and see if they can change their app, which I think is a great idea.

Rebecca Hines

Absolutely, because it's not even about whether or not it's valid in measuring that they're angry. The whole point of it is it will afterwards say, hey, you look like you're happy. So even if I wasn't, maybe yeah, I feel pretty happy. Or if it says, hey, it looks like you're a little stressed, why don't you try this, and it does give you a few little tips about how you might be able to relax.

Lisa Dieker

And you know, I like just really trying to be positive. I tend to be on the overly positive side most of the time. I do get worried, but you know, asking like so what went well today? I mean that was always my approach when you know this is wrong and that's wrong and I'm like, ok, but what went well today? And I think that's a good question we should be asking ourselves, yeah, I'm tired of you know, cooking food in my house and I'm tired of not driving my car. But you know what went well, today my cat was nice to me. Whatever it might be, having our children who might be anxious to talk about that and then there are a lot of really great anxiety books, so you might just do a Google search. Maybe that's something that you might want to do, and then I would recommend there's these workbooks for teens and these relaxation workbooks that you could do no teenager is going to read them, but maybe you want to read them and suggest, hey, I'm going to go out in nature and close my eyes and just sit in the grass for five minutes and think about all the positive things that happened today, again modeling that I think is what we should be doing for adults as adults, whether that be as a parent, maybe we don't have the capability to do that right now because we have so much going on. We might be caregivers, but could

teachers do that. Could we make that a part of our standard routine? And I've been using this model in my online world of 40-20. 40 minutes online, 20 minutes send them away to do something. Those would be the great send away. Go to mind up and come back and tell me something you learned about your brain. Go do cosmic yoga and do 5 minutes of deep breathing and then let me tell me what makes you feel better if you find kids are anxious.

Rebecca Hines

Since I did mention a little bit of technology, even though. You just told us to get away from it for 20 minutes. I wanted to at least mention two other two other apps. That I've used one is called Calm talk and I believe that that focuses more on kids on the autism spectrum. I haven't looked at it honestly in the last year, so I cannot say whether it's still free, whether it's still functioning, but the last time I saw it, I found it to be helpful and actually pretty interesting. And then the other one is simply a tiny piano. It's literally a little piano you can play on your phone. And when I was finishing my doctoral degree, I literally rented a big piano and put it in my house. And it wasn't a big piano, I didn't say that cause now it sounds like I had a lot of money. It was a crappy little piano, but it felt to me in my little house. And I would just sit and bang on the keys and just try to, you know, take my mind off of what I was studying because I just needed that that brain breaks in a completely different way. And it felt great, it helped me reduce my anxiety and get back to work.

Lisa Dieker

And I think my last thought. I'm going to go no tech. Which is not typical, but I'm going to go low, low tech and you know, maybe the conversation is to really help your kids think about which internal signal is really struggling. Is it physical? Like I just need to get out and move again, there are many kids that that's anxiety producing. How do we move in a tiny little apartment in a small space? The second one is, is it emotional? Are they missing their friends? You know, so again, it goes back. To what you were saying. Can we talk to our kids, or can we communicate through the communication device if it's limited? But I think the one that we often forget about that also causes anxiety. Our thoughts and those are harder to know, emotional and physical normally present themselves in some way. For the kid who's sitting there silently, so again it goes back. You said not only thinking aloud, but could you? You know penny for your thoughts. It's an old saying. But could you share two things you're thinking right now? Well, I'm thinking that that I don't like being in this house anymore and I don't like my teachers, whatever it is. And then having those discussions can really lower that anxiety, and I think those 3 buckets are ones we should remember as teachers and parents.

Rebecca Hines

It's not always easy, but I 100% agree.

Lisa Dieker

All right. Well, thank you for joining us for this session of practical access. If you have questions, please send them to Twitter at @AccessPractical.