“Identifying and Helping Kids With Anxiety”

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“You’re listening to Brain Talk, from the Johns Hopkins Brain Science Institute.”

Dr. Ginsburg: “Kids who struggle with anxiety, if we ask them what are they thinking, what’s going through your mind, the themes of their thoughts are often about danger and threat, the kids will make fun of me, the bus might break down, I’ll fail my test, I will get lost…”

Dale: “Dr. Golda Ginsburg is a professor of child and adolescent psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University who specializes in finding treatments for kids who suffer from anxiety.

Today on Brain Talk: identifying and helping kids with anxiety.”

Dr. Ginsburg: “Kids begin to avoid going to parties because they are afraid the other kids might laugh at them or afraid to go to school so they avoid going to school. Wake up in the morning both with a stomach ache and then saying I don't want to go to school mom, can I stay home. Avoidance is a key characteristic of anxiety and it often maintains the anxiety.”

Dale: “Dr. Ginsburg says ‘fall can be a difficult time for kids prone to anxiety. For a lot of kids, back to school jitters go away as their new routine becomes familiar. But for others, it’s not that easy’…”

Dr. Ginsburg: “Are kids waking up in the morning and reporting physical symptoms that have no medical cause, or usually on Sunday night those kinds of physical symptoms start. Or kids worrying excessively about what might happen in school and talking about all the things that might go wrong.”

Dale: “Behavioral changes can happen too, like avoiding school or social activities. And this interferes with healthy functioning. According to Dr. Ginsberg, some anxious kids could benefit from a little extra help and support. But parents, who intervene too much, may be causing more harm than good…

Dr. Ginsburg: “The more parents accommodate children’s anxiety by removing them from that anxiety-provoking situation, the less opportunity the child has to learn that that scary situation, that they perceived as scary, is really not as scary as they’re thinking, and they never get to develop the skills to master that frightening situation.”

Dale: “Dr. Ginsberg is interested in the role prevention can play, especially with kids whose parents suffer from anxiety. According to her research, information sessions with parents and their kids can help stop anxiety even before starts.”

Dr. Ginsburg: “We first start with this meeting with the parents to teach them how they to help their children, by first recognizing early signs of anxiety, and then looking at the ways they might interact with their kids that
may actually increase the risk of their children developing anxiety problems or what they can do to decrease that risk."

Dale: “In fact, kids in Dr. Ginsberg's study had no reported anxiety in the year following these sessions. But 30% of kids with anxious parents—who did not have counseling sessions—did suffer anxiety. Early intervention with an anxious child is crucial.”

Dr. Ginsburg: “Anxiety persists over time and that if kids are not effectively treated early on that it is what we call a gateway disorder in that it predicts adult psychiatric problems such as anxiety, depression, suicidal behavior and substance abuse in adulthood.”

Dale: “The other crucial factor in helping children with anxiety is determining just who those kids are…”

Dr. Ginsburg: “Identifying is my primary concern and then providing effective treatment. So we are now involved in a very large study in Baltimore city schools helping school counselors look for those signs of anxiety and then provide effective treatment.”

Dale: “For more information on anxiety and children go to brainscienceinstitute.org. I'm Dale Connelly and this is Brain Talk from Johns Hopkins University.”

Additional Information:

Read "When Anxiety's All in the Family" an article on Dr. Ginsburg’s research

Learn more about the Johns Hopkins Child and Adolescent Psychiatry Department

Learn more about the Johns Hopkins Childhood Anxiety Prevention Study (CAPS)

Learn more about the Johns Hopkins Child and Adolescent Anxiety Multimodal Study (CAMS)

Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA)
For information on anxiety disorders and treatment. The mission of the ADAA is to promote the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders through education, practice, and research.

Research Publications:

Treating Anxiety Disorders in Inner City Schools: Results from a Pilot Randomized Controlled Trial Comparing CBT and Usual Care

The Child Anxiety Prevention Study: Intervention Model and Primary Outcomes

Transporting CBT for Childhood Anxiety Disorders into Inner-City School-Based Mental Health Clinics

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