

The Anxiety Demon, and the Little People

Understanding the battle our young people are waging against an internal demon that holds them prisoner, and takes over their lives.

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They have a difficult time doing what other children are doing. They don't always seem like they fit in. They can be shy, or overly aggressive. They ruminate. They may have difficulty sleeping, and clarity of thought can become an issue. They seem to have more pain in muscles and joints, and are often tired or fatigued. They are restless, and relaxing doesn't seem to be easy for them. They avoid people and situations that other children navigate with ease.

They often isolate, spending time in their rooms, or other quiet places. They seem to take everything to heart, and even simple comments can be overwhelming for them. They avoid being the center of attraction, but always feel as though everyone is looking at them. They have a difficult time believing that they measure up to other children. They firmly believe that no one understands them. They are overly emotional, and live in a world of "I can't".

There is no battle more difficult than the one waged inside our own bodies, and our own minds. Young people are not exempt from the anxiety demon's internal battleground, a war zone that if not understood and treated, can become a lifelong emotional wasteland. Anxiety has no favorites, it does not discriminate, and it can paralyze with deadly force. It takes hold in the early years, and those of tender age are, so often, its primary targets.

Is there anyone out there?

For children, anxiety is a silent scream that no one hears. Not yet equipped with the skills that are necessary to communicate efficiently on an emotional level, children provide us with a vast array a physical, emotional, and intellectual signals telling us that they are in pain. The old adage that says relax, children are resilient, could not be farther from the truth. In fact, it is this type of thinking which, so often, dooms our young people to a life of invalidation, and loneliness, and pain.

We really need to move away from this type of thinking if we are going to understand the signals that our children are trying to communicate with us.

Children are not resilient. They are impressionable. They are neophytes in the big-world learning process. They take things to heart, and so desperately need the attention and the understanding that only adults can provide. Unfortunately, when they try, it seems like no one is listening. We tell our children to tough it out, stop whining, get over it, and we attempt to prepare them for a difficult world by treating them in a fashion that can only further complicate their problems.

Children learn from the adults in their lives, and those teachers can be the difference between happy and well-adjusted little people, and those who become broken, lost and alone in the darkness, and in terrible pain.

When a child is suffering from anxiety, they feel weak, misunderstood, alone, and without hope. Their world becomes a huge open space, with few, if any, emotional markers. It is unlike other physical ailments. Suffering from an affliction that has been with them almost all of their lives, they do not understand enough about what is happening to them to communicate the parameters of their pain.

It has always been this way, and they don't know anything different. The signals I put forth in the first two chapters are the identifiers, those little pieces of information that our children are using to tell us that something is so wrong in their lives. They are the signals which tell us that the matter needs to be looked into a bit deeper. This is where the recovery process starts.

The 7 keys to understanding your child's anxiety, and starting their process to recovery

1. Pay attention to your child. Though they may not have developed efficient communication skills, they do communicate about what's happening to them. Pay attention to any changes in behavior, regardless of how insignificant they may be (paragraphs one and two).
2. Never assume that's something is a simple passing phase, or that they are overreacting to something. You won't know that until you talk to them about it, at length. Give them your time. That is so important.
3. Often, a child does not yet understand that those signals they are providing are, in fact, expressions of distress. If your child is doing something that has you concerned, and they can't tell you why they're doing it, it's because they don't know how to define it. That's your job. If you're not sure what to do, it is time to get help.

4. It's always good to start with the physical examination. Get them to a physician, preferably a pediatrician if they are still young. Rule out any physical problems.
5. Children can have a difficult time expressing themselves with their parents. There's no shame in getting help for your child. If your child is displaying the signals listed in the first two paragraphs, think about making an appointment with the counselor skilled in treating childhood difficulties.
6. Do not allow your child to isolate. That's telling them that you don't have time for them. Spend more time with them. Talk to them. Talk often. Asking them how their day is going, and receiving a “fine” for an answer, is not talking to them. Set aside time to talk about anything, not just what's bothering them. Get to know your child. They'll talk to you if they can trust that you are willing to be there for them. You take the lead on this one.
7. Often, parents themselves, are suffering from anxiety and depression. If you are, get help for yourself. It's hard to help someone else before you help yourself. Get family counseling if it's necessary. Be willing to open your family to the love, warmth, and communication that sets the stage, not only for recovery from anxiety, but for the happy life that can follow.

Let no child be left behind

Childhood anxiety can decimate a young person's life on two levels. First, in and of itself, it is a debilitating condition that causes physical, emotional, and intellectual pain. No child should remain in pain if there's a viable way out of it. Second, anxiety causes one to feel weak, and victimized. This way of thinking and behaving opens the door for other issues such as bullying, abuse, and failure on so many levels.

Keep in mind that what you have with your children is a relationship. Any good relationship needs to be nurtured and blessed with the gift of time. By simply taking the time to talk to your children, validating what they are thinking and feeling, and learning to understand who they are, and what is happening in their lives, you open the door to a world of hope, and that hope is the steppingstone to a rich, productive, and happy life. Every child is a special gift. May we love them all into the happy life they deserve.

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