


## Child & Adolescent Anxiety:

### Overview of Treatment & Classroom Applications

"It is always wise to look ahead, but difficult to look further than you can see."  
-Winston Churchill




Daniel Chorney, Ph.D.  
Registered Psychologist  
Dr. Daniel Chorney & Associates  
[www.chorneyandassociates.com](http://www.chorneyandassociates.com)  
[drchorney@gmail.com](mailto:drchorney@gmail.com)

## Who Am I?


- \* **Daniel Chorney, Ph.D.**
  - \* Registered Clinical Psychologist
  - \* Owner/Psychologist @ Dr. Daniel Chorney & Associates
    - \* Dr. Alissa Pencer
    - \* Dr. Tricia Beattie
  - \* Dr. Ayala Gorodzinsky
  - \* Dr. Skye Stephens
  - \* Dr. Nicole Vincent
  - \* Dr. Jill Chorney
  - \* Dr. Lindsay Uman
  - \* Dr. Bonnie McNeill
- \* Former IWK Anxiety Team Leader & Community Mental Health staff psychologist
- \* Previous research in anxiety development and expression across the lifespan

- \* **Education:**
  - \* B.A. Psychology – UBC 2004
  - \* M.A. Psychology – West Virginia University 2006
  - \* Ph.D. Psychology – West Virginia University 2009
  - \* Clinical Internship – Brown University 2009





## What is Anxiety?

- \* **anxiety** is a **future-oriented** mood state associated with preparation for **possible**, upcoming **negative** events;
- vs.
- \* **fear** is an alarm response to **present** or imminent danger (real or perceived)



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Gone. Fine. Not sure.

PAST NOW FUTURE + bad



### Anxiety Causes & Maintenance

- **Biological/genetic transmission**
  - Not 1:1 match of disorder
    - Behavioral inhibition or negative affectivity
- **Parenting Factors**
  - Excessive attention to anxious behaviors
  - Child's loss of sense of control over env't or emotions
  - Modeling (their own anxious behaviors)
- **Traumatic life events**
  - Actual negative life experiences/history

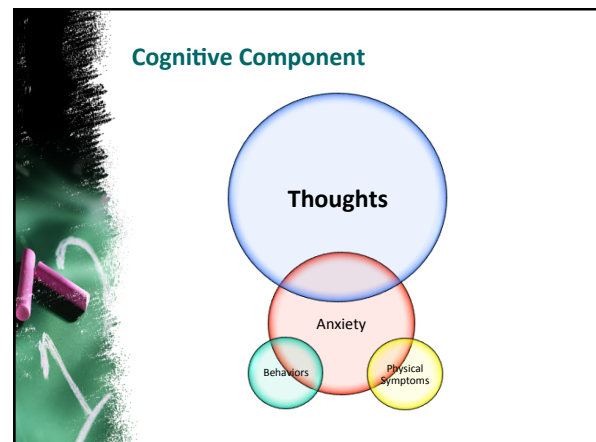
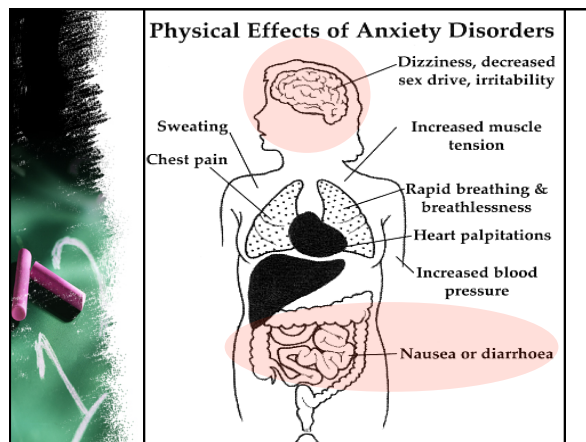
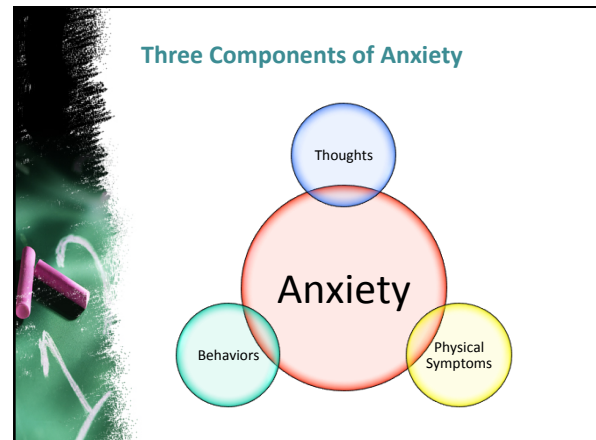
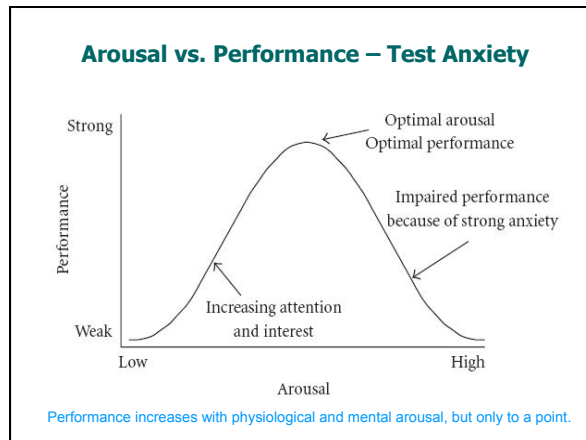
### Prevalence & Sequelae

- Most common psychological problem found in children and adolescents (Kessler et al., 2005)
  - Prevalence rates for having at least one childhood anxiety disorder vary from 6-20% (Costello et al., 2004)
- Can lead to further anxiety, major depression, substance abuse, and educational underachievement as young adults (Woodward & Ferguson, 2001)
- Impairment across all major areas of childhood functioning
  - Academic/school
  - Social/peer relationships
  - Family functioning

AGORAPHOBIA  
CLUSTERS  
PHOBIA

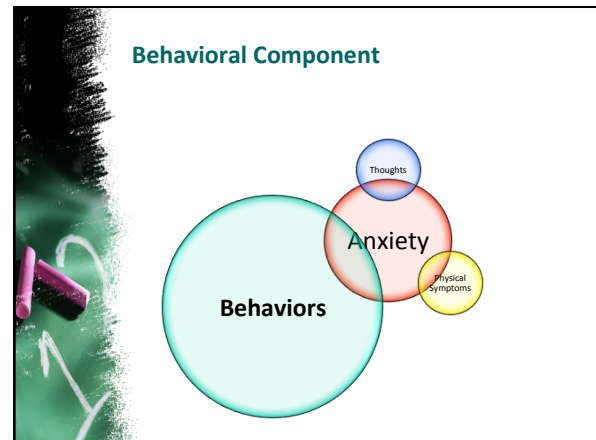
### When is Anxiety A Problem?

- Most children, adolescents and adults use anxiety to help them make good decisions – it is transient and **normal**
  - e.g., looking both ways before you cross the street, putting on your seatbelt, setting your alarm so you aren't late, studying for tests, budgeting time to complete assignments.
- Having **NO anxiety** would be a major problem!
- Anxiety becomes a problem when it makes the decisions for you, interferes with your life and/or causes significant distress.
  - Crosses into functional impairment
    - Avoidance
    - Enduring with extreme distress



### Anxious Thoughts in Kids/Teens

- **Thoughts that center around harm or threat.**
  - "My parents/friends are late, they've been in a car accident." (Separation)
  - "I can't do this presentation because my classmates will think I'm dumb." (Social)
  - "If I don't check my work exactly 11 times, something bad may happen." (OCD/GAD/perfectionism)
- **Overestimating...**
  - The **frequency** of negative experiences
  - The **severity** of negative experiences
    - "Bad things happen often, and are REALLY bad."
- **Future-oriented thoughts**
  - "If I worry enough today, maybe tomorrow will be calmer."
  - "What if...?" thinking and "mind-reading"
  - Catastrophizing/Overreacting
  - "Future/Bad"



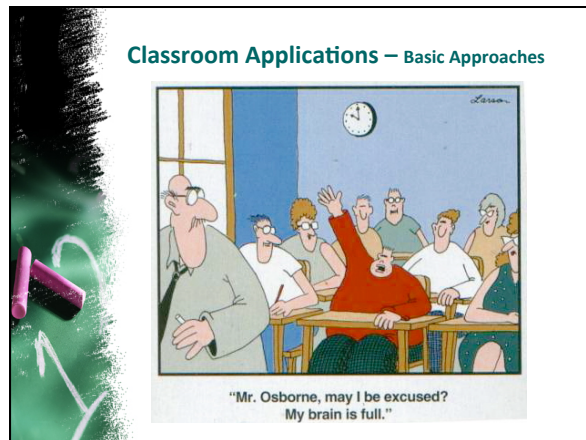
### Anxious Behaviors – What You SEE

- **Anxious children and teens often behave differently:**
  - Pace, fidget, cry, cling, shake, sweat, numb
  - Teens can become defiant, irritable, oppositional
- **Reassurance Seeking Increases**
  - "Am I going to die/get hurt/get sick?"
  - "When are you coming back?"
  - "What's next?"
  - Difficult to provide enough reassurance
    - Often similar questions asked repeatedly
- **Avoidance**
  - Negatively reinforces fear
  - Denies opportunity for exposure
    - Extinction process can not begin, creating feedback loop of fear & avoidance

### Anxiety in the Classroom

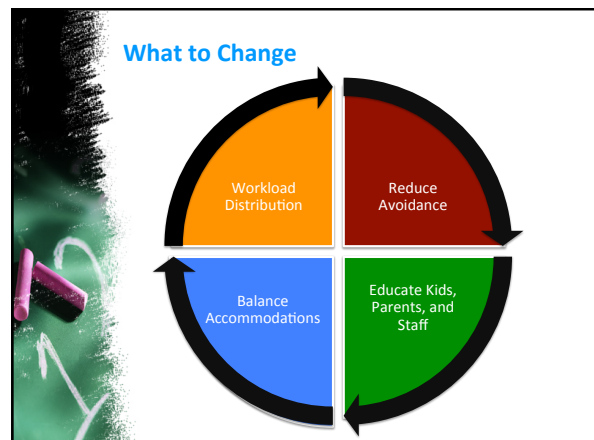
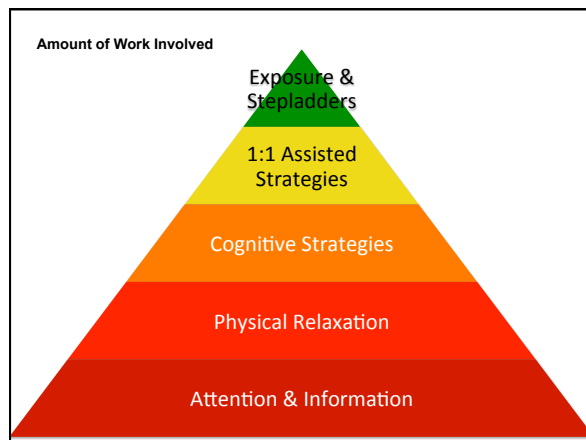
- **Common behaviors – what to look for:**
  - Irritability/tired
    - Sleep = both cause and symptom of anxiety
  - Absenteeism or calling/requesting home frequently
  - Somatic complaints (stomach & head)
  - Decline in grades
  - Withdrawal from peer group & low mood
  - Use of alcohol/drugs as coping tools
  - Poor overall management of minor stressors
  - Angry outbursts if pushed
    - Can escalate to suicidal ideation over time in extreme situations





### Disclaimer

- Strategies & information provided here are to help reduce minor, common anxiety-provoking situations
- These strategies are **NOT** intended to:
  - Turn teachers & staff into clinical psychologists
  - Dramatically increase workload
  - Replace intervention by a trained mental health professional
- The strategies & information **ARE** intended to:
  - Help you identify anxiety in the school setting
  - Provide you with a better understanding of how anxiety is treated
  - Introduce some potentially new strategies/changes to help reduce anxiety in specific situations for some children



Anxious Behaviors	Maintaining Behaviors
Avoidance	CARE
Withdrawal	
Escape from the situation	Comply
Distraction	Accommodate
Reassurance Seeking	Reassurance
Resistance to change	Enable

### Educating Ourselves & Others – Step 1

- **Normalization of symptoms**
  - Everyone worries, everyone gets anxious and everyone is afraid of something.
  - Differentiate “good” vs. “bad” anxiety
- **Talking about how anxiety is helpful**
  - Helps you study for an exam
  - Helps you do your homework
  - Helps you think before you speak
  - Helps you make and keep friends
- Idea is to open the child to the idea that all anxiety is **not** bad/harmful anxiety and break rigid thinking
- Ensure parents understand that ‘anxiety’ is not harmful, but **avoidance** is



### Educating Ourselves & Others – Step 1

- **Increase awareness – it is key to moving forward**
  - Identify anxious moments or episodes to the child and label the behavior as anxiety/worry
  - Letting parents know how involved their child is early on and if you notice behaviors consistent with anxiety
- **Helps kids/teens in multiple ways**
  - Know when to use an anxiety-reducing intervention
  - Cues us to pay more attention to when we are being anxious unnecessarily vs. experiencing real fear.
  - Increases our emotional awareness, emotion regulation ability, etc
- We need to know **WHEN** to use the “coping tools,” otherwise the tools become ineffective if never applied

## MR. WORRY

By Roger Hargreaves



### Accommodations Gone Awry

- **Increase attention to positive, brave, or independent behaviors**
  - *Examples:* Raising hand in class, asking for help from a peer, giving a presentation, trying something new or novel without fear, doing activities without support/assistance
- **Decrease attention to anxious, attention-seeking, reassurance seeking behaviors**
  - *Examples:* Recurrent asking for help/assistance on tasks **they are capable of**, crying to repeatedly avoid a classroom activity, whining/complaining, attempting to draw attention to physical complaints (belly, head, etc) when there is no medical cause
  - At times these can turn into escape behaviors from tasks

### Speaking the Same Language – Worry Scale

- Worry scale (“Fear Thermometer”) helps describe the intensity of the fear
  - As opposed to all fears being “big and unmanageable” some fears are smaller & “OK”
- Assists in objectifying/externalizing the worry
  - Makes anxiety more concrete rather than abstract for children
- Helps monitor progress/reduction in anxiety over time
  - Critical during exposure hierarchy development



### How to Counter Physical Symptoms

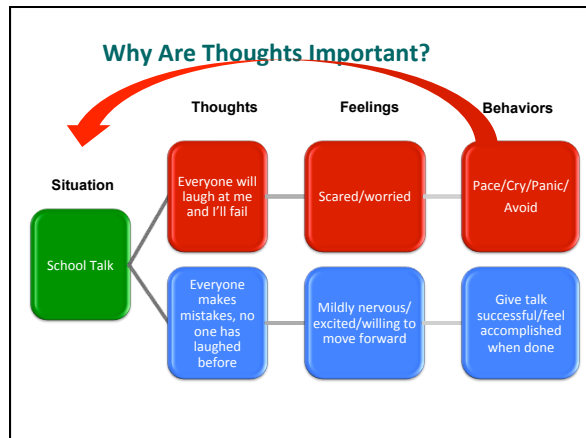
Physical Symptoms

- **Diaphragmatic Breathing (5-5-2)**
  - Inhalation of 5s, exhalation of 5s, pause of 2
  - Mentally focus on breathing rhythm and surroundings, concentration on the present
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)**
  - Gradual tensing and release of tension in various muscle groups that hold tension (note re: panic)
- **If necessary, build specified times into the day to promote relaxation exercises**
  - These times should NOT be immediately given during an anxious episode – this will reinforce anxiety/avoidance
  - Times should be pre-determined and regularly given, preferably before anxiety-provoking events to help prepare – e.g., 11am & 1:30pm each day

### Awareness of Thoughts

Thoughts

- **Emotions are often a direct result of your thoughts and beliefs about an event**
  - When your thoughts change about something, so will your emotions and behaviors
  - E.g., “I think roller coasters are fun!” = excitement/approach vs. “I think roller coasters are death traps!” = anxiety/avoidance
- **Many thoughts are “automatic” and happen without full awareness**
  - Requires practice to identify “anxious thoughts” and “catch” the thoughts behind the emotion
  - Remember, anxious children/teens/adults will default to “future-bad” without challenging the thought



### Cognitive Restructuring

- **Do we have to believe every thought we have?**
  - How likely or realistic is the thought?
  - What evidence do you have it will happen?
  - Have you seen this happen to someone else?
  - Have this ever actually happened to you before?
- **Generating alternatives**
  - What else could happen?
  - What are the other possibilities?
  - Could it be not as bad as you think?
  - What would you tell a close friend?

### Example

#### Challenging Negative Thinking

Questions to ask yourself to help challenge your negative thoughts or self-talk:

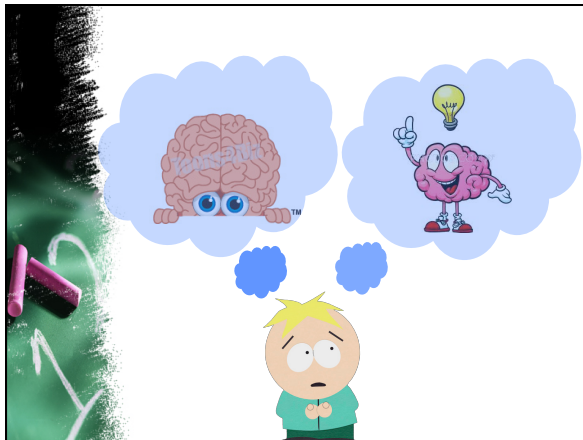
- Am I falling into a thinking trap (for example, catastrophizing or mind-reading)?
- What is the evidence that this thought is true? What is the evidence that this thought is not true?
- What would I tell a friend if he or she had that thought?
- Am I confusing a "possibility" with a "probability"? It may be possible, but is it likely?
- Am I 100% sure that \_\_\_\_\_ will happen?
- How many times has \_\_\_\_\_ happened before?
- Is \_\_\_\_\_ really so important that my future depends on it?
- What is the worst that could happen?
- Is this a hassle or a horror?
- If it did happen, what can I do to cope or handle it?

[www.anxietybc.com](http://www.anxietybc.com)

### What NOT to Do – "Think About Something Else"

**SO, THE BEST THING FOR YOUR ANXIETY IS TO THINK ABOUT SOMETHING OTHER THAN WHAT YOU'RE ANXIOUS ABOUT?**

**LET'S THINK ABOUT THAT ONE THING ALL THE TIME.**



### Thinking Strategies On-The-Go

- **Coping Cards**
  - Choose 1-4 “realistic thinking” thoughts or strategies that help reduce fear ratings
  - Transfer onto recipe card & carry into anxious situations to practice and use in the moment

#### Daniel's Coping Card for Speaking

**Fear:** People will think I'm a bad speaker/dumb

#### **Brave Thoughts:**

- 1) No one has **ever** actually called me dumb after a talk
- 2) Most times people say I did a good job
- 3) Even if I make a mistake, everyone makes mistakes. Even smart people!
- 4) I know I can't make everyone happy **ALL** the time.

### Advanced Techniques - Introduction to Exposure

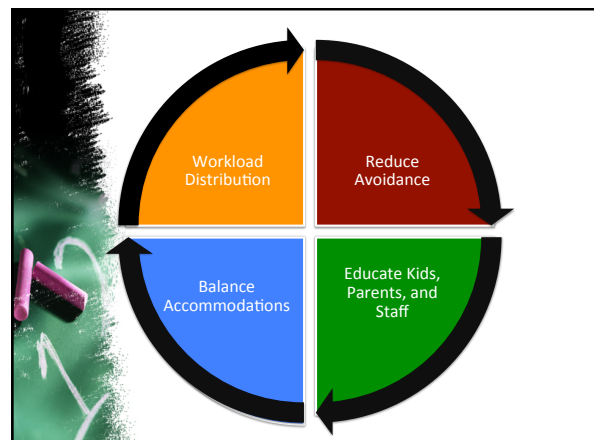
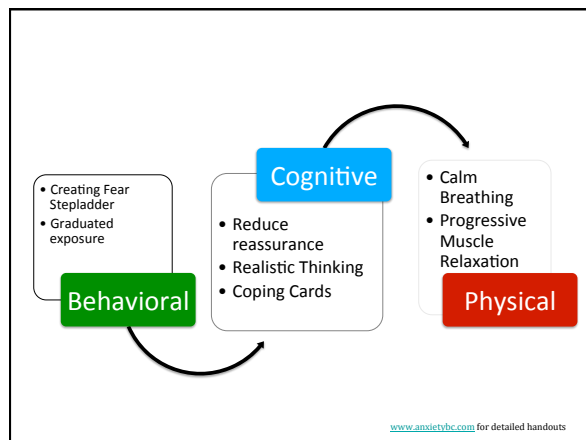
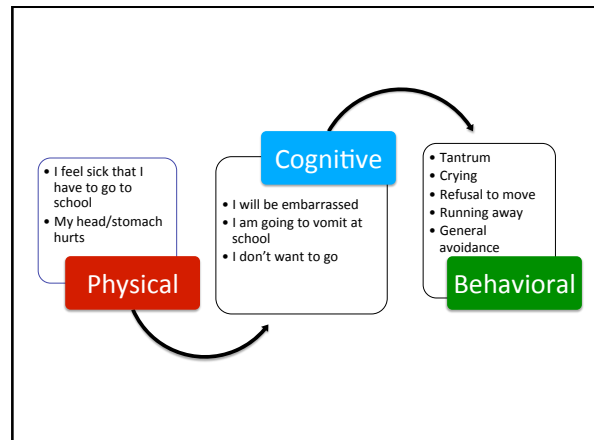
- **Direct exposure**
  - Direct confrontation with a feared stimulus
  - e.g., holding a snake, giving a speech, touching a dirty object and not washing hands
- **Indirect exposure**
  - Imaginal exposure with feared situation
  - Often performed in a controlled, structured, and artificial setting at the pace of the individual
- **Interoceptive exposure (anxiety sensitivity)**
  - Purposefully inducing and drawing attention to the physical symptoms and sensations of a panic attack

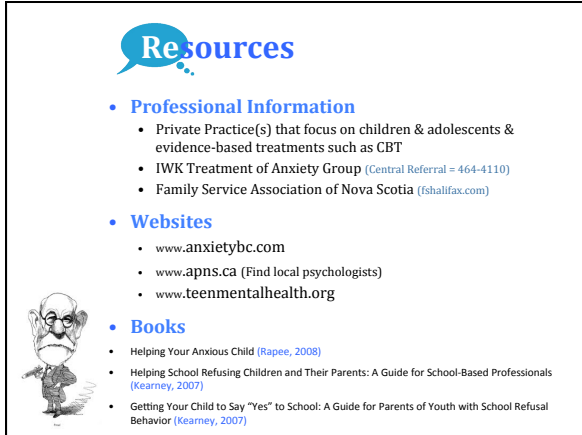
### Proceed with Caution

- **Important for both parent and child to understand the goal of exposure exercises**
  - Goal is **NOT** to practice eliminating or controlling anxiety – this is unrealistic
  - “Comfortable being uncomfortable”
  - Exposure helps us understand anxiety – we avoid things we fear
- When exposures are practiced with **gradual intensity** and over **repeated** sessions, this goal is achievable as anxiety slowly decreases (both in duration and intensity)

### Exposure – Sample Stepladder

- Giving a talk alone in my room (1)
- Giving a talk in front of a mirror (2)
- Giving a talk in front of my parents (3)
- Giving a talk in front of 2 close friends at home (5)
- Giving a talk to my teacher at lunch/afterschool (7)
- Giving a talk to my teacher & a few friends in my classroom where I present (8)
- Giving a talk in front of my class (10)





## Resources


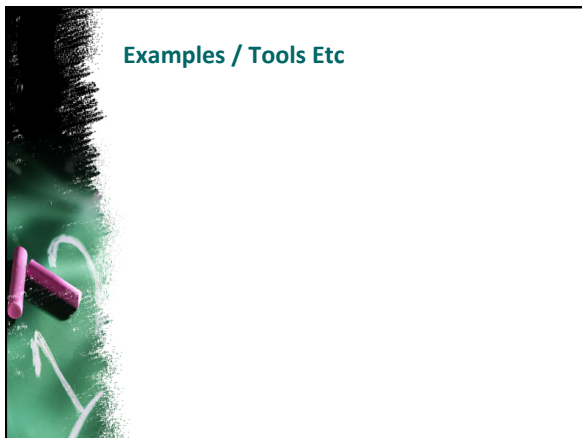
- **Professional Information**
  - Private Practice(s) that focus on children & adolescents & evidence-based treatments such as CBT
  - IWK Treatment of Anxiety Group ([Central Referral = 464-4110](#))
  - Family Service Association of Nova Scotia ([fshalifax.com](#))
- **Websites**
  - [www.anxietybc.com](#)
  - [www.apns.ca](#) (Find local psychologists)
  - [www.teenmentalhealth.org](#)
- **Books**
  - Helping Your Anxious Child ([Rapee, 2008](#))
  - Helping School Refusing Children and Their Parents: A Guide for School-Based Professionals ([Kearney, 2007](#))
  - Getting Your Child to Say "Yes" to School: A Guide for Parents of Youth with School Refusal Behavior ([Kearney, 2007](#))

## Dr. Daniel Chorney & Associates

a: Halifax Professional Centre  
5991 Spring Garden Road, Halifax NS

p: 902.444.1160  
f: 902.444.3210

e: [drchorney@gmail.com](mailto:drchorney@gmail.com)  
t: [@drdanielchorney](https://www.instagram.com/drdanielchorney)  
w: [chorneyandassociates.com](http://chorneyandassociates.com)  
fb: Dr. Daniel Chorney & Associates

## Examples / Tools Etc

Event:	I have to give a talk at school
What is my worry rating?	Worry rating: 8
<b>Thoughts</b> "What am I thinking?"	I will do a bad job, kids will laugh at me and talk behind my back
<b>What is the evidence?</b> What else could happen? What happened last time I worried? What is likely to happen? What happens to other people?	1) I've given talks before and only made a mistake once before. 2) I've seen other kids get embarrassed, so others feel like I do sometimes 3) I've practiced my talk a lot, so I should be OK 4) When others make mistakes, people almost never laugh at them 5) Even if I do mess up, most kids won't laugh and if they do they'll stop and forget about it quickly
What is my <b>realistic</b> thought?	I will probably do a good job, and even if I make a mistake most kids won't even notice or care. Worry Rating: 3