

April 14, 2021

# Anxious Kids? How Parents Can Help

## **Cindy Lopez:**

Welcome to Voices of Compassion, CHC's podcast series providing courage, connection and compassion, highlighting topics that matter to our community, our parents, families, educators and other professionals. My name is Cindy Lopez, today we're talking about anxious kids. So some kids now are turning off their camera during remote learning and some are experiencing sleeplessness, others are feeling panic when they go out beyond their home, right now we're all feeling anxious and our kids might be experiencing anxiety in a whole new way. Even kids who didn't really deal with feeling nervous or fearful or lonely or unmotivated before they're experiencing all those kinds of feelings right now. So the way that you respond to your child's anxiety can make a big difference in its potential impact. Listen in to this podcast episode with Dr. Joan Baran, clinical director at CHC and Beth Moroney, doctoral psychology intern, also at CHC. We're going to talk about how you can support your child and respond to their anxiety in a way that helps and provides reassurance. Beth and Dr. Baran, is there anything additional you'd like to tell our listeners as we get started?

## **Beth Moroney:**

[00:01:23] I'm in my last year of training as a psychologist and focus specifically on kids with anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder. Really excited to be talking about this topic today and hopefully communicating some helpful strategies for how parents can recognize anxiety in their kids and also some things that they can do to help. Of course we always encourage families to come to CHC or a place like it if you're needing extra help and we would love to see you.

## **Dr. Joan Baran:**

[00:01:51] In contrast to Beth, I've been a psychologist over 25 years, so she's just at the beginning and I'm more the end. And I've been at CHC for over 20 years and uh I feel blessed to work at CHC, to work with families who speak both English and Spanish. And we help a wide variety of families here at CHC with clinicians who speak a variety of languages to help our wonderfully diverse community.

## **Cindy Lopez:**

[00:02:24] Beth and Dr. Baran thank you so much for joining us. I'm Wondering in your practice with kids and families what are you seeing with regard to anxiety in kids right now? What are parents talking about, what are kids talking about?

**Beth Moroney:**

[00:02:38] I think we're seeing an increase in anxiety kind of across the board, both for kids and adults. I think part of that is that we've all been dealing with this uncertainty for, you know, a really prolonged period of time and humans like to know what's going to happen and they like to be in control of their circumstances and I think that's true for kids and adults, and it's really hard not to know what's going to happen or to feel like there are you know elements of your life that are out of your control.

And I think there are some new sources of anxiety that come with COVID, so things that we haven't dealt with before. So being worried about the actual virus itself or, you know, your own safety or maybe the health of family members, and then there's some sources of anxiety that might be a little bit exacerbated by our circumstances right now. So, you know, if someone's a little bit anxious maybe to be on camera or to talk in front of their peers that might feel really different to have to do that at school everyday, rather than in person. And I think there's a little layer of risk that comes with doing kind of our everyday activities. I think we're all experiencing that so things that didn't feel anxiety provoking before, like going to the grocery store, even going for a walk, or seeing friends or people outside of your home, there's a little bit of risk that comes along with that and so I think both for kids who you know experienced some anxiety before the pandemic, and also those who might not of, there's definitely, a layer of kind of that risk and that worry that's coming up a little bit more at this time.

**Dr. Joan Baran:**

[00:04:10] Beth, I really have to agree with what you said, and I think there's even a newer layer of anxiety that I'm seeing now that things are opening up so kids are uh worried about what it's going to be like to go back to school, maybe what it's going to be like to be with their friends again. So I think we're definitely seeing greater levels of anxiety with regards to anticipating what it's going to be like to be back in person. I think the good news is, is that we know a lot of strategies and tips in order to help kids and their parents because I think it's both who are experiencing this nervousness with having to go back.

**Cindy Lopez:**

[00:04:51] Yeah, I know there's some new data out recently, I know that the data basically says compared to this time last year, everyone's experiencing marked more anxiety, right. So it is very different. So thinking about, as a parent, how might I be seeing anxiety in my kids or even as a teacher with my students?

**Beth Moroney:**

[00:05:16] So I think, we often think anxiety is having a few different components that I

think are all really important to sort of look for here. And one of those components is the cognitive piece, so what are actually kind of the thoughts and the worries and sort of listening out for any time kids might verbalize those types of things, like you know, I'm worried that I might get sick myself or I'm worried that my grandparent might get sick or it's really scary to go back to school and not know what that's going to look like or what's going to happen.

I think behavioral that's sort of the second component, that's also really important. And we know with anxiety that that often can look like avoidance. So kids not wanting to maybe do things that they haven't had trouble with in the past, or you know, suddenly being really resistant to activities or situations in which they've done okay with before, or that could look like regression in some ways. You know, maybe kids are asking for a lot more help or wanting to be around parents or teachers more, than they used to be. And that's also something to kind of keep an eye out for.

And then the last piece is sort of physical or physiological. You know we often know that anxiety has some physical symptoms that accompany the worry. So I would keep an eye out for, new difficulties with sleeping, any headaches or tummy aches that might be coming up kind of frequently um, that seem a little bit unexplained or big appetite changes. Kids wanting to, you know, eat a lot or a lot more than they used to, and I think one thing to think about is that anxiety can often be kind of sneaky. And one of the strategies we're going to talk about is kind of helping kids understand what they're feeling and label what's going on for them. And so sometimes anxiety pops up in ways that we wouldn't expect. Your child could look more irritable for example or more angry or frustrated, and that might be sort of a new emotional experience for them. So I think kind of keeping that in the back of your mind that you know, oh, could anxiety be driving this or could worry sort of explain some of these things and thinking about how you yourself as a person might experience worry. What does that look like for you and could some of those same things be coming up for your children or your students?

**Dr. Joan Baran:**

[00:07:32] I really like how you said about if you as a parent are experiencing anxiety because a lot of parents are, it really does offer a unique opportunity to show your own kids how to handle the challenges that come along with your own anxiety or your own nervousness with regards to COVID or any other issue.

**Cindy Lopez:**

[00:07:57] Yeah, I think parents in some cases don't even realize, you know, kind of that their own anxiety and, and what that might be communicating to their kids. So if I am a parent and I'm seeing some of these things you just talked about Beth, like avoidance,

regression, difficulty sleeping, appetite changes. If I'm seeing some of those things, what should I do?

**Beth Moroney:**

[00:08:19] Yeah, that's a great question, Cindy. I think we're all kind of wondering how to help. And, um, I think as, as Joan was saying, you know, this does present a unique opportunity to kind of help your kids through a difficult situation and model some of the ways that you might manage stress or anxiety in your own life, then kind of use it as a teaching moment, but I think to sort of back up, I think the first and foremost thing to do is just to listen and kind of check in with your kids and see what might be going on for them. They might have trouble expressing exactly what it is that they're worried about, but if you sort of have an eye out for some of these symptoms or know that some of this might be going on that's a really, really good start. And you're an amazing parent for even recognizing that this could be going on.

I think the next thing to think about is to really acknowledge and label the feelings, and to validate that they're there. So to make sure that your child feels seen and heard, and if they need help labeling what's going on, you can always share, you know, how you might be feeling, that I think I'd be feeling a little bit worried if I had to present in front of my class over Zoom too or, you know, I know it's scary not to know what's going to happen with grandma and grandpa, but they're getting the vaccine shot and we're all really excited about that. So kind of offering some of your own emotional experience to them and helping them, kind of label and feel validated and heard. I think sending the message that you know, you are their cheerleader and you are confident that they can be brave and that they can get through this and that you're going to help them get through this is really, really huge and can be so, so helpful for these kids.

**Dr. Joan Baran:**

[00:10:05] It can be really powerful when a parent acknowledges that they might not have all the answers, but then model how they go about coping with that. Like, I am not quite sure what's going to happen next either. This could happen or this could happen and what would be the pros if this happened or what would be the cons if this happened and then also just saying sometimes I have nervous energy, and so that's why I'm going for walks after my Zoom calls, because I have this nervousness that I am trying to manage as well and I wonder if you are too.

**Beth Moroney:**

[00:10:42] I think it's sometimes helpful to help identify, what is it right now that's on your mind or what is causing the worry and is there anything that we can do about that, is there anything that we can solve because you know, if you're worried about a math test

or you're worried about a performance coming up, there are ways to practice and prepare, and parents can absolutely help with that. If it's something that's a little bit more nebulous or kind of this uncertainty in general, parents might be able to help model some of those other coping strategies or ways to sort of change the channel. So we're not getting so stuck in the worry, and that might be a good time to suggest, getting kids to move their bodies a little bit, taking a walk together, spending some family time together and kind of just helping them change the channel if there's not a clear way to solve the problem in that moment.

**Cindy Lopez:**

[00:11:30] Yeah, thank you, Beth and Dr. Baran, I liked that idea of changing the channel cause I think kids get that, that's kind of a visual that they can imagine and, uh, a verbal cue to them to say, oh yeah, okay, I can think about this in this way or different ways. So you talked about some great strategies, right, labeling feelings, validating, modeling, can you share some examples of those strategies and maybe consider some different ages as you talk about it?

**Beth Moroney:**

[00:11:58] Yeah, absolutely. I think as we talked about, you know, younger kids might need a little more help identifying what they're feeling as worry if we think that's what's going on. So, you know, even labeling, oh, you know, I'm noticing that you're having a lot more tummy-aches, sometimes when I feel anxious or when I feel worried, I don't feel good either, is that something that happens with you? So again, kind of sharing and allowing some space for kids to discuss, oh, yeah, that might be what's going on with me too. I think in talking with teens or kind of older kids who may or may not be able to label those feelings or identify exactly what's going on, a good thing to think about might be, you know, times of day when there might be an opportunity to have a conversation. So riding in the car together, or kind of settling down before bedtime, taking a walk together. I know Dr. Baran likes to talk about how taking a walk together sometimes takes some pressure off, you're not looking exactly right into each other's eyes, you can kind of have a more free flowing conversation.

And I think encouraging teens and younger kids to use any of the strategies that you might use, to kind of help you manage your stress. So again, that might be exercise that might be moving your body, there's some really, really great apps out there for help with things like deep breathing, mindfulness, muscle relaxation, things like Calm or Headspace, YouTube has lots of great videos, and doing that together. I think doing those pieces together and spending some time together, sending the message that I want to kind of help you through this, is always, always helpful for kids.

**Cindy Lopez:**

[00:13:38] Thank you for tuning in! Just a note, before we continue on with today's episode, we hope you're following us on social media, so you don't need to wait a whole week between episodes to get engaging, inspiring and educational content from CHC. Our social handles are linked on our podcast webpage at [podcasts.chconline.org](http://podcasts.chconline.org).

If there were one thing that you hope our listeners would take away from this episode, what would that be?

**Beth Moroney:**

[00:14:07] I think you are a great parent for being on the lookout for some of these things and for listening to this podcast and wanting to learn strategies to help. I think there are lots of things that you can do to help and that you and your child are not alone in this. Um, a lot of people are experiencing this. And we often talk about sort of the oxygen mask metaphor when you're riding an airplane, that it's really important that you're able to take care of yourself so that you can take care of your child and that might mean you seeking out extra support or talking with other parents who might be going through this.

It's such a hard time and I think we all need that kind of extra support and extra love right now. So leaning on your friends and family, um and seeking out your own support if you need it. You're not alone either and of course you know we would always recommend seeking out professional help if you're feeling like you need a little bit of extra support, or you're not sure how to help your child in this moment, CHC is a wonderful place to do that, but there are lots of great community agencies out there as well.

**Dr. Joan Baran:**

[00:15:12] Beth, I really liked what you said earlier about parents modeling how to cope with their feelings when they're feeling anxious or feeling worried. Anxiety actually can be a good thing, anxiety can motivate us to either seek out help or it can motivate us to do things. And what we need to do is we need to find a good balance of anxiety so that you have a certain amount of anxiety that will motivate you, but it won't necessarily paralyze you or stop you in your tracks. And so I want people to understand that there are so many great strategies out there, either through therapy or through websites or through apps in order to teach kids as well as teach parents how to cope with their feelings so that they are to be uh successful and thrive.

**Beth Moroney:**

[00:16:05] I think anxiety impacts all of us no matter your cultural background or your

education level or your age, and I think it can impact us at different points in our life, depending on kind of what's going on in your circumstances or if you have a particularly stressful, you know, family or school situation. It's always good to have strategies or ways that we can manage anxiety since we know it's something that likely we will all have to deal with, in different ways at different times of our life.

**Dr. Joan Baran:**

[00:16:33] I really like how you said that because I think sometimes people think, well, anxiety only happens for certain individuals and I think every person can think of a time when they felt nervous or when they felt anxious, whether it's starting a new job starting the first day of school, having to ask your boss for a raise. Everybody has had a time when they have experienced anxiety and our goal is to help kids and parents when they have that experience, feel confident that they can manage it and cope effectively and it is possible.

**Beth Moroney:**

[00:17:11] Absolutely agree.

**Cindy Lopez:**

[00:17:13] Thank you both so much. And Dr. Baran, what you said about, you know, the anxiety piece, like just enough anxiety to motivate you, right.

If parents are wondering, do I need to pay attention to this, is this too much, is this normal, I don't know what to do?... I just want to encourage our listeners CHC is here for you, you can find [help@chconline.org](mailto:help@chconline.org), you can call and ask about an evaluation or assessment, you can also request a free 30-minute parent consultation so you can talk about what's going on and get some advice by talking with one of our clinicians about next steps. So again, that [chconline.org](http://chconline.org) and Beth and Dr. Baran, thank you so much for joining us and sharing your insight and your expertise with us.

**Beth Moroney:**

[00:18:06] Absolutely. It's great to be here, Cindy, thank you so much.

**Dr. Joan Baran:**

[00:18:09] Thank you Cindy so much for this invitation.

**Cindy Lopez:**

[00:18:11] Thank you to all of our listeners, and we hope that you'll join us again next week.