Introduction to Anxiety in Kids

Welcome back to ADHD, Autism and Chronic Disease Parenting Summit. I'm here with the amazing doctor Mary Wild, who is an integrative pediatrician. And, we're going to talk all about anxiety, which I know a few people might have a little bit of. Anxiety is kind of a big deal these days.

So I thought it really important topic to talk about. And thank you for for being here and sharing your wisdom with us. Yes. Thanks for having me. I'm excited.

So can we I mean, maybe even just before we jump in, can we set the stage a little bit? What's going on with anxiety? What what are you seeing? Are you seeing a lot more of in your practice?

You know, why have you kind of taken this up as as a cause? I'm imagining just because the rates are skyrocketing. But I'm curious, you know, to hear from you what you're seeing out there.

There are a couple reasons I have adopted it as a cause. One is that it's so prevalent, and I see how it holds kids back from accomplishing and not only accomplishing what they could, could be participating in and doing, but but just enjoying that process.

And then that second reason that I have adopted this as a cause is it's something that I have experienced to as a younger child and moving forward in my life.

And so it's something that I developed tools to counter over many years and through my pediatric training and integrative medicine training. And I just feel like I don't want other families to have to wait until they're adults to figure this out.

So there's so many reasons why anxiety has increased. And I think that, you know, just the changes in society, the availability of information, I think is overwhelming.

And it causes kids to have to adopt a certain sophistication, even maybe earlier than they're ready.

Why Anxiety Is Rising

And then there are so many demands in our fast paced lifestyle, and, and these are just a few reasons why anxiety has increased. But I think it's just so important to give tools to kids and families early on so they don't have to follow a different trajectory than they otherwise could.

Awesome. And for a parent who's concerned about their child's anxiety, stress, maybe their own too. But you know, we'll we'll just say, this is for the kids at this point, even though maybe probably helps yourself.

What what are some of the the ways that you can respond or what are some of the, the things that you find or what do people need to know, you know, about anxiety to kind of do this better get move in a better direction, decrease that stress for kids.

Yes. Well, one thing is just having a whole new paradigm about anxiety. So if I could, I'd love to share a slide or two just because I know that some of us are more visual learners, and I think it helps to drive home the point.

So I'm going to go ahead and share my screen and pull up. This, slide really quick. So I like to talk about the anxiety equation and it has been said that our anxiety is our perceived risk over our perceived resources.

And when I talk about risk, I'm not talking about actual risky things that we would want our kids to avoid. I'm talking

about things like going and making a friend, or starting that big project, or trying out for the school play.

So these are healthy risks. But when our kids or we see the risks before us as looming very large and we don't really have resources to deal with them, then our anxiety will be big.

If you remember seventh grade math, you know when the number on top gets big, then the the numerical value of that fraction is a big number. So a lot of times how our kids and we try to address this is we diminish risk.

You know, we don't go out for the school play. We don't go up and talk to that person. We don't try a new thing. And then our kids worlds just start shrinking and shrinking and shrinking.

The Anxiety Equation and a New Framework

And this is why anxiety can often lead to a secondary depression, because it makes it so we feel less sense of self-efficacy. We feel more isolated, as you know, the things that we are willing to try and do diminish.

So the approach that I like to encourage families to take is just to build resources, and so they can face risk and still have, small to moderate level of anxiety.

And none of us really are looking for anxiety. That is zero. You know, we want to have a full human experience. Anxiety plays a role. There's a reason why, you know, we have a response when something feels like a degree of a threat, even if it's just a threat to our own sense of belonging or, you know, feeling like we might be judged or rejected in some way, but when we can have those resources, then we're able to live to the fullest, and we don't necessarily try to get anxiety to zero, but we get it to a manageable place where our kids can go forward and where they can enjoy things.

So that's one of the first things that I like parents to understand. And one other thing, maybe to kind of jump into maybe the next main point that I'd love to share is that the way that we often address anxiety in our modern culture, in modern medicine is very limited.

And I'd like to share this next slide. Represent that so often if we take our kids to the doctor and say, I think my child is anxious, I think I might actually, you know, meet criteria for a diagnosis of anxiety.

Then usually they're they're just two things that are, you know, recommended. And it's like, should we start a medication or should we refer your child to therapy?

But I think it's so valuable for, for parents to realize that there are many, many interventions that, they can play a role to diminish anxiety to some degree.

And there are very natural, healthy things. And again, we don't have to diminish anxiety 100%. But if through these different tools, we can diminish it enough to help our kids be functioning, help our kids enjoy themselves, then these are really healthy practices anyways.

So some, you know, through my resilience program, I teach families, mind tools, body tools, spirit tools, focusing on, you know, teaching them about cognitive behavioral therapy and thought coaching, teaching them about mindfulness practices and the power of imagery.

And, meditation, then sometimes going on to the body. Sometimes kids do need medication.

Mind, Body, and Spirit Tools

And so that is something that we consider, but also teaching them diaphragmatic breathing, teaching them to utilize movement to balance their brain chemicals, because that is one of the most powerful things we can do, doing yoga, using aromatherapy, grounding, looking at our entire lifestyle platform of, you know, our exercise, our sleep, our nutrition, our use of screen time, then other tools like tapping or something called, also called EFT.

And then, you know, what I think is often one of the most neglected things is addressing the spirit. This might be religious or spiritual practices that are more formal, or it can just be anything, you know, that helps our kids have a sense of meaning, purpose and connection.

Things like journaling, gathering or studying wisdom literature, participating in the arts, doing service, having gratitude practices, taking time in nature, building relationships, spending time laughing and playing.

You know these things. Sometimes in our very overscheduled lives, we don't leave room for our kids to just do self-directed play or self-directed creation.

Or just taking time to be in and not do anything. So these are these are some of the things that I love to, to share with families. Can I ask you question on that for a second?

Because I think that's a great list. It's it's beautiful. And I think, you know, it's very in line with everything that I always say, which is kind of like that tree approach.

So there's many different things that you can do. Yes. Sometimes therapy can be super helpful. Some kids do need medication, some adults on medication.

That's fine. But it, you know, generally should try to be a last resort. And there are a lot of other things that we can try first most of the time. But I'm just curious.

I mean, obviously, you know, everybody's different. Every kid is different. There's no one way to do anything. But in your experience working with a lot of patients and, you know, kind of taking this on as a, as a, again, as a cause, what have you found is a good first step for people if they're like, not Mary Lou, you know, and they're like, oh, okay.

Well, you know, this is a pretty new list for me. I mean, yeah, I heard about yoga, but I've never really done it. And obviously nutrition is pretty good, but not super spiritual.

What do you think? You know, before obviously going to medication and therapy if or if you're doing that in conjunction, someone who's like, yeah, you know, I would like to help my kid a little bit.

You know, again, I'm not super woowoo, so I'm not sure I'm going to go down and do like a whole aromatherapy protocol or something like that. Like, do you think, like, journaling is a good first step or or what do you think is as a good, you know, tilling the water for a family?

Yes. Well, I really do encourage families to take kind of a sampling method. So when I was a little girl, my mom used to take me to Baskin Robbins, or also known as 31 flavors, and they had these little pink spoons where you could taste things and decide what you wanted to get the big scoop of.

And so I encourage families just to go through these sessions. So I just I do two sessions on the mind, one on the body, one in the spirit, just to introduce these things.

And usually I find that kids latch on to 1 or 2 practices that are very, very helpful for them. And sometimes the families and the kids themselves are surprised.

So I try to not predict or, you know, select out tools that I think a child will gravitate towards because I let them do the choice. And so I think it's really important to be exposed to the many resources.

And then of course, we get to pick and choose, I do choose to begin with introducing concepts of cognitive behavioral therapy and thought coaching, because I think that that is it's very it feels very safe and it's very logical and it's a way that we can often diminish anxiety even by something like 30 to 50%.

Just as kids learn to pay more attention to the quality of their thoughts, the thoughts that they allowed to remain

and and kind of be thoughts and residents in their minds.

And with all these things, I introduce it in a very accessible way. So I think that nobody needs to define themselves as we will to accept the idea, for example, with yoga, just the idea that the way we position ourselves that, you know, we can send body language to other people and we all agree, you know, like, yes, if you're sitting like this, you know, you're sending body language, but, there's there's wonderful research by people like Doctor Amy Cuddy that we actually send body language to ourselves.

And as we, you know, do things to make our body big, you know, that it helps us feel more confident.

Starting Small with Practical Strategies

And so it's just even connecting the dots and helping kids just have a new awareness that they can get at their anxiety from multiple angles. And I recently heard another doctor say that he likes to.

He thinks of it as pulling threads, that he's just like pulling little threads to improve the anxiety. And if you pull enough threads, then it's like the anxiety unravels and it's it's a beautiful, beautiful process to watch unfold.

And what about supplements? I don't see that on your list here. Is that something that that you do recommend to patients and if so, what are your what are your favorites like magnesium or what?

What are you finding most helpful? Yes. And it's interesting because I do a lot with ADHD and anxiety, and I find that a lot of the supplements, that help with one can be very helpful with another because there are certain, you know, building blocks that our body needs to create these neurotransmitters, the serotonin, the dopamine.

And things like omega threes, zinc, magnesium, and a lot of times it's important to begin with some testing so we can acknowledge where the baseline is.

But research shows that many kids with focus issues with anxiety are low on, you know, some of these things like magnesium, like omega threes. And and so, you know, I start with nutrition, but I do also, offer testing and suggest supplements as well.

And some families don't want to do testing. And then we just try to use common sense and choose dosages that are reasonable to go forward with without having, you know, baseline data that would be safe for anyone.

And then we can see and and even with the nutrition, we can go so much deeper with that. We can start out with saying, okay, let's try to avoid non-organic foods that are known to, you know, be have high contamination rate.

So let's try to buy organic, especially in those areas. Let's try to avoid processed foods. Let's try to eliminate or reduce dyes, you know, things like that.

But then there's also another deeper layer of specialized diets based on, you know, the history of the person and the symptoms that they are are displaying that sometimes we we do some dietary trials as well.

Well, that's I mean, it's I couldn't agree more with everything you're saying. Is there a lot of the same stuff that I say, which is always, you know, great to hear.

And I think that people often forget there's just so many ways to, to work on, on, you know, anything that has to do with the mind and everything's connected anyways.

But but certainly, you know, we're not moving enough and we're not eating well enough and we're, we're too worried about everything going on, and we're too much on our phones, and we're too stressed about many things, and we're not, in our community enough, and we're not outside enough, or we're not around people enough, and all these things add up and nothing is magical or really rocket science.

It's just like, we're not we're not living in a way that's really conducive to being balanced. And so I, you know, I love I love seeing this list and all these things and, you know, just going back to it again, it's like you don't have to be very you don't have to do tapping or grounding or yoga or even, you know, meditation or have to do any of those things if you don't want to.

You certainly can. They're not very, you know, realistically. But, there are a lot of things, you know, in between, even just like, getting, you know, lavender essential oils or other things like that, like, there's so much that you can do. Yeah.

And I think that because there's so much you can do, that is something that paralyzes some families because they're like, where do I start? You know, and and there's so many rabbit holes you can go down.

And who do I trust? What websites, you know.

Supplements and Nutrition Support

So I think that it's helpful to have some type of a guide to share things that have worked to, you know, people who have curated, lists and suggestions, you know, like you and, so it's so wonderful that you're gathering practitioners that that have done some of this legwork for families to, to help decrease that path.

So, so I usually like to finish off with, you know, something very actionable, something that people can do today. And you, you mentioned a bunch of things.

Everything you said is kind of actionable. So you could really pick and choose anything but I'm curious if you were, you know, to speak to somebody who's watching this and say, like, this is the thing that I would like you to do today or this is what I would like you to do first.

Would that be something on that list? Would it be having a conversation with your kid? Like what? What would you want the first steps to be in in terms of moving in a better direction, having helping your kid to be a little bit healthier, a little bit more anxiety, not anxiety free, but a little anxiety decrease, we'll say.

Right, well, I think the probably the first place I'd recommend starting is looking inward, because a lot of times, you know, we as parents experience a lot of anxiety and we have a lot of fears related to our kids and, and their, productivity, their success.

And, and we sometimes project that energy on our kids. And so I think the first place we can look is inside ourselves and working on some of our own energy that we are sending forth and and really looking, you know, at and asking ourselves, am I do I really believe in my own child's resilience?

Do I believe that the universe is a friendly place, you know, do I believe that they can navigate and, and so working on some of those beliefs and, and perhaps practicing some of these, these suggestions that we went over individually and gaining some grounding ourselves so we can truly offer that and be an anchor point to our kids that we can offer some co regulatory, energy and calmness is is really valuable because it's always easy to just see the problem in somebody else and witness it.

But sometimes we also have to look in the mirror and say, how can I become more calm? Because if I am naturally more calm with how I relate to the world, then that will just spill over to the people around me.

Helping Parents Model Calm

So that would be the first step. And I love it. That's great. And I'll just say to finish up that, you know, there are very, very few things in medicine and health care that are useful for for everybody.

Or there's one way. But that list that you posted up there, I would say that's about as close, close to everyone as you can get. I think anybody who's watching this, every family could be reminded, you know, for the most part of of

different things that they could do to decrease their stress a little bit, to be more mindful.

There's no there's no way that could be a little bit more balance. Everybody can be a little more balanced. Everybody can, you know, think about these things a little bit more.

So I think it's super helpful. Really well curated list really on point. And I really appreciate you you being here and and being a part of this and sharing your wisdom is super actionable and I think will be very helpful to the listeners.

But before we go, maybe you can tell people a little bit more, about where to find you and, any of the programs that you have. I think that, you know, you were mentioning a little bit about that you have like the quick, you know, couple visit, type thing.

I think that would be very useful. So if somebody wants to do that and maybe dive in with their kids, that's something they could do. How they how they would go about that. Yeah.

So my website is Doctor Mary wild.com. And if you do Doctor Mary welcome. So it's Dr. Maria Wilder e.com. If you do forward slash anxiety hyphen masterclass then I have a free masterclass teaching about some of these things more in depth.

Resources and Where to Find Dr. Wild

I also am on Instagram at Doctor Mary Wild and I'm going to start, pediatrician comes clean kind of challenge because as I have continued to learn more about these practices, I am just looking at my own life and saying, how could I do better?

You know, how could I do better to be a little more mindful about my choices, to incorporate movement, to incorporate time outside? So I'm going to get really honest about my journey doing that.

And so that will be starting in the next couple of weeks. So it would be great to, to have you join in. Awesome. Yeah. Definitely that that's great. Well, I appreciate that. I think it's great resource.

I think you're a great resource to families out there who are going through this or thinking about it or want to make some changes. So I really appreciate it.

And again, thanks everyone for joining us here today. We'll see you in the next session. Thank you.