

# CUSD Cares Podcast

## Dealing with Anxiety

Season 1, Episode 7 – August 20, 2019

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Music: Music

Brenda: Welcome parents to another episode of CUSD Cares. I am so incredibly, fortunate today to have with us Ryan Helton who is a therapist locally here in Chandler and who's very familiar with our students in CUSD as well as our families since he is local. He is here to serve our community. Ryan, welcome to CUSD Cares.

Ryan : I'm excited to be here and look forward to having a great conversation about anxiety and the issues that face our families and a good percentage of our children right now.

Brenda: Yeah, it's such a hot topic, especially at the beginning of the school year, you know, with all those butterflies most students and I think parents have too, but this episode of CUSD Cares is really focused on anxiety. What our students experience everyday. Sometimes they don't even know the fact that it is anxiety that they're feeling. So why don't we start parents off with giving them an idea of what anxiety is and what does it look like? You know, we can talk about adolescents all day long. I know that's what we're both really passionate about. But from our elementary aged kiddos all the way up to our adolescents, if we're parents to really have a good understanding as to what it is and what does it look like?

Ryan : Yeah, well that's a great place to start which is just what is it? And as the parents are listening, I think one of the things that most parents have to wrestle with is understanding what you're seeing and recognizing what your child is going through. If we don't understand what it is then how are we going to recognize and then intervene and help our children. So as far as what anxiety is, most of us know the basics between the fight and the flight response. You have a stimulus and the response and for anxiety, obviously a stimulus, that produces emotions like being scared, unsure, uncertainty, predictability, something that elicits one of those emotions. So the fight or flight response is a very adaptive response and actually a very healthy response that we all have experienced at one point or another, and will, so we'll talk about here today at what point does anxiety or that response to a scary situation or stimulus become now problematic and manifests in a clinical way that may require treatment. It's just the response to something that's a very scary and we don't know how to respond, what this is going to mean for our world. And so as far as the manifestations go you have the physical, mental and emotional manifestations, and then of course, the behavioral. Those would look different depending on the phase of life, from a child to an adolescent.

Brenda: And before we go into that, Ryan, I'm so glad you mentioned that there is a certain level of anxiety that is normal, right? And that we all feel at some point in another and we'll get to the point where we discuss when it reaches a point in which it's above and beyond the quote unquote, I hate using the word normal, but normal for the typical person. But anxiety allows us to kind of check in and also check out sometimes, which isn't a bad thing. When we look at some of the signs or symptoms, let's look at that elementary age student. What would it look like? What, what would a parent see?

Ryan : Again I think it's important to just understand as I just started to talk about what is anxiety, it's this fight or flight response, to a scary situation. And so, anxiety, generally I, I break down in two different areas, as a response. A lot of our kids will shut down and internalize. And then you've got the kids who are in that star flight mode, right? The response to that often is avoidance and internalizing and contracting and everything coming in. And then you've got a subset of kids who fight. I've got my two older sons are great examples; both struggle from anxiety, but in different ways. My oldest as an internalizer, he gets quiet, he doesn't talk, he will drift off into his bedroom and he gets quiet and that's what he does. He internalizes it. My middle one is a big time externalizer. So when stress comes at him, he often gets into that fight mode. and so as far as the presentation goes, it can look a couple of different ways. So if we talk about the internalizing response, you'll see kids who are essentially avoiding, mostly when it comes to school, you'll see the kids when Sunday night comes and the kid gets really quiet or sad or they get a stomach ache. We as parents get them, my wife's a teacher, she gets them, so it's normal to a point. But those are the kids who have those physical manifestations where they get the stomach because they're keeping it in. They get the stomach aches, they get the headaches, they might get joint, or backaches. They'll have problems sleeping. And when it's time to get up and go to school they're very slow to get up, maybe because they didn't sleep well or just because they're avoiding going into school what they're fearing or what seems too scary for them. So that's from the internalizing standpoint-that avoidance is really the hallmark of anxiety. And then you have the externalizers, the ones who are fighting, who may have temper tantrums and outbursts and fight with teachers, fight with parents, and it comes across as just being defiant. But if you really kind of look underneath, this child is scared of something, and doesn't have the language or the words to be able to say what's going on with him internally, and so he just reacts out of that fight or flight response and sometimes you get flight and avoidance and sometimes you get fight.

Brenda: So the emotion completely takes over this child. And so therefore they can't formulate their words or maybe they don't have the words, or can't access them. I've heard and seen some students just became so incredibly, after the act or incident in which they're fighting, quiet. I mean, they can't even verbalize or go through reflective till they've had some time to decompress.

Ryan : Absolutely. And I know we'll get to the section in our conversation here today, but as far as kind of what to do and how to help our kids, one of the biggest things that I work with parents on is giving them a language and giving them words to be able to identify and connect what they're going through physiologically in their body, emotionally. Giving them that language. "I'm feeling scared. I am overwhelmed, I am even stressed", which is just a general term. But really being able to use some words so that we as

parents, can respond to that versus just the behavior or the outbursts or the defiance. And I know we'll talk about that, as far as how to give our children the words. But certainly when I see clients in practice, I have parents bringing children, teens too, to my practice. I say the biggest thing that we're going to do in here in session is to discuss what the first step is in psychoeducation, which is what is anxiety? What does it look like? How does it feel in the body? What are my main triggers and stressors? and just starting to learn about their patterns and how it manifests for them. Because it is a little bit different for everybody. And so if they can start to be aware that when they get butterflies in their stomach or they have a stomach ache or when they get this feeling of impending doom that something bad is going to happen, or when they really don't want to go to school, that equals anxiety. They're feeling anxious right now. And then as parents, we can meet them there. We're much more likely to respond to them in a more appropriate and helpful way. Because we all as parents want our kids to feel safe and we know they need to go to school and we know it's our job to help them overcome fears and concerns. But again, it's our job to give them that language and that's what we really work on in counseling as well.

Brenda: So it's really making sure that everybody understands from that parent perspective, so parents can respond now that everybody is aware of what it is for their particular students, son or daughter, but making sure that they have a good understanding so that they can appropriately respond in a supportive way as opposed to responding to just to the behaviors.

Ryan : Absolutely. And that's very critical. And the kind of things that get flushed out in counseling when you have a parent bringing a child in with these presentations. Right now we're seeing such an uptick in behavioral, developmental; ADHD is on the rise. We have all of these disorders that are kind of bubbling up and our parents are just struggling and don't know what to do with these behaviors. And that goes back to as parents, how do we respond to our children who are in crisis and are having a little meltdown when we ourselves maybe are stressed, anxious, and our reactions are keeping them in that kind of stress state? So when they come into session one of the things we kind of parse out is-step back, be objective, step out of the emotion and ask what's the function of the behavior right now? Is this an avoidance behavior? Is this a child who's trying to say something, just doesn't know how to say it? Which often times is that fighting. We ask parents to just understand the function of the behavior. What is our child trying to communicate through the behavior?

Brenda: That's a critical question that requires, as a parent, for us to really stop and listen. And I think that probably sounds simple, but it's hard to do with the busy-ness of just life, how it is today for most parents, not all. And we're speaking in very general terms just to stop and listen and ask ourselves that question and really kind of ponder it.

Ryan : Absolutely. And I tell parents, I fail daily. Because we're all so busy and this kind of work requires presence; truly being present for our children and listening to them, understanding them and listening to or understanding what they're not saying in many cases. But I think it's important to step back a little bit and just understand the scope of something like an anxiety disorder that one in four of our teens right now, from the age of 13 to 18, are experiencing from a clinical standpoint that could be classified as an

anxiety disorder, one in four. That's a really high number. The likelihood that your child, is, or has or will experience anxiety to that level is pretty significant. So as parents, we almost have to just expect it; that our children are going to go through certainly phases, in which anxiety, these emotions, that they will not know how to handle. And you're gonna see that avoidance. You're going to see the fighting, and we're gonna just have to be on the lookout for it.

Brenda: Think about a typical classroom. It could be anywhere between six and eight students, in a class, that really have something that's diagnosable that has to do with anxiety. That's pretty hard. And even though they can't express, they may not be able to verbalize it, we know that 80% of what we communicate is through nonverbals every single day. All the time.

Ryan : Yes. And it's hard, especially if you think about teenagers, they're from a developmental standpoint in this phase. One of the hallmarks of adolescence, is that autonomy and identity and pulling away from parents and more gravitating towards peers and stuff like that. So I mean naturally you're going to see that kind of isolation, and that need for privacy. So it becomes as a parent, very hard to, again, parse out like, what is anxiety? or even depression, right? Where you see that avoidance, that isolation or they're not talking as much. So it becomes very difficult. And that's where I tell parents typically, like anything, it's not gonna be a problem until it's a problem. And one of the biggest ways to identify if it is truly a problem is if you see a pretty radical change in your child's behavior, mood, the things they say, their thought patterns. So it really is about kind of just understanding your child, what their typical or norm is. And when that just seems a little off and where the isolation or that avoidance seems to be kind of kicking up a notch and they're struggling, maybe they're withdrawing and not going to school as much or they're sick more often or things like that. That's when you know, okay, that we need to have a conversation. You know, how you doing? What's going on? Here's what I've observed. I know these are signs of stress and anxiety. Let's just have a conversation about that.

Brenda: Well, I know parents tend to find a lot of support in talking to other parents and what could manifest in a neighbor or another student may not look the same in your student or in your son or daughter, so I'm glad you mentioned what's out of the norm for your son or daughter is really important for people to really look at their individual student, what are the things that they enjoyed before that they no longer find joy in doing.

Ryan : And I'm glad you brought that up because when I work with clients and parents, particular to anxiety, I try to make things as simple as possible. And one of the ways that I help not only a parent but also a client identify if the anxiety is becoming problematic and if it's already been determined and now we're working on it, If they're making progress is this- is your world contracting or is it expanding? Are you saying no to going out and hanging out with friends? Are you missing more school? Is your world shrinking because of fears and the anxiety? Once we start with the treatment, that's the main goal is how do we feel more safe in more places. And your world expands for you. So again, as parents, we're talking about identifying that point at which it can be problematic, maybe something that's worth seeking outside help or getting treatment for. Even just asking those couple of questions. Is the behavior change, is this a kind of a

turn from my child's typical patterns -number one and number two is does it seem like that turn or are those patterns changing as leading to a contraction in my child's life? and if so, if he can answer kind of yes to both of those, then it's probably a safe bet that that you need to at minimum have a conversation. But may want to consider outside help and treatment.

Brenda: And I'm glad you mentioned about answering those two basic questions. Is your world shrinking or is it expanding and how you create those opportunities to check in? And I think as a parent and I've been in the circumstances creating those conversational moments where you are checking in and what does that look like? For some families, I know it's at the end of their day when everyone's spent and we're all getting ready to go to bed. For other families it's that drive time in the car. That's the only time that you have and it may be just 10 minutes. So it may be just a small window. but I'm so glad you brought that up where a parent can really have that kind of self talk within themselves as to, okay, if I have this conversation, what is it gonna look like and what do I really need to ask? Especially since time is usually of the essence and we want them to make sure that they understand, we're checking in with them. This is important. I've noticed x, Y, Z, what, or where are you at? And kind of presenting it from more of the facts standpoint, where either I've noticed you're not hanging out with your friends as much as you used to or I noticed anytime there's an opportunity for you to do something outside of school, you tend to turn it down and you didn't use to do that before. So keeping it very factual before you do those check-in questions. So therefore there's nothing really to argue with, hopefully, since you're sticking to the facts.

Ryan : Yeah. So one of the strategies I did that we do as a family with our children and one that I present to most of my families is at the end of the day doing what we call in our family "peaks and pits" the high and the low. I think that what that does, the benefit of that, is it gets you out of the trap of how was your day? How are you doing? What's going on? Fine. Fine. And number one, our kids, often can't recall. They've been through so much in a day that for them to pull out to answer those general questions is difficult really, even if they wanted to. So the "peaks and the pits" has them look for a more specific answer. So I think from a parent's standpoint, what it does is gives us a gauge of our child's life. We're not going to know everything in between, but if I know my child's high point and what they felt worst about, what they felt was the worst part of their day, we as parents can fill in the blanks, the rest of the story. So if you're doing that on a regular basis, you kind of understand, my child's high or his peaks they either can never find, or they don't seem to be that high and they're not that excited, not that proud or in the pits, you get to understand, they'll share some of these stories about when a kid said this or did this, or they're struggling in a class. And those are great openings for us as parents to just say -"tell me more about that. Oh my gosh, that must be difficult". And at that point we empathize and normalize and just validate their feelings and then come in with the solutions or "what have you thought about doing?" "What can you do?" and then you fill in the blanks as needed, where they get stuck or don't know what to do. That's our job as parents. So "the peak and the pit" I found personally with my kids really helps, especially if you get in a habit of doing that. And not always, but they usually look forward to doing that. Because "the peaks" is where you get to celebrate that this is "let mom or dad have our moment" to be able to celebrate whatever was a high point for you. And we also want to be there to love and support you in those low

moments; that's as parents what we want to do. And from a kid's perspective, they all want to be celebrated and share something that's exciting and they also, whether they will admit it or not, do want and need that support as well.

Brenda: I love the language of "the peaks and pits". I use high and low, but I'm going to switch over to the "peaks and pits."

Ryan : I like the alliteration with the 'P's.

Brenda: It certainly does. And you know what, they look forward to it. And when you forget, they remind you and they then they begin to initiate those conversations, which I think is great. And if it becomes something, a pattern that you do during dinner or during the time whenever that happens, if we forget, they remind us. So I think that's fantastic. And thank you for sharing the language of "peaks and pits." So getting back to you said one in four youth tend to have some type of diagnosable anxiety disorder. If you were to give parents a little bit of some insight of some simple strategies that they can do every day, maybe just deep inhaled and exhaled sometimes does the trick. There is definitely the power of breath. There's a science behind that. But if you were to share with parents just some simple quick three or four things that they could do just to get the edge or get through that moment for students that are feeling super anxious that they could maybe even model because obviously we know kids learn from what they see. They take in everything that they see us do and say as we catch ourselves and in our age probably doing and saying things that we saw our parents do, and especially if it's something that we have adapted that maybe isn't the most positive we catch ourselves.

Ryan : I think the first thing that you have to recognize is if my child is experiencing a level of panic or pretty extreme anxiety where their heart rate is up, everything is elevated. We know as adults when we're past a certain point emotionally, we can't think straight. Our behavior is going to reflect that. We can't reason. So that is not the point for talking to our children about, "well, don't worry about this at school" and we want so much to do that as parents is to fix things and make things better. The best thing we can do in those moments where on a scale zero to 10, 10 being absolute panic if they're, a seven or higher, even a six or a higher, that first and foremost, we have to bring down that stress and anxiety in them.

Ryan : So this can be done in a number of different ways for the younger children. Most parents and most people are at this point familiar with the term mindfulness, right? There's a lot of great activities and ways to use mindfulness, especially in the middle of a tantrum or a panic attack. And mindfulness is really just about engaging your five senses to draw you into the present moment. And essentially if we've got a child in the middle of a panic attack or anxiety, if you think about what anxiety is, it's your thinking about the future, right? I tell my teens you are future tripping. You're tripping on the future, right? So our goal when we are feeling some of those physical symptoms, and we feel that anxiety, that is absolutely our trigger that we need to get in the present because we're thinking about something in the future. So as far as getting into the present, again this mindfulness practice is great. So with young kids, I know when my middle son gets into these really, overly emotional tantrums where he's kind of lost control, we definitely just changed the environment. Because you're getting him out of whatever

environment has kind of stimulated that, get them into a different environment. Obviously as a parent you have to stay calm, which is a super crucial part of that. So we'll engage. And again, my son is elementary age at this point, but we'll engage the site; we'll play a color game. And we start with simple and then we move into harder. So we'll say, "okay Hudson, I want you to find one thing that's orange in this room."

Ryan : And he'll be crying and trying to catch his breath. And it's hard for him to breathe. And so at that point, if any parent has experienced that with your child and you just say, "well, just breathe just breathe!". And they can't, they literally can't catch their breath. And it can almost make it worse. So again, at that point, it's kind of about distraction. And so there's a difference between avoidance, chronic avoidance, which leads to the anxiety. And just in those moments where we just need to refocus, distract. So we'll say find the color orange and he'll be looking around and he can't even speak at that point, but he can point, he can point to something that's orange, Just say, great. And he's engaged, right? And we're slowly getting him from that Amygdala. The emotional brain to the rational brain. The talking will come later as to understand what triggered him, what he's feeling, what we need to do moving forward to make things better. In that moment, It's just calming him down. And then we'll move to, "okay, find two yellow things." And then you go three red things and you'll see him slowly come down. That's sight. You know, you can do this for, for sounds. There are certain songs or meditational music that helps kids.

Brenda: What about for older youth?

Ryan : It's the same principle, which is to just distract and get into the present moment. I don't care if it is getting on your phone. I don't care if it is playing a video game. I don't care if it's going for a walk or getting out of your environment, whatever is going to reduce your heart rate, the physiological stress in that moment. As a parent we have to help our kids develop a menu of items or things that they can do to help them get out of that place. And then at that point, we're going to talk about it, we're going to need to process, but we'll do that after you calm down.

Brenda: I'm so glad you brought up a menu because a lot of times what works on one day or with one of your children may not work with another. So it's just kind of trial and error and trying something new. And it may be something as simple as walking.

Ryan : For teens, they usually just need space. They need time and space to figure out what's even going on with them. And because if you start hitting them with "what's going on, what's wrong, what happened, here's what you need to do to calm that", they can't answer even any of those questions. Often times they don't even know. And so I do a lot of couples work and we use what's called the Gottman method. And out of his research, he found that when working with couples, if one of the partner's heart rates are 95, a hundred beats per minute or higher, they just shut down therapy. So he sets them up with like monitors and stuff like that. And through some research, they will literally for 20 minutes have them totally get their mind off of what they are fighting about or talking about. They'll have them read magazines or just look at their phone. And 20 minutes later, once the heart rate has come back to the conversation, come back to the issue and it's a completely different conversation at that point because they're in a place

now to work through it. So as that relates to our teens, that time and that space, just be distracted is really important way for them to come down before we can work through whatever is triggering them. From there it's processing. how are you experiencing the anxiety, what goes on in your body? It's really asking some of those questions so that they can learn for themselves about what this is and what's going on with them

Brenda: So they can recognize it on their own and know what to do so that when you're not there or as they get older to be able to manage and cope. And it sounds so simple, just time and space. Really. That's it? And sometimes that's the biggest thing we're lacking in our lives is finding time, right? To be present and finding a place that we can feel safe.

Ryan : Absolutely. That is a great thing that you brought up. Even when we talk about this idea of having a menu of things that our kids can do. Maybe five things that we can do when we're stressed or overwhelmed and as parents, we have to know what this is too. How do we respond when our kids are like this? We have to be reminded because we get in that stress, that wave comes over us. So stress and anxiety and what's wrong with him and what's he going to do in this emotional state? And so we have to have that same menu and say "why don't you Hudson, go take some time in your room. Just go relax. Here's your menu, here's some different things that we've talked about that you can do. You just take the time to do that. Decompress."

Brenda: Letting them choose. Another thing that I would share that could be very practical and you tell me Ryan, if this is good, is practicing maybe some of those menu things even before it even happens. So therefore they can access them later if they feel like coloring, I know coloring's a big thing out. You see all the mindfulness coloring books. One in particular that I actually happen to like or just breathing or meditation or whatever works for you or just being in your safe space. That brings you the most comfort and joy. What are those pillows? They have these pillows with a lot of what I call, sequence. Yeah, the sensory pillows. I know they sell stuffed animals and little kids love them.

Ryan : And that falls under the umbrella of this mindfulness thing, right? You engage your eyes, your sight, the sounds. Touch tactile. That sensory input. Just kind of feeling what's right in front of you, right? The breathing that you brought up, the breath is the best way to get into the present moment. If anxieties about the future and you're following the breath, you can't get any more present than your breath. There's a menu of items that you have to have as an intervention and then it's our job, I believe as parents to, on the prevention end, to do some of these things. To practice the breathing, the meditation. How do we curb some of that stress and anxiety? How do we prevent some of that from happening in the first place? And I'll point right back to the parents. You know, we do a horrible job as a society, as even adults regulating and managing our emotions, our stress, our anxiety. And here we are expecting our children, our teens to do that when we're not modeling and doing some of those things. So that would be the next thing that I would say to any parents is, your children are watching everything that you do. So they know that you meditate and they know that you've carved out time in the morning or the afternoon to do that? When you go and talk to them about what they should do, they're going to have so much more buy in. They're going to see that mom is calmer after she meditates. Parents are a huge part of the solution when we talk about just helping our children learn about and cope with anxiety that we can be a part of that

solution and model it and teach it. And I don't believe that we can teach something that we haven't modeled-effectively. We can say we're giving our children a menu of things to do, but if we've not actually practiced those or, done those with our kids, then they're gonna have a hard time of just saying, "oh, okay, you want me to do this"? but you have to give them that experience. You have to tie in that when we play the color game, or when we rub the sequence pillow, or when we start breathing like this, that we actually feel better. we feel the difference. And, and then they have buy in and then they'll do the stuff even preventatively.

Brenda: It's hard to look in the mirror sometimes as a parent, we're both parents. I know I've been there as well, but I think that what you said is probably the biggest takeaway for parents listening out there is even if your youth or your child is looking at you like you have three heads, like "what are you doing? I'm not doing that." Still do it anyway. Because eventually even if it doesn't work for them, they'll see what peace it brings you and either try to figure out with your assistance, hopefully what works for them, even if it's not what works for you. But often we know, the apple doesn't fall too far from the tree. So with that said, a lot of times what could help you could help your child as well. They're going to go through different stages of life just like you are and will have seasons in which they're more stressed and feeling more anxious than others. I know as we quickly approach, I can't believe I'm saying this because the holidays are near, but now they come pretty quick. You know, people tend to feel a little bit more anxious or they have past experiences that they draw from that bring a lot of anxiety. So I'm putting this into action now. is important in there ton of Apps, some that are free, some that are not, a ton of resources for parents and caregivers out there if they're looking to read more about mindfulness practices or things that they could do. You don't need a masters degree in this, that's for sure. Right, Ryan?

Ryan : Absolutely. and that's the beautiful thing with technology as much as this hurt a lot of us and disconnected a lot of us, there are some really great tools on there like the breathe app and the calm app and all you have to do is search it in the app store or there's hundreds of them literally, and you go through and you just find some that work for you. You play around with them and you do these with your kids and there's built in meditations in them. There's built in breath metronomes where you follow with your breathing. and my children love them. They go to sleep to this meditation and they ask for them. They count on them and they absolutely work. They put them in that kind of zen place where everything just kind of dissolves. There are more resources than we've ever had in the history of mankind. We have more information about anxiety. We can even go online and self-diagnose. We can go on and look at the checklist of what is classified as an anxiety disorder. We have all that information at our fingertips now. Now the next step is what do we do with this information? If I see these behaviors, I see these thought patterns, these emotions. Now what do I do?

Brenda: So what should a parent do? Because if something happens or we're seeing signs of it in a school setting, I know our counselors will typically converse with the parent and say maybe it's time to make that visit to the pediatrician as a starting point. Is that what you would suggest Ryan?

Ryan : Yeah, so I think first and foremost having the conversation, opening up, creating as we've talked about the language of "it seems like you're experiencing this and this and this," this is anxiety and teaching them that and then validating, normalizing what they're going through. Maybe even relating from your own experiences about how you relate to their anxiety and what you go through. And then from there, helping them see that this really seems to be impacting your world. Your world seems to be contracting- some of the things that we've talked about here today. And then at the next phase we'll be talking about ways to address that. Most parents are quick to go into the doctor's office, pediatrician, a psychiatrist office and say what's going on? And they're very quick to medicate right now. We've never had so many kids medicated for so many different things. There's 50 to 75%, effectiveness ratio. Medications do work, but CBT, (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) going to counseling also has the 50 to 75% effectiveness, And so those combined, you look at 75 to 90% effectiveness for treating things like anxiety and depression. All of this is treatable. A lot of our kids are going through it. One in four. It's not abnormal and it can be treated. And that's the thing that I want the parents to know. We need to impress upon our kids that this absolutely not something that has to debilitate you any longer. We can get help for this. And so going to your pediatrician's office, seeking out a counselor who can do the official assessments and diagnoses and then create a treatment plan for them.

Brenda: Something I want parents to keep in mind because as our children develop, we know that as I mentioned before, they go through different seasons in life and a lot of the anxiety is feeling scared of the unknown. And sometimes they just don't have the words. So equipping them with the words and the communication piece so that they know what to do. And the coping skills, sometimes that does the trick, you know? because we're preparing them for life and if they're feeling anxious now they need to know 20, 30, 40 years from now, when they have these feelings again in whatever circumstance of stressful point in their life that they can access the healthy coping skills so that they can manage and get through and know that they can get through it.

Ryan : Absolutely. And that's a great point. It's our job to provide hope to our children and for them to know that this too shall pass, and I'm here to help you through it too and things can improve. And that's a really important part of the therapeutic equation - just creating that hope. I want to go back to the treatment part of it. Most parents will take their kids into the doctors and they will quickly medicate them. And, I don't mind medication, but that should be the alternative. Giving them language, helping them understand what this is, why they're experiencing it, and just developing a better relationship with anxiety because it's not all bad and that's one of the things that we often have to teach our kids is you're having this for a reason. This is a protective, very adaptive response to stress. so we're not trying to get rid of anxiety. We want to help you learn to manage it. And so often times that therapy, that counseling, giving them them that language and the education helps tremendously and medication is never even needs to be in the equation because there's side effects with that, but for cognitive behavioral therapy counseling there's not a adverse side effects. Sometimes our kids need them both. Sometimes they are so debilitated they can't get to school literally. I'm not bashing medications. but I just know we are very quick to medicate and what is the message that we're sending our kids through doing that is we're just going to cover it up. We're just going to mask the symptom without addressing the underlying root issue.

We're trying to set up our kids for life. We all want our children to be healthy, productive adults in society. That's our main goal. And we know life is stressful and there is going to be many more times to be anxious. So if they don't learn these tools now, the stakes only get higher as our kids get older as drugs, alcohol and other ways of coping get added to their menu.

Brenda: And more responsibility as they get older. So as we wrap it up, Ryan, because I know we could go on and on because I know how passionate you are about making sure that there is understanding behind anxiety and what it looks like and how we can help and how can we help support each other. I'm glad that a few things parents and caregivers to take away is about being present and listening. And I hope that after hearing this podcast, you take out time with your child to check in with the peaks and pits. I know I'll be adding that language to mine, but is there any other takeaways that you would want parents after hearing this podcast, Ryan, to know what, this is that "ding moment" where I really want them to walk away with this one piece of information.

Ryan : If you're listening to this, I assume you've already probably had an experience where your child has had some severe anxiety or has been very stressed, and you didn't maybe fully know how to meet them there, but number one is it's going to happen. They're going to experience, if not now, there will be a moment where their anxiety becomes too much. Just know that will happen. And open up a conversation, like you said, through the peak and the pits or however you need to have these conversations. Maybe it's just sharing your own anxiety saying to your kids, "Hey, I'm stressed, I'm anxious. I need to go do this." It's really modeling that for them. and then helping them see that it's normal. It's okay, but we don't have to stay in that and live in that. And I'm here to give you tools and it's highly manageable, highly treatable. so that this doesn't have to debilitate you, that your world can forever expand and not contract. And that's really the biggest thing that parents need to know and impress upon their kids that I'm here to help your world expand and not get smaller. And that treatment is available. I do individual counseling. Anxiety's kind of my favorite disorder and issue to work with as somebody who's experienced debilitating anxiety in my life. I can relate even on that personal level, what they're going through. And then also being on the other side of it and knowing that it is treatable. So the individual counseling is so important to get to the root. I also have outpatient support groups where you can be with other kids or teens their age who see that they are not alone in this. That's such a validating experience, especially for teens and kids don't speak, because that's the hallmark of anxiety. They avoid, internalize. But once they find they're not alone, then they feel all of a sudden connected to other kids their age. And that immediately takes the power away from the anxiety and gives them their life back.

Brenda: And isn't that what we all want to feel is we all want to feel like we belong. We all want to feel like there's hope and that we belong to others. And creating this community where it is safe to feel what ever it is you feel and that we can get through it together. Ryan, I can't thank you enough for being here. If you're looking for Ryan Helton, he's at the Human Experience here locally in North Chandler, and we'll have him on again on a few different topics. Parents and caregivers, thank you for signing in with us and listening to this podcast. We hope to have you back once again and for right now, Bon Voyage!

Music:

Music