



School Counsellor Newsletter

Edition 34

Anxiety is Normal

I often hear people talk about 'wanting to get rid of their anxiety' or 'hoping to have a day where they are not anxious at all.' My response to these comments is that this is unnecessary, and often impossible, as anxiety is a completely normal and important part of everyday life. In this newsletter I hope to briefly explain what anxiety is, why it is important and how it is normal. The goal should not be to have anxiety free days necessarily or to say "I don't have anxiety" but rather to get to the end of each day and be able to reflect and say, "I had some anxious moments today and I managed those well."

Anxiety is normal. When we feel anxious it is our mind alerting us to something important so that our body can get ready for this important activity or event. For example, we might feel anxious when we enter a room full of people we do not know and need the courage to find someone to talk to, or we might feel worried before sitting an important test or exam because we want to perform well and we might feel a sense of alarm if we are waiting for someone we care about and we are not sure where they are. These feelings can be uncomfortable but they are usually temporary and pass quickly. In events which may place us in danger, anxiety helps us to react and stay safe. For example, when you are trying to cross a busy road your heart may beat faster to pump blood to our muscles so we can move quickly when we need to. In the event of immediate danger, such as a car heading straight towards us, our 'fight-flight-freeze' response is triggered so that we can react however we need to to stay alive. Some people refer to this as the body alarm system, in which our brain notices a threat to our safety and activates our body to react, such as fighting back or running away.

Anxiety is a part of everyday life and makes life worth living. Without it we would not be able to stay safe, both in situations of immediate danger but also daily activities. Rather than seeing anxiety as a negative, it is helpful to focus on its positives. By noticing your anxious feelings, you are paying attention to detail, you are sensitive and thoughtful towards yourself and your friends and you are well prepared for things that may happen. It is vital for children to be supported with information, tools and resources to help them have the confidence to cope with anxiety as a normal part of life rather than seeing it as something to be feared or avoided.

Of course anxiety can become a problem. Whilst small amounts of anxiety are useful, some people, including children, worry or feel so anxious that it can stop them from leading a rich and full life. The next newsletter in this series will unpack this level of anxiety further and how parents can support a child who may worry more than is helpful. The challenge from this newsletter is to have conversations with your child about how anxiety is normal and important. Perhaps this week's dinner time question, car ride home discussion, or doing the dishes together chat could be based around questions such as:

- **“How was anxiety helpful in your day today?”** or
- **“Tell me about how you managed an anxious moment today?”**

As always, don't forget to answer the questions yourself as well!



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Jenelle is a Registered Provisional Member with NZAC (New Zealand Association of Counsellors).

If you wish to discuss the services the School Counsellor can provide, please see your son's homeroom teacher or Amos Pilgrim:

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