Anxiety and the Big, Scary Dog

By Alice Roberts, LCSW
07 May, 2018

Adolescents, Advice, Anxiety, Children, Counseling, Emotional Health, General, Mental Health, Mental/Emotional Health, Self-care, Therapy, Tragedy, Trauma

Alice Roberts CSW, All or Nothing Thinking, Anxiety, Avoidance, Box Breathing, Challenging Thinking Errors, Confront Anxiety, Cycle of Anxiety, Cycle of Fear, Emotional Reasoning, ERP Therapy, Exposure and Response Prevention Therapy, Instinct, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, Positive Affirmations, Reinforcing Anxiety, Treating Anxiety

When I was a small child, my family had several large German shepherds as pets. I don’t remember the times those dogs jumped on me and knocked me down, though I have been told it happened. I do remember growing up with an intense fear of large dogs. Throughout my childhood, when I saw a large dog, my primary instinct was to run away.

Unfortunately for the young-child-me, dogs enjoy a good game of chase. By running away, and encouraging the “big scary dog” to chase me, I was reinforcing my own fear: that dogs were scary and should be avoided at all costs.

Anxiety is often a “big scary dog”. We feel the discomfort, and seek to avoid it by running away, or avoiding situations that cause anxiety. When we avoid anxiety-provoking situations, we reinforce in our brains that those situations are unsafe, creating a cycle of fear and anxiety that grows the more we avoid specific situations.

In order to retrain our brain, we have to confront the big scary dog. This can be an
overwhelming task, so it is important to have tools to draw from. Three helpful tools are box breathing, positive affirmations, and challenging thinking errors.

Box breathing:

Take a deep breath, filling your lungs completely while imagining moving your lungs in the outline of a square. At each corner, pause and hold the breath for 4 seconds, then exhale along the next side of the square. Breathing in this way helps to regulate your nervous system, increasing your sense of calm.

Positive Affirmations:

Words are powerful, and we tend to believe the words we tell ourselves. A friend recently recounted her experience on a climbing wall. “I was doing really well, until I looked down. At that point I panicked and told myself, “I can’t do this”, I sat frozen for several seconds and then let go of the wall, letting the ropes catch me and return me to the ground.”

If we constantly tell ourselves “I can’t do this”, “This is too hard”, or “My anxiety is too high for coping right now”, we are likely to give up early or avoid the situation entirely. When those thoughts pop into our minds, we can replace them with a positive affirmation. “I can do this”, “I am capable”, and “I’m stronger than I feel” are all positive affirmations that can help push back against the anxiety that is preventing us from reaching our goals or functioning in daily life.

Challenging Thinking Errors:

Thinking errors are irrational patterns of thinking that often come along with anxiety or depression. As with positive affirmations, we can replace thinking errors by challenging them. Common thinking errors include all-or-nothing thinking (where we view things in very black and white terms), mind reading (where we assume we know what another person is thinking), filtering out the positive (where we focus entirely on the negative, and ignore anything that might counter our current thoughts), and emotional reasoning (taking our feelings as signs, i.e., I feel scared, so I shouldn’t attend this event).

Recognizing then challenging these kinds of thinking errors can help us confront our anxiety by reminding our brain that there are other ways to see the world and we do not have to be stuck in our anxiety.

If you have tried utilizing these tools and need more support in confronting the big scary dog of anxiety in your life, Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) therapy can help retrain your brain to see the dog not as a snarling beast, but as something more approachable. ERP therapy is effective in treating anxiety as well as obsessive compulsive disorder.

If you are struggling with these issues, schedule an appointment with Alice in either the Bountiful or Cottonwood Heights office at (801) 944-4555.

More

5 Reasons Healing Outdoors Can Work for You
Have you been looking for an alternative to traditional office therapy that includes an outdoor component? Then you would very likely find that Healing Outdoors therapy is a compelling option for you.

I've had people tell me for some time “when you start doing therapy outside, let me know.” That time has arrived! I'm letting people know.

Therapy or Healing Outdoors on the trail works because you're outdoors in amazing beauty. You feel better. You're being active. Feeling alive. Feeling real!

Check out these five reasons why Healing Outdoors can just work for you.

**You Love the Outdoors**

People that love the outdoors seek to be outdoors. They look for every reason or excuse to hit the local hiking trail or go for a walk in the park. They find that being inside, even during the winter, is awful. They can't wait for the day to end or the weekend to begin. Why? Because they want to be outside! If this description resonates with you, then having your therapy on the trail may be just the ticket for you.

**You think Office Therapy is boring**

Does the thought of being in an office setting for therapy bore you? Does it sound monotonous? Or at the very least make you feel a bit anxious? Have you tried office therapy and it just didn't seem to work for you? Then Healing Outdoors is likely something you'd find worthwhile.

Therapy on the trail or in a local park is invigorating. Talking about life's problems or concerns outdoors seems so much more doable. If this resonates with you, then definitely consider Healing Outdoors in the central Wasatch Mountains.

**You Want to be Outside. It just Feels Better**

Does being inside on a sunny day make the day seem 16 hours long? Do you find yourself
glancing out the window almost as often as we check our smart phones? If this sounds like you, then Healing Outdoors therapy sessions could very well work for you.

Clients and others in the community have told me for years that being inside can seem depressing. Exactly! Why not fight your depression, anxiety, or relationship problems on the trail?

**You Believe that Moving Around Opens up Your Mind**

Hiking or walking during a therapy session just seems to open up your mind and clear your head. Not only do you think more clearly, but you feel better. You’re definitely much less likely to have your mind wander during a Healing Outdoors therapy session. Oh, and if your mind does wander, it’s only because the beauty is so captivating that you were distracted by nature’s awesomeness.

**You Find that Nature is Healing for You**

This may be the most compelling reason for wanting to seek therapy on a local trail. Many people find being outside healing in and of itself. Combine that with the opportunity to talk through a problem or two on the trail and you’ve likely got a winning combination.

**Hey that’s cool! What’s next?**

If you found my 5 reasons I’ve listed to be compelling, please follow the link below to get additional information. You’ll also be shown how to schedule your own Healing Outdoors therapy session. You can then begin your therapeutic journey to find that happier and more effective you that you’ve been desperately wanting to discover.

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**Healing Outdoors**

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**School Safety Summit – Join Me in Taking Action**

By Clair Mellenthin LCSW

16 Apr, 2018

Abuse, Adolescents, Advice, Anxiety, Children, Communication, Counseling, Emotional Health, Events, Family, General, Mental Health, Mental/Emotional Health, Play Therapy, Therapy

April 20th, Clair Mellenthin LCSW, Columbine High School, Community Violence, Crisis Response, National Day of Action, Nurtured Heart Approach, Play Therapy, Reducing Bullying, Safety in Schools, School Safety, School Safety Summit
Did you know that April 20th has been deemed a National Day of Action? It's the 19th anniversary of the school shooting at Columbine High School and a day that many communities are planning events designed at keeping kids safer in schools.

I thought I'd let you know about something I am doing to help professionals, parents and teachers like you on this day and challenge you to take part with me:

It's the School Safety Summit, and it's totally FREE to register!

I will giving a presentation called Putting Back the Pieces After Community Violence: Using Play Therapy To Mend Broken Attachments

And other top mental health and play therapy experts are talking about:

- Reducing bullying using the Nurtured Heart Approach
- How we might actually be increasing aggression by trying to keep kids calm
- Toolkits for schools to prepare for crisis responses

This is a politics free event focused entirely on how to help parents and teachers feel more prepared to help the kids that they care so much about.

Just follow this link https://clairmellenthin-jentaylor.thrivecart.com/school-safety-summit-parents/ to register for free and my friend, Jen Taylor, will send you all the details. Can't make it on 4/20? Register anyway, and Jen will send you the details on how you can catch up later.

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**3 Ways to Raise Healthy Kids in an Anxious World**

By Melissa Blumell, ACMHC

10 Apr, 2018

- Adolescents, Advice, Anxiety, Children, Communication, Counseling, Emotional Health, Empathy, General, Mental Health, Mental/Emotional Health, Parenting, Therapy
- Childhood Anxiety, Encourage Kids to Face Fears, Manage Worries, Melissa Blumell ACMHC, Raise Healthy Kids, Relay Good News, support, Turn Off News, Validation
There's a lot of scary things going on in our culture, and it's very easy for children to get overwhelmed. Here are some strategies to raise healthy kids in an anxious world:

1. Manage Your Own Worries

Think you can hide your fears from your child? You may need to think again. Children learn to read their parents' facial expressions from a very young age. For instance, a toddler will glance back at his mother's face before exploring a new area. If he detects calm from the parent, the toddler may feel reassured and explore the new environment; if he senses her fear, he may move closer to mom because he senses that there is danger nearby. All this can happen without any dialogue. Over time, a child may learn to fear going to new places because he has picked up on subtle parental messages of danger. Parents who learn to manage their own worries may help prevent anxiety in children.

2. Turn off the Evening News

The U.S. media outlets often use fear and sensationalism to attract more viewers. Kidnappings and extreme violence are reported frequently, while common acts of kindness and community support are rarely given weight. With repeated exposure, children, and even adults, may begin to believe that the world is more dangerous than it actually is. Even young children who appear to be occupied in play can tune in to environmental messages. Parents who choose to turn off the television and intentionally relay good news may help their children avoid the growing anxiety so common among today's kids.

3. Encourage Kids to Face their Fears

For most parents, it is hard to watch their children struggle. It can be tempting to swoop in and rescue the child from a frightening challenge. There are situations where children could benefit from parents' sensitive support and encouragement to confront feared tasks: first, give validity to the child's feeling (fear or worry), and then encourage the child to move forward anyway. In this case, parents send the message that our fears do not have to debilitate us.
Boy, has dating changed in the last 25 years! As a happily married person, I never paid attention to the struggles of my single contemporaries. However, as a widow of 3 years, I recently ventured back into the realm of dating and into online dating. Wow! That’s some culture shock for the uninformed. Now, I’m sure that there are people reading this that are wondering what my starting to date has to do with therapy? Well, since I am in the business of...
relationships, personal interactions, and self-concept, this is a very relevant topic as dating in this highly technological, swiping app, game of numbers age morphs these concepts into something much less personal...at least at first. How does someone that is unfamiliar with the "new" rules of dating venture in? I think it's important to have a plan, not a set-in stone rigid plan, but a basic idea of what you want to gain from the experience.

What should this plan look like? What is your expectation? Are you wanting to meet friends? Date a lot of people casually? Get into a relationship? There are apps, groups, and websites devoted to all these scenarios plus any other variation that you can imagine. I'd suggest evaluating what your needs and wants are. Have you ever dated using the technological environment of today? Setting realistic expectations is important. Although you have access to many more single people than what you would likely have otherwise, there is still the need to weed out people that you feel would not be compatible with you or your lifestyle. For example, dating an atheist if you are very religious and seeking someone with the same quality. It would be unrealistic to expect someone to change their spirituality to such a degree...it's an unrealistic expectation. Yet, it happens repeatedly in various forms, people often think that they will "change" a person.

What about the amount of time that you are going to dedicate to your dating endeavor? If you download the apps, you can be instantly and constantly connected to any potential "matches." However, is this healthy? For me it wasn't, I felt tethered and "on-call" all the time. A possible solution is to look at the website or app only from a computer or dedicate a set amount of time per day to dedicate to the search. Boundary setting early on can help alleviate the anxiety and stress that can accompany the online dating platforms and help you not feel so tied to an app.

What about when you do match with someone? Have you formulated a plan and appropriate boundaries within yourself to deal with inappropriate questions, comments, and expectations from strangers? What are you comfortable sharing with a virtual stranger? What information do you need to protect? What about meeting for the first time, do you have a plan in place to make sure that it's a safe encounter? These are all things to be considered before any of those scenarios happen. Personally, I think that best advice I received concerning first meet-ups was to keep them short, make sure they are in very public places, and go in with no expectation other than talking to someone new for a few minutes.

You've made it to the first meet, and you are feeling self-conscious...yep, it's almost like junior high all over again. How can you deal with the potential feelings of failure and rejection? Acknowledge them. I'd be amazed if anyone that has done an online dating meet or has been on a blind date hasn't experienced these exact feelings; it's natural to be nervous. Likely, the person you are meeting with is having these same emotions to some degree, why not just put it out there? This is a genuine and open expression of what is happening for you in the moment; be yourself, that is the person you want them to like.

Dating can be a scary and anxiety ridden experience. However, it can also be a fun "re-
One of the best things we can do for our mental, emotional, and physical health is to simply live in the present moment. The phrase is becoming cliché, but that doesn't mean its significance has reduced. Rather than living fully today, we often spend our entire day worrying about what's coming up in the next one. Or, we waste away our lives regretting and lamenting what we have (or haven't) done in the past. Neither of these strategies are helpful in getting the most out of the here and now. So, how do we stay in the present? Here are a few tips:

**Do a little bit of writing (or reflecting) each day, preferably with a pen and paper**

In our fast-paced world, we feel like we are working at a million miles per hour. Writing helps slow things down and clear our minds, which is very therapeutic. To write clearly is to think clearly. There's a power in writing down our thoughts and expressing what we are thinking and feeling.

**Put away the technology**

Smart phones, iPads, and computers are constantly distracting and "stimulating" our minds. Put them away! Be present where you are, especially if your children or those closest to you are competing for your attention. You won't regret it.

**Take time to breathe**

Obviously, we are all breathing throughout the day, but sometimes its just enough to survive! We want to thrive, not just survive. Take a step back, and take a few deep breaths. Not only is this good for the nervous system, but deep
breathing is a useful tool in grounding us and helping us develop a healthier perspective on life.

In conclusion...slow down. Enjoy the present moment. Soak it in. In our pop-tart, microwave society, we are always running from place to place, both literally and figuratively. Take some time each day to reflect, put away the technology, and practice being fully present in the moment.

Maybe I have been watching too much Kung Fu Panda with my boys, but like Master Oogway says: *Yesterday is History, Tomorrow's a Mystery, Today is a Gift...That's Why They Call it the Present.*

Please, if you have found other ways that have helped you stay present and joy in the moment, share in the comments or share with your friends. I would love to hear your ideas.

**Something You Should Know:**

**Meditation and Mindfulness**

By Nathan Watkins, LMFT

22 Mar, 2018

Advice, Anxiety, Counseling, Emotional Health, General, Mental Health, Mental/Emotional Health, Self-care, Therapy
d-e-stress, Five Good Minutes, Jeffrey Brantley, meditation, Mental Health, Mindfulness techniques, mindfulness, operant conditioning, Physical Health, positive emotional response, positive reinforcement, Self Awareness, Stress Management, The Office

As I work with clients, I often find myself recommending various techniques to help manage our behaviors, emotions, or thoughts. So I'd like to spend some time sharing these tools with you. This is the start of a blog mini-series of things we should all know to improve the quality of our lives and mental health. We live in a fast paced, instant gratification world which often leads to stress in our work and personal lives; so, our first topic will be on a helpful tool to de-stress and bring focus to our lives: **mindfulness.**

Meditation, or mindfulness, have vast benefits for mental health. While we may not have time to become yoga masters or visit the idyllic mountains of Nepal to meditate, we all have time to practice simple mindfulness techniques. Jeffrey Brantley, the author of *Five Good Minutes,* reminds us that we do have time because meditation can be done within a few minutes.
When used regularly, meditation can be beneficial to our mental health and physical health and can bring the following results:

- Improved attention span
- Help with self-awareness
- Stable emotional health through regulation
- Reduced anxiety
- Better stress management
- Promoted brain growth

There are various ways to meditate, and you will want to try a few to find what works for you. One method that works well for me is from Brantley's book *Five Good Minutes* and is called operant conditioning. Operant conditioning is the process by which you can modify behavior through negative or positive reinforcement.

Let me share one of my favorite examples of operant conditioning: During one of the early episodes of the hit television show “The Office,” Jim continually restarts his computer. Every time it reboots, it plays the classic Windows jingle, and each and every time this jingle plays, Jim gives his co-worker Dwight a mint. After a while, Jim restarts his computer and Dwight holds his hand out instantly for a mint and states, “Hmm… I now have a horrible taste in my mouth.” The technique that I am going to discuss avoids sounds and mints, but it does condition your brain to have a positive response when you need it most. This specific technique uses positive reinforcement to train your brain to have a positive emotional response to happy healthy memories through touch. This technique can be done when you are calm or when you are having a stressful time to regain control of your thoughts and relax.

Here’s how to do it:

1. First, choose an object to use for this technique. You can also use your fingers, because you always have them with you! As you practice this technique, you will be thinking of pleasant memories. Try to capture the feeling and essence of the memory as you practice, rather than simply running through the memories themselves.

2. To begin, touch the object you have chosen. If using your hand, you can touch your index finger to your thumb. While doing this, remembering a time you felt a healthy sense of satisfied exhaustion, such as from physical exercise or work. For me, one memory in particular stands out: After completing a mountain race in which we summited a tall mountain peak before returning back to the finish line, I was mentally and physically drained. I remember feeling exhausted, but at the same time feeling an incredible sense of accomplishment. When I think back to that sensation, I can almost feel the same as I did that day.

3. Second, touch your middle finger to your thumb and remember a time when you felt truly connected with someone important to you. This can be when you felt trust, love, or empathy with that individual. During a difficult time in my life, I connected with a friend. That trust and friendship is something
I value to this day as I look back on that experience that helped me to feel connected to him.

Third, you will touch your ring finger to your thumb. While doing this, think back to a memory when you received a special gift or a kind gesture. For me, there is nothing better than the comfort and feeling of a well-loved pillow case (which, I might add, drives my wife crazy because I won’t let her buy new pillow cases). At one point, my favorite pillow case was torn, and I thought it was done for. While my mom came to visit, she had snuck it away, fixed it, and returned it to me as a gift. This was a kind gesture that I still cherish to this day.

Last, while touching your thumb to your pinkie, recall a time when you witnessed the most beautiful place you have seen or pictured. Remember how breathtaking it was. When I saw the Grand Canyon for the first time, I was in awe. Its majesty and grandeur is not something you can imagine until you see it in person.

You do not have to perform these steps in order, or do every step. To begin, start with one memory.

As you regularly practice this mindfulness technique your body and mind will become conditioned to relax during this meditation. Doing it consistently can help improve your mental health and help you control your thoughts through meditation.

When this or other meditation is not enough, please come and see me. We can define and work towards goals that you want to accomplish. Please do not hesitate to contact me at Wasatch Family Therapy at 801-944-4555.

Nathan Watkins, AMFT

References


Get Over It!

By Stacie Rasmussen, AMFT

01 Mar, 2018

Advice, Anxiety, Communication, Counseling, Depression, Emotional Health, Empathy, Family, General, Grief, Grief & Loss, Mental Health, Mental/Emotional Health, Relationships, Self-care, Therapy

Be There, David Kessler, Death Experience, Elizabeth Kubler Ross, Grief and Grieving, grief and loss, Grieving, listening, Rebuild yourself, Stacie Rasmussen MFT INTERN
"The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not "get over" the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again, but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same. Nor would you want to!" – Elizabeth Kubler Ross and David Kessler from "On Grief and Grieving"

We live in a society that is uncomfortable with death and grieving; we just want people to "get over it" and be done. It makes us feel better if they are back to "normal" and are "okay", then we can return to our lives without guilt. However, grief is complicated, messy, and full of emotions that we don't want to acknowledge, let alone feel. So, what happens when we lose, or someone that we are close to, loses a person in their life? A spouse, child, parent, or friend. How can we help them, or ourselves, with this messy grief business? Honestly, the answer is so simple yet so complicated at the same time; grief is as unique and individual for each person as their fingerprint. There is no "right" way to do it. As a widow myself, there are a few things that I found, and continue to find, as being helpful and healing in my grief journey.

Be There

Grieving is a lonely, isolating business. Sure, there is the initial influx of mourners that surround the family in the days and weeks immediately following the loss, but what about after that? Can you be that person that shows up, texts, or calls just to chat, go for a walk, or grab a cup of coffee and give the grief stricken a sense of normalcy while chaos reigns elsewhere in their life? It's often said, "Let me know what I can do to help." Often however, in the midst of grief people aren't even aware of what they need, nor do they want to impose on family or friends and ask for help, but they crave human interaction and connection. It doesn't have to be a big thing, but just knowing that someone is there and cares can make all the difference during those really difficult moments.

Listening to the Tale

Just as each person has their own grief journey they each have their own tale of grief, how they came to the painful spot where they dwell. While those on the periphery may have witnessed and been part of that journey, it may be surprising how the mourner interprets their experience. For some, telling the tale is cathartic and allows them to release what they've held within themselves: guilt, shame, anger, fear, relief. While for others it gives them space to voice the confusion of trying to process a surreal experience.

My experience with losing my husband landed me squarely in the "trying to process the surreal experience" camp. Trying to wrap my head around him being here one minute and gone the next was really difficult for me to wrap my head around. My friends and family were all present in witnessing, but I needed to express what it was like for me. I felt almost desperate, at times, to have someone understand and
validate me. I didn’t need anyone to “fix” it for me, they couldn’t, but to have them say, “Yep, that sucked!”, meant the world to me.

The “Right” Way Doesn’t Exist

As a society we have constructed this movie image of what grief should look like, the bereaved go into a deep mourning for a while, but then they pull themselves together, “move on” with their lives, and the grief is finished. In reality, grief presents itself in a multitude of variations. For some there is the anticipatory grief that accompanies a long illness. For others there is the acute, shocking grief from a sudden death. Yet still for others there is the guilt-ridden survivors’ grief that can accompany trauma and suicide. With such differences in experiences how can we really expect for people to process grief in the same way? Within the same timeline? And with the same reactions? We can’t; it’s a preposterous assertion.

Need help or know someone that needs help processing the grief related to losing a loved one? Wasatch Family Therapy has a team of therapists that can help you wade through the sea of emotions that accompany the grief journey, we would be honored to stand witness to your tale and help you find the “new” you that evolves from the death experience.

How To Teach Your Children Self Love

By Samantha Castleton, LCSW

27 Feb, 2018

Adolescents, Advice, Anxiety, Body Image, Children, Communication, Counseling, Depression, Emotional Health, Family, General, Mental Health, Mental/Emotional Health, Parenting, Play Therapy, Self-care, Self-esteem, Therapy

adolescents, Children, Good Things Utah, How to Teach Children Self Love Samantha Castleton LCSW, Self Love

Check out the video below to see Samantha Castleton, LCSW speak about How to Teach Your Children Self Love.

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You must be logged in to ask a question, like answers or post comments. We know it’s annoying but it’ll ensure the quality of the questions and answers in this section. All you need to do is register here for free and click on the verification link that we’ll send you via email. I’m trying to get my blog which uses REST API from a Wordpress site to show in TabBarView. And I’m not exactly sure how to go about it.

First I tried Widget blogSection = WordpressBlog(posts: posts); but I was getting error: ‘only static members can be accessed in initializers’ so I placed my code in void initState() { ... } There are 3 tabs: infoSection, blogSection and contactSection. Two of the tabs are hard coded and work ok. Also I’ve extracted my blog to wordpress_blog.dart and named it Discover 1 Blogsection design on Dribbble. Your resource to discover and connect with designers worldwide. Blogsection. Inspirational designs, illustrations, and graphic elements from the world’s best designers. Concept Car Blog and Compare Website.