

Glossary for Anxiety Related Assessment and Treatment

While at WayPoint, your child is developing a deeper understanding regarding anxiety along with an expanding vocabulary. Here is a glossary of terms to help you familiarize yourself with some of the words/language you may hear.

Accommodation

A pattern of behavior that involves family members altering their lives/routines, and/or reinforcing the avoidance of anxiety provoking situations to assist a family member who suffers from anxiety disorder.

Three common behaviors that contribute to accommodation

1. Using volatile behavior as a negotiating tool to get others to provide things, support avoidance, or remove obstacles that are stressful from their path.
2. Using their safety as a negotiating tool to get others to provide things, support avoidance, or remove obstacles that are stressful from their path.
3. Wearing you down to the point that you give in to avoid “World War Three” and the resulting negative impact upon others in the home.

Anticipatory Fears/Anxiety

A fear of what lies ahead. It almost always involves a fear of failure, rejection, or uncertainty (i.e. bad things may or will happen).

Attentional Bias

Vigilance for potential threats, overly focusing on perceived threats (failure, rejection, bad things), often at the expense of seeing positives.

Avoidance

Avoidance occurs on both an internal (thoughts/feelings) and external (going places/doing things) basis. While it is easy to measure external avoidance (i.e. school attendance, homework, social interaction), it is more difficult to measure/monitor internal avoidance.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy focuses on the relationship between Thoughts, Behaviors, and Emotions (i.e. what we think affects how we act and feel, what we do affects what we think and feel, what we feel affects what we think and do). This form of therapy encourages people to examine and challenge distortive/irrational thoughts and change problematic behaviors.

Cognition/Cognitive

Thoughts; relating to thoughts.

Cognitive Dissonance

The distress one experiences when thinking of or engaging in some form of behavior that contradicts personal beliefs, values, ideals. Many people struggle with intrusive thoughts that create tremendous dissonance. These people are dealing not only with the exhaustion from having these thoughts repeatedly jumping into the mind (think of a time when a catchy jingle or song gets stuck in your head), they also are dealing with thoughts that go against their personal values or preferences.

Cognitive Distortions

Distorted or irrational thoughts that contribute to negative emotions or behaviors (avoidance). Common cognitive distortions of those who struggle with anxiety include: overvaluing thoughts, over-predicting the likelihood of negative outcomes, catastrophizing.

Core Fear

Fears embedded deep within ones' psyche. Experiencing core fears is a part of the human experience. Often, the struggle to work through these fears allows a person to ascend to higher levels of personal awareness and confidence. Common core fears include fear of inadequacy, a fear of letting others down, rejection, failure, abandonment, loss of control, etc.

Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)

A form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. DBT in part focuses on skill development to help people achieve personal goals that will allow them to live a life they find meaning in. These DBT skills include: Mindfulness, Emotional Regulation, Distress Tolerance, and Interpersonal Effectiveness.

Distress Tolerance

The ability to tolerate the distress one experiences from anxiety inducing situations.

Emetophobia

Irrational and overriding fear of throwing up - particularly in front of others.

Exposure Response Prevention (ERP)

A form of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. Purposefully and deliberately confronting a fear, while not engaging in avoidant behaviors. The more one does this the more distress tolerance one develops/acquires. (Example: Think of getting in a cold pool. When we get into the water we experience distress associated with the cold temperature. If we stay in the water long enough our body will acclimate to the water temperature. While it still may feel cold, it's not as cold as it felt when we first got into the pool). There are three different types of exposure: Imaginal (cognitive), Virtual (electronic presentation of visual and/or auditory stimuli), and In-vivo (in real life) situations.

Executive Function

Cognitive functions relating to a person's ability to plan ahead; make good judgments; learn from experience; adopt appropriate socio-emotional, internally guided behavior.

Fear appraisal

A person's ability to accurately and objectively evaluate the world around oneself for potential threats. People suffering from significant anxiety, struggle to make objective evaluations. While they are typically better at distinguishing the difference between overtly hostile or friendly interaction, they struggle in recognizing and interpreting neutral situations (i.e. anything that is not overtly positive or negative). The net result of a person with poor fear appraisal skills is that they frequently assign a strong likelihood for a negative outcome to a neutral event, or assign high probability of a negative outcome to a low probability event. (Example: "When I told a schoolmate about a funny experience I had, he did not smile or nod his head, therefore he must think that I'm stupid, he probably does not like me, and I have made a fool of myself.")

Feared Outcome

What one is afraid might happen. Individuals who have avoided (both on an internal and external level) for a long time, are often unaware of what the feared outcome even is. The result is typically an over-estimation of the cost associated with a social mishap, or low probability events are viewed from a high probability likelihood of occurring. Identifying the feared outcome helps to combat internal avoidance and puts a face on what the fear is all about.

Fear Hierarchy

A list of feared situations ranked in descending order, with the most powerful fears at the top of the list – a fear ladder. Situations that create tremendous distress are rated at the top with each successive rung decreasing in intensity of distress experienced in the associated situation.

Habituation

Developing increased distress tolerance towards the effects of a stressful situation. This is achieved through systematic and repeated exposure to the stressful situation.

Intrusive Thoughts

Unwelcome involuntary thought, image, or unpleasant idea that may become an obsession, is upsetting or distressing, and can feel difficult to manage or eliminate. Intrusive thoughts can become extremely disturbing and may induce panic as the thought becomes "stuck" and the individual is unable to let the thought go. Other common difficulty with intrusive thoughts is that they become *dystonic* - meaning the thoughts that enter the mind are the exact opposite of the individual's values or preferences. Individual with Intrusive Thought Disorder often suffer in silence. They experience considerable shame for experiencing the thought and are afraid to share the problem with others out of fear of being judged.

Life Interfering Behaviors (LIBs)

Behaviors that prevent one from effectively/meaningfully living one's life. LIBs typically occur due to **Skill Deficits**, **Executive Deficits**, and/or **Avoidance**.

Mindful Completion

Purposeful and deliberate act of completing tasks, goals and responsibilities.

Completion is the antithesis of avoidance. Many people who struggle with severe anxiety become chronic "avoiders." As time passes, avoidance results in a lack of skill development, low self-esteem and eventually lack of identify formation.

Parental Exposure

Some parents experience such tremendous distress when they perceive their child to be struggling, that it renders them unable to respond effectively to the needs of their child. When this occurs, their distress reaches a level that surpasses what they can effectively tolerate and manage. This parental reaction often results in accommodation (fixing, rescuing) and family conflict. Parental exposure involves a parent being strategically exposed to their child's distress (through Skype, video, letters) as a way of increasing their own distress tolerance so that they can be an effective exposure coach once their child returns to home.

Perfectionism

Striving for flawlessness; unrealistic expectations regarding performance. Individuals struggling with perfectionism will avoid handing in assignments even when completed, or are unable to finish assignments due to the amount of time spent trying to make it perfect. Often at the core of these issues is an inability to tolerate the uncertainty of how others will perceive their work.

Processing Speed

The speed in which an individual recognizes and processes data (visual or auditory).

Anxiety can negatively affect processing speed. Conversely, slow processing speeds can be a contributor to anxiety. Perfectionism, ruminating, and intrusive thoughts can also negatively impact processing speed. Slow processing speed is one of the most common occurrences with individuals who suffer from moderate and severe anxiety. Teenagers with low processing speeds frequently exhibit lower distress tolerance than their peers because they struggle to effectively process their emotions. As a result, they are more prone to become emotionally overloaded and rely upon avoidance to cope.

Proportionate Response

Responding in a manner that is commensurate of the situation - neither under nor over reacting.

Reassurance Seeking

A form of compulsive behavior (like hand washing, or checking/re-checking) that is manifest in virtually all individuals affected with OCD, social anxiety, and/or body dysmorphia. Reassurance seeking is a way to seek stress relief by turning to friends, family or the internet. Unfortunately, seeking reassurance does not provide an environment that teaches or demands increased distress tolerance. It is a short-term symptom relief approach which ultimately perpetuates the problem as the individual repetitively utilizes this approach. Over time this process results in skill deficits, poor self-esteem, lack of healthy identity formation, and dependency upon others for basic functioning.

Relapse Prevention Plan

A highly detailed plan used during family visits, or after graduation that involves identifying and preventing high-risk situations that could contribute to a relapse into negative behaviors that could compromise recovery.

Residential Treatment Center (RTC)

A live-in health care facility that provides therapy. WayPoint is dually licensed as a RTC and an independent school.

Safety Seeking Behaviors (cheating)

Behaviors that are used to relieve stress and fear (often during exposure exercises) when feeling threatened or unable to cope with rising levels of distress. The most common forms of Safety Seeking Behaviors are avoidance, reassurance seeking, and distraction. Like reassurance seeking, Safety Seeking Behaviors provide temporary benefit at the cost of long-term relief – a “Band-Aid” approach to anxiety management. Engaging in these behaviors reinforces cognitive distortions and the faulty belief that the perceived danger is more than one could possibly tolerate or overcome.

Secondary Gain

Attempting to gain something that occurs secondary from the self-reported illness or difficulty (i.e. using illness or emotional difficulties as a way of avoiding work, responsibilities, chores, or to gain attention).

Self-directed exposure

When an individual takes it upon themselves to look for opportunities to do exposures. A sign of significant progress as it represents a shift from staff/parent-directed exposures to self-directed exercises.

Social Anxiety

The fear of social situations that involve interaction with other people. Virtually all individuals suffering from social anxiety have a fear of being negatively judged and evaluated by other people. It is a pervasive disorder and causes anxiety and fear in nearly all areas of a person's life.

Subjective Units of Distress (SUD)

A way of measuring the intensity of a distressful experience, rated on a scale of 0-100. SUD measures how intense the distressful experience is and where the event is ranked on the Hierarchy of Fear. The higher the SUDs score the more distressful the exposure will be. The lower the SUD score, the less distress the exposure will create .

Sub-clinical presentation

Symptoms or characteristics of a particular disorder displayed by an individual that do not reach the frequency or depth to qualify for the full, clinical criteria of a particular diagnosis. Example: a certain diagnosis may require 6 of the 8 established diagnostic markers to qualify for a formal diagnosis, however, the individual may only display 5 characteristics, one short of what is required for the formal diagnosis. One would conclude that something is trending, yet the individual still lacks enough of the symptoms to meet the threshold required for the diagnosis.

Treatment Interfering Behaviors (TIBs)

Volitional, repetitive behavior(s) that are not compatible with the effective participation in treatment. Examples: Refusing to talk with therapist, refusal to complete therapeutic assignments, manipulation, lying, denying/justifying problem behavior, etc. TIBs not isolated incidents. TIBs are volitional and repetitive and represent ambivalence toward making changes or moving forward in therapy.

Uncertainty

The unknown. The feeling one experiences when in a position where it is impossible to know or predict the outcome or series of outcomes.

Working Memory

The ability to store, manipulate, and retrieve information over short periods of time. Memory required to function moment to moment. There are two forms of working memory, a) auditory memory and b) visual-spatial memory. Auditory memory records what one hears, visual-spatial records what one sees. Lack of working memory may include forgetting directions, leaving homework at home, difficulty doing mental arithmetic, etc.