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“My Child Won’t Listen”

by Nancy Michel, M.A., R.Psych.

Parents often complain that their children “do not listen” and that is frequently a concern parents describe when they visit a child psychologist. When I met the parents of six year old

Charlotte, they described daily power struggles over routine tasks- getting dressed in the morning, eating breakfast and getting ready for bed at night- and essentially whenever they asked her to do something. Charlotte’s resistance often escalated into full-blown tantrums that occurred several times a week. This behaviour was disruptive to the whole family and sometimes interfered with family activities. Anticipating conflict whenever they asked Charlotte to do/ not do something left her parents feeling tense and largely unable to enjoy their otherwise smart, imaginative and playful daughter.

Learning to comply/ cooperate with the expectations of trusted adults (e.g. parents, teachers, coaches) is a critical part of a child’s social- emotional development and is essential to the child’s self image and overall well-being. The child needs to understand that he is cared for by adults whose wisdom and life experience can support him as he grows. Those adults responsible for his well-being also have the right to set boundaries for him and to have expectations of him.

Compliance occurs when a child follows through with an adult’s direction within a reasonable period of time. Defiance, conversely, describes an intentional and often overt resistance to an adult request; for example, when the child says NO and stubbornly refuses to comply. While Non-compliance does not always reflect Defiance, both contribute to frustration and

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Five Habits of ‘Anxiety Resilient’ People

by Joan Schultz, Ph.D., R.Psych.

Why are so many people struggling with anxiety? This was the question posed to me by a good friend over coffee this week, who was concerned about the levels of anxiety she was seeing in her workplace colleagues.

With all that is happening in the world around us - natural disasters, immigration crises, worldwide political unrest, political shenanigans, housing affordability issues, ethical and moral failures—a more appropriate question might be – *Why wouldn’t we be anxious?*

According to the Statistics Canada (2012) *, anxiety costs the Canadian government \$17.3 billion dollars a year, affecting almost one quarter of the Canadian workforce. Improving accessibility to viable treatment for working Canadians would most definitely be part of the solution. On a personal level, Canadians need to commit to engaging in constructive action to manage anxiety before it becomes debilitating.

Anxiety begins as a normal and adaptive response that can alert us to threat. It is an unpleasant state where we have “a vague sense of apprehension, often accompanied by such autonomic symptoms such as headache, perspiration, palpitations, tightness in the chest, mild stomach discomfort and restlessness”. ** It results from anticipation of a future threat,

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“My Child Won’t Listen”continued from cover

conflict in the relationship between parent and child and furthermore undermine any sense of harmony and wellbeing within the family.

There is good news- Improving Compliance is an achievable goal! These worthy principles can support success in developing better cooperation from your child:

1. Recognize that learning to cooperate with adult authority is a developmental task. Partner with your child, setting your child up to be successful in achieving this goal.
2. Ensure that you are in close proximity to your child and have eye contact upon making requests.
3. Communicate requests that are clear and reasonable for your child- requests that are based upon your child’s age, temperament and skills.
4. Focus attention on your child’s Compliance- praise his “cooperation”. Help your child see himself as a person who Does cooperate, who Is a “team player”.
5. Identify the most important requests you have of your child. Avoid “nit picking” and over controlling- allow your child to make independent decisions appropriate to his age and level of development. (This will minimize opportunity for resistance and also allows your child to learn from experience).
6. Avoid engaging in power struggles with your child. Remember that you are on the same team- your intentions for him are benevolent! You have the right and responsibility for authority and you can respond wisely to your child’s otherwise immature (ie inappropriate) responses. When your child is defiant, understand that as reflecting his immaturity and choose to respond in a calm and authoritative manner- let him know you can handle his poor behaviour (and that you are intent on supporting him in developing more appropriate behavior).
7. Set Compliance/ Cooperation as a Target Goal for you and your child. Keep a record or tally of compliant behavior and work towards a prize- a privilege, activity together or small gift that can acknowledge both your child’s efforts to Cooperate as well as your effectiveness as a Parent - Child team.

Learning to comply...with the expectations of trusted adults...is a critical part of a child’s social - emotional development and is essential to the child’s self image and overall well-being.

A defiant child can cause chaos not only at home but also at school and elsewhere. The roots of defiance can include the child’s genetic background, his temperament, and developmental history as well as certain parental characteristics. Where defiant behaviour persists, consultation with a child psychologist or counselor specialized in treating children can be indicated. That specialist would be expected to assess the child, rule out other potential factors, thoroughly conceptualize the reasons for the child’s oppositional behavior and then work with the family as they support their child’s healthy emotional development.

Recommended Reading: Your Defiant Child by Russell A Barkley and Christine M Benton. Guilford Press, 2013.



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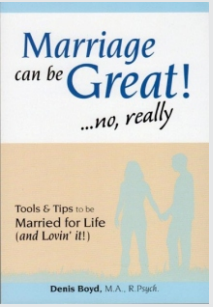
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Bob Armstrong, Registered Clinical Counsellor
Penny Armstrong, Registered Clinical Counsellor
Jennifer Foster, Registered Social Worker
Paula Sandhu, Registered Social Worker
Jessie Wall, Registered Clinical Counsellor

Book

Marriage can be Great!...no really

by Denis Boyd, R.Psych.



Five Habits of Anxiety Resilient People.... continued from front cover

and should be differentiated from fear, which is an emotional & physical response to an imminent threat (either real or perceived). Fear can trigger a full scale “fight or flight” response, but anxiety symptoms are more pervasive, such as muscle tension, hypervigilance, worry and ongoing sleep disturbances, just to name a few. Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Social Anxiety, Panic Disorder, Agoraphobia and specific phobias are a few of the diagnoses given under the “Anxiety Disorders” umbrella when the symptoms become debilitating.

Anxiety symptoms are commonly experienced in normal everyday situations, often if these are outside of an individual's typical comfort zone. Their initial function is helpful, in that the body and mind are alerted to pay attention to matters at hand. *Trouble begins, however, when individuals misperceive what their symptoms mean.* Thoughts such as “these symptoms are dangerous”, and “I won't be able to function if I become too anxious” elevate and become self-fulfilling prophecies if not curtailed and replaced with truthful cognitions.

Without understanding the function of our symptoms, we may seek to alleviate discomfort by avoiding situations that make us anxious. But in the long term, when these situations are avoided, the greater our anxiety response becomes. *Avoidance reinforces anxiety.* To overcome it, we must be willing to endure uncomfortable sensations and tell ourselves the truth about them. We must allow ourselves to become comfortable with our discomfort.

What about those people who seem impervious to anxiety? In reality, it's not that they don't have anxious symptoms when faced with new or challenging or threatening situations. *Rather they may actually use their anxious symptoms* as cues to increase their alertness, prepare for the challenges ahead and ultimately “up their game”.

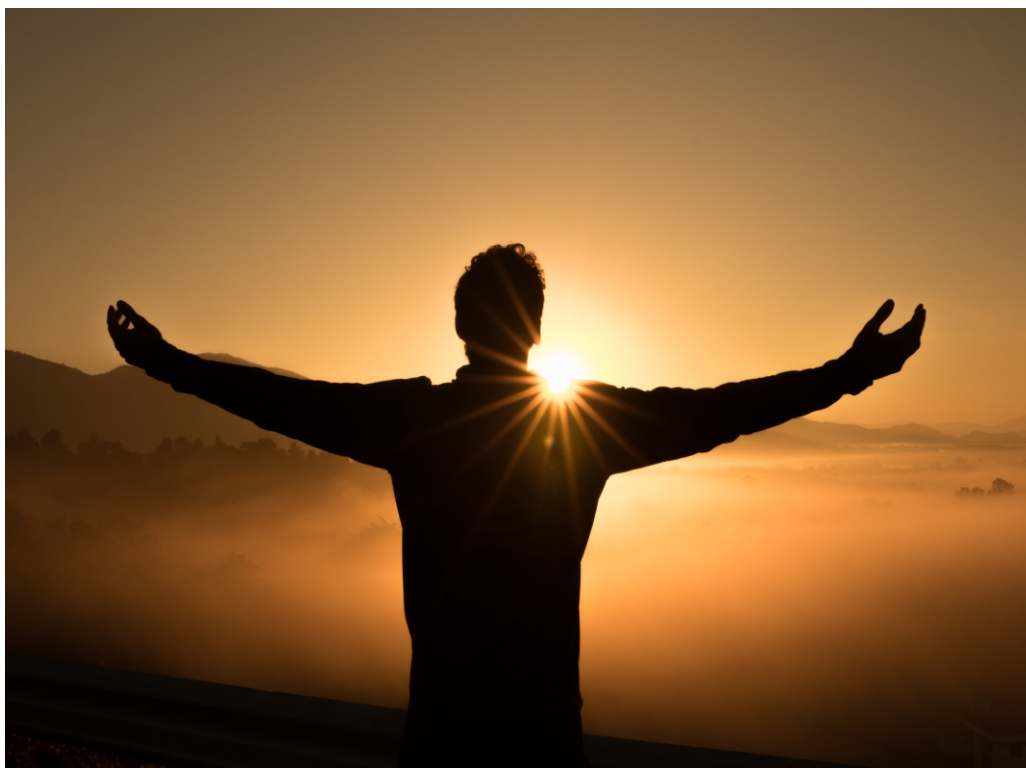
Taking into account learned behaviours and genetic predispositions that may increase one's proclivity to anxiety, there is much that can be done to step out of the patterns of being anxious. People who are resilient in the face of anxiety tend to:

1. *Recognize their physiological symptoms are just that:* Symptoms of increased adrenaline and physiological arousal. They know these will pass.
2. *Maintain awareness of their incorrect misperceptions,* challenge them constructively and replace them with more constructive beliefs. They may also limit negative information and media influences, instead looking to sources of information that inspire, encourage and support potential, in themselves and for others.
3. *Offer themselves no excuses.* They do not allow their mood of the moment to constrict them. Instead, their motto is similar to that of my 94- year- old father: “Get up, Dress up and Show up!” Despite how they feel, they make commitments and follow through on goals and plans which have been set. Their habits and life choices reflect values of honouring and respecting themselves and others.
4. *Engage in intentional self care.* They find ways to take themselves out of stressful life circumstances with activities and people they truly enjoy on a daily and weekly basis.
5. *Not shy away from challenging life circumstances.* Rather than procrastinating and letting minor stresses grow into major ones, they deal with problems when still small and manageable. They look for ways to make constructive and meaningful differences in their work, family and community life.

Our normal physiological responses to challenge can limit us, or we can choose to use them to help us take on life's challenges. The choice is ours.

**Global News.ca. Anxiety and Depression cost the Canadian economy almost \$50 billion a year. September 2, 2016.*

***Sadock, B.J. & Sadock, V.A. 2007. Synopsis of Psychiatry. (10th Edition). Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, Philadelphia, PA. (p. 579).*





Up In Flames part 2

by Chris Boyd, M.A., R.C.C.

About three and a half years ago I wrote the article: 'Up In Flames' that can be found at Psychealth.com. It was written shortly after my apartment burned down and shares my experience navigating through that challenging life event. This article is the follow-up.

It took over three years to rebuild my home. I recall the first few weeks as the most difficult, as I was coming to terms with the scope of the loss. As time went on, I discovered lots of silver linings: I got to experience a new community to live in, I got to live in a place with a superb view, and I got to enhance various relationships/ connections that led to many memorable experiences. Not having content insurance posed some challenges but slowly but surely I rebuilt my collection of clothes and unique items, with the help and generosity of my family, friends and colleagues. I often say that my place burning down was the best thing to ever happen to me since it sent my life on a new and fruitful trajectory.

The day before I got the keys to my apartment the anticipation and excitement was stifled: I got word that our family cabin outside Princeton had burned down. It was likely an electrical fire; the flames destroyed the house, the surrounding outbuildings on our property, and about an acre of forest next door to our property. I experienced a juxtaposition of feelings; there was gratitude and relief that no one was hurt and the flames didn't spread to our neighbours' cabins but the shock and uncertainty was dilapidating as I along with each family member tried to grapple with the situation. We had owned the cabin for just under a year but the connection we had to the place was strong and the sense of loss was significant.

Focus on the moments you are grateful for, no matter how small they may seem.

As the days went on, I realized that my experience three years ago helped prepare me for this situation as I began to pivot my mind and explore the positives, shifting my focus to the future. I quickly realized though that my family wasn't on the same page with me and required more time to process the experience. It once again emphasized how critical it is to talk about challenging situations or write or express the feelings in some creative way. Doing so helps settle the emotions down. It enabled me to be there for them, the way they were there for me three years ago. There was nothing specific or special I said while connecting with my family; I just focused and listened. I provided some feedback, based on my prior experience, when the situation warranted it or when input was invited. As the weeks have passed, the sadness has slowly subsided as I have observed each family member slowly making a shift in their minds towards the future.

A few ideas to assist with challenging moments such as this:

1. Take the time to process it. Allocate 20 to 30 minutes a day to chat or write. Look at photos; share stories and memories; focus on the way you are feeling.
2. Make self-care a priority. Get out for a walk, have a good meal, spend time with friends, watch a movie, do some mindfulness, etc.
3. Focus on the next steps. What needs to be done to rebuild or get your life back on track?
4. Start to explore and highlight the silver linings. There are always positives! Focus on the moments you are grateful for, no matter how small they may seem.
5. If the intense thoughts and feelings persist, seek professional support. How someone reacts to a situation is impacted by his/her perception or beliefs which are developed from biology, genetics, temperament and experiential factors.

I look forward to a year or so down the road when my family feels the excitement I feel right now moving back into my apartment. It's brand new, feels more sturdy, has better sound proofing, and everything has been upgraded to today's codes and standards. I have realized first hand that challenges can enhance resiliency. As Viktor Frankl suggested, it's through those challenges we can find meaning and purpose.

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