

Academic Anxiety: Presented by John Zbornik, PhD

John Zbornik:

Hi. Thanks for having me on your show today.

John Zbornik and Nicole Born-Crow:

(both laughing)

John Zbornik:

I really appreciate it. Just a little personal and professional information: I'm 65 years old – I know I don't look it.

Nicole Born-Crow:

You don't look it.

John Zbornik:

Not a day over 30.

John Zbornik and Nicole Born-Crow:

(both laughing)

John Zbornik:

I've been a school psychologist for 30 plus years. And actually, I recently retired from school psychology in September of 2020 when the pandemic hit. And, um, but I returned then to De Luca and Associates – I've been working with them for about 20 years on and off. But in June of 2020 – in September of 2020 – I returned to De Luca and Associates full time. And um... things that I just think you want to know about me is that I've been on both sides of this situation. I'll say to my clients, "you know, I've been on both sides of the couch. I've been on your side, and I've been where I'm sitting, doing the intake."

For both professional – and well, personal reasons, I've talked to psychologists. And but I've also had my children tested for specialized instruction. So, I've gone through that process on a personal level as well as the professional level. So, I've been there – well, I've seen it from both sides. And, um, I have to tell you that every time – I've done over 3,000 evaluations – but I'm never – I'm always anxious when I'm doing an evaluation and meeting people for the first time. And I don't care if the person's 3 years old or 83 years old – I still have this anxiety – that I have anticipatory anxiety – when I'm meeting somebody for the first time. And I don't care what their age is. But I know this sounds like, really corny, OK? But I really love my profession – well, you would expect me to love my profession – like what am I doing here?

(laughter from listeners)

John Zbornik:

I went into my profession as a calling – and as a career, but I really wanted to – I came out of this kind of like the 60s-type of generation where I wanted to change the world. And I still have that same zeitgeist. I still have that same feeling. I still want to try to do that (laughing).

Um, and, so how did I become interested in this topic tonight? Well, actually this all started way back in 1972, guys! (laughing). McGovern was running for president. And it happened to be my first – I was doing some door-to-door stuff for George McGovern – but that’s another story.

(laughter from listeners)

John Zbornik:

But I was actually – I was in, um, I had an English class with Mr. Tom Saul. He was a Vietnam veteran – he had just returned from the war, and he was still very scarred. And he was teaching for the first time. And I was in his English class, and I guess I was struggling, but I really admired this guy. And he said – one day he came to me, and he said – “Hey, John, you know, I would like to have you tested by the school psychologist.”

I said, “what are you talking about Mr. Saul? I’m not crazy.” You know? “Why would you want me to be tested? I thought you liked me. Why would you want me tested by the school psychologist?” (laughing).

So, I went through the whole process of the assessment – just like I do with students and adults today. And at the end of that process, it was determined that had a – a learning problem – um dyslexia. But one of the major aspects that the psychologist at the time picked up was that I had a significant amount of anxiety. And she said – her name was Heddie Clark – and she said to my mother, “you know, John’s a nice guy but he’s really anxious! And I really think that if he would get some counseling and work with somebody – just to alleviate some of that anxiety, he’d be – he’d do better in the classroom.”

So. My parents referred me to a psychologist – but not just any psychologist – he was a psychoanalyst – which was heavy duty at that time, but my family was kind of weird. My mom was going to a psychoanalyst. My dad was going to a psychoanalyst. They were driving in from Cle—from Amherst, Ohio every day, because you’d go 5 days a week back then. And you took off – you had a vacation in August because that’s when Freud took off. So, the psychoanalysts still do that – they take off in August (laughing). It’s like, crazy! (laughing)

But, um, so I went to the counseling – and you know, it really helped! It alleviated my anxiety. It freed me up and I started doing a lot better in school. So, I said, “boy, there’s really something to this!”

So, I went to college, got into graduate school. I was in graduate school at Kent State University, and I decided to do my dissertation – my doctoral dissertation on reading anxiety. And I developed a reading anxiety scale to determine how emotions impact reading. And I was able to publish that instrument that uh – I published my dissertation in an article. And so I was able to then kind of like utilize this instrument to determine how emotions impact the person’s reading.

And um, so, I made a profession out of my disability. (laughing) And so, I went on further and – a lot of people when they do their doctoral dissertation – they do it one time. They put it on a shelf, and they never use it again. But I have to tell the audience that I use this dissertation every day of my professional career. I’ve never stopped using the premises of my dissertation and the findings. And what I found in

terms of how emotions – anxiety – impact a person’s ability to think and to perform in the classroom. So that’s how I came to this topic. OK?

So, on with the show. That’s just a little bit about me.

Nicole Born-Crow:

(inaudible)

[6:44]

John Zbornik:

Um, well. The first thing I want to discuss here – is I want to differentiate the (inaudible) the academic anxiety disorders. The second, well, second. The first slide: Anxiety, fear, and phobia. And I just want to differentiate that for our audience.

Nicole Born-Crow:

(inaudible) ... there we...

John Zbornik:

So, there’s three concepts here. Anxiety, fear, and phobia. And kind of like, “what’s the difference?” Well, they – there’s a lot of overlap. But when I was doing my dissertation, I had to differentiate between the three.

So, anxiety, as we notice, is a feeling of worry, nervousness, unease – typically about some imminent event or something that has an uncertain outcome. So, anxiety is free floating. Which is – which means that it’s not attached to anything. Um, and, you don’t really know where it’s coming from. And you just feel this sense of doom – this impending sense of doom.

The second thing, uh, fear. The difference between anxiety and fear – fear is an unpleasant emotion. Not – it’s called – historically it’s called objective anxiety because it’s anxiety attached to an object. A really object – a real, a real object that could cause you pain or distress. Like say if you were, um, jeez – you know if you were on a camping trip or something and a grizzly bear came out and started chasing you. That’s fear. Uh, you know – getting car jacked. That’s fear! Because that’s a danger. It’s objective. Whereas anxiety is free-floating – it’s not attached to anything.

Phobia – the third thing – is an extreme – it’s a – it’s, it’s an irrational fear or an aversion to something that’s attached to an object, like in our case, a situation. Test anxiety – fear of a test. Fear of reading. Fear of math.

Now they’re not life-threatening – like somebody carjacking you – or a bear chasing you – but you still have fear about that particular subject. But it’s not life-threatening.

But all of these overlap. So, when we’re talking about test anxiety, math anxiety, and, um, reading anxiety, they have elements of all three of these variables. But in the literature, test, math, and reading anxiety is considered to be a phobia. However, it does have elements of fear and it has elements of anxiety.

[9:48]

All right, the next page. How do people learn? I wanted to bring this up because this is how – I, I need to talk about this because it's important to understand how we learn in order to understand how anxiety interferes and inhibits the learning process. And I'm using what they call a "cognitive information processing model." And as you know, information comes into our senses— our 5 senses: seeing, hearing, smelling, touch and taste. So, information comes into the brain, OK? – through our five senses.

It then goes into something called working memory. And working memory is – the best way that you can understand it is the seat of consciousness. It's what we're thinking about right now. The here and now – that's our working memory.

And then lastly that information, when it's processed or— so first it's sensed – there's sensory. It's – information is then organized and the working memory. And then it goes and it's integrated into long-term memory. And a common definition of learning is, "a change in long-term memory."

When we learn something new, and there's a change in long-term memory, that's when we've learned something. OK? So, that's different from, like, say, a hallucinatory – a hallucination. Or we learn something – it stays in long-term memory.

But here's the problem with our learning. So, the information comes in through our senses, it goes into working memory where it's organized, and then it's integrated or stored into long-term memory. The problem becomes – with working memory – is that working memory is of limited capacity. It can only hold so much information. And limited duration. And it can only hold that information for a very short amount of time.

So, at any one point, we can only hold 5-7 pieces of information in our working memory – but only for 30 seconds! (laughing) And if we don't rehearse that information, we lose it – and it doesn't go into long-term memory.

And so, next slide, I guess?

[12:26]

How does anxiety interfere with learning? Well, first of all, let me tell you a little bit about anxiety. It's what we call "curvilinear." It's like an inverted "U." OK? So, it's like, if you don't have any anxiety, well then you're totally apathetic. You don't learn at all.

So, like I was telling you at the beginning of our presentation here, I'm still anxious when I see a client. I (inaudible) – 3 years old – anyone from 3 years old to people in their 80s. I am still anxious when I'm meeting with those people. However, my anxiety – it's not to the point – the curvilinear – so that I don't have any anxiety—you can't learn. But if you have too much anxiety, you can't learn. So, it has to be just right – like Goldilocks's porridge. You know what I'm saying? If it's too – no anxiety – you don't learn anything. Too much anxiety, you're paralyzed with fear.

So, what's happening here – the reason I brought up my age – it's important to tell you this because in 1975 I graduated from high school, OK? But there's been a quantum leap in the amount of information – the quantity and quality of information that students have to learn today, and teachers have to impart. It's unbelievable. Things that children are learning in the 5th and 6th grade are things that we were

learned in – I was learning in college! Things like, you know, DNA, RNA – they’re learning that stuff! At that age. They’re learning about the – the uh, scientific model of testing. The hypothetical deductive model.

I mean these people – they – these children – our children now, our students are learning so much more information. But what’s happened is the information has exploded! But – the human cognitive architecture hasn’t changed at all. Working memory is still of limited duration and limited capacity. And what’s happening to our children is what happens to a computer when you overload it – it’s crashing. Our children are crashing. Our students are crashing (voice wavering).

And I get a little bit emotional about this because I’ve been seeing so many of these people – not only children but adults – who are completely overwhelmed by the amount of information that they have to manage.

So, when I went into my profession, I had a mailbox. And what the secretary would do – would leave a message in my mailbox with something like, “while you were out” – was the name of the – was the – and you would get this message and it was a paper message: “while you were out, so-and-so called.” OK, now I have a mailbox. I have voicemail. I have regular phone contacts. I have email. I have all those things on the internet that are going on that I’m checking. And – it’s overwhelming. And the amount of information that’s out there – it’s just – it’s too much to handle. And as a – as a um, consequence of this, we’re getting an enormous amount of anxiety in children now.

I mean when the DSM – we were just talking about this before the meeting that DSM – the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual – the diagnostic manual I use to diagnose people is coming out in the spring. And incidentally, I didn’t know that Nicole (laughing) – but I kind of faked my way through it.

So, um, but when the DSM first came out, there was no – there were NO diagnoses for children. There as one thing – it was called “Adjustment Reaction to Childhood.” So (laughs) – so it’s like, so being a child was enough – was the only diagnosis that you could attain – that it was overwhelming to be a kid. That was in the 1950s.

But now, I was – and I’ve just been informed – a lot of things are changing in the DSM. But now we talk about anxiety in children. People didn’t think children would get anxiety in the old days, when I was a kid. There were kids – weren’t diagnosed with depression, withdrawn behavior, attention, concentration difficulties, aggression, hostility, and intellectual disengagement. There’s so much and – there’s so much information out there that students and adults are checking out. They’re disengaging. And then people say that’s – they’re lazy. I never use that term because I always use the term “disengaged.” Because “lazy” doesn’t mean anything to me. I think what’s going on is that people are so overwhelmed that they become apathetic, they lose hope, and they look lazy. But it’s easier to look lazy than to try and not succeed at all.

So, this is what I’m seeing in private practice. But I’m also seeing this among adults. I’ve had more adults in this past year than the 25 years I’ve had at De Luca and Associates for attention-deficit disorder, learning difficulties, depression, anxiety. It’s endemic.

Um, I guess the next slide, Nicole? Types of academic anxiety disorders?

[18:40]

So we're going to talk about 3 types of anxiety disorders tonight: test anxiety, which is a fear of taking tests, math anxiety, which is a fear of taking math tests – but also of numbers. So, math anxiety is a bit different than test anxiety. Math anxiety is a bit more complicated. It includes math test anxiety and what they call, "numerical anxiety." And then the last one – reading anxiety. And, um, I'm one of the – I have to uh, do a little shout-out for myself. I was one of the first people to actually look at reading – reading anxiety. Now it's become much more popular, but at the time it didn't really exist.

And reading anxiety, of the three, is the most complicated because it often leads to intellectual disengagement. A disengagement of curiosity, a disengagement in terms of intellectual assertiveness, and a disengagement in terms of intellectual independence.

All right, next slide – test anxiety.

[20:01]

So, test anxiety – test anxiety is a form of anxiety in which the testing situation triggers a student's emotionality and worrisome thoughts. OK?

How do you spot test anxiety? Well, there's two components to test anxiety which are common to both math and reading anxiety. The one is worry. Worry is the "cognitive" aspect of text anxiety. The thoughts – the thoughts we have, uh, that occur when we're taking a test. Thoughts of failure. Thoughts of punishment. Thoughts of pseudo-stupidity. Thoughts of shame, guilt, blame, remorse, and abandonment.

Now in terms of you know, like, feeling like, "if I don't pass this test, nobody will love me – I'm a failure – I'm going to lose friends – people are going to think I'm stupid" – those are the kind of things that interfere with a person's ability to take a test. This is among students – we're doing this predominantly for children tonight – but this is HUGE among the adult population I'm working with. Particularly when adults are going back to school for the first time – let's say they graduated from high school, but they didn't go on to college. Or they didn't graduate from high school, got their GRE (sic), because they could never tolerate the anxiety that occurred when they had to take a test. And it was better just to cut and dash than it was to hang in there and keep getting slaughtered all the time.

So, um, yeah – it's a big problem because when people go back to college again or are in college today, they do fine in the classes – they can read and whatever. But when they come to take a test, they – they can't – they can't manage it. And I once had one client that said to me, "hey doc, you know, I'm smart. I just can't prove it!"

And that encapsulates test anxiety! I thought it as beautiful – "I'm smart. I just can't prove it."

Uh, the second aspect of test anxiety is called "emotionality." OK, so worry is the cognitive aspect – that's – we can associate that with thoughts. Emotionality, we associate with the somatic, semantic – sorry, I have trouble with my S's – somatic problems. Head and stomachaches, nausea, nervousness, crying, skin picking, and last but not least, tantrums. A lot of these kids who have tantrums who have an academic anxiety. This is characteristic of all the academic anxieties, but a lot of times parents will tell me, you know, they're running out of their room when they're trying to work with them. They're throwing objects. They're hitting (laughing) their siblings! Just get out – of, you know, creating an absolute catastrophe just to get OUT of having to deal with all this stuff.

So, just wanted to reiterate, worry and emotionality are probably a component of all three of these anxiety disorders.

The next page – math anxiety.

[23:49]

Math anxiety is a form of anxiety in which the subject of math triggers a student's emotionality and worrisome thoughts – the things we just discussed. But there's two additional components to math anxiety. Uh, people with math anxiety typically have a very difficult time taking a math test – and if you're a parent out there, you know what I mean. Or doing math homework? Oh my God.

I remember standing over my son, Abe, and he would get math homework every night from Mrs. Fisher who would give him a – not calcu— they would only have one thing for homework, and it is typically math. She only assigned math. But she would assign a thought problem – not a calculation problem. And he would say "I don't wanna to do this." I can just remember screaming... we were, uh, standing over him and screaming at him. That really didn't help a lot, I have to tell you. But you know (laughing), I learned a lot about being a psychologist as being a parent. I was a horrendous psychologist until I became a parent (laughing) of two tough boys. Who – they're good guys now – man they were – they uh, pretty much destroyed me.

And the second part is numerical anxiety. Numerical anxiety is actually having anxiety about numbers. Calculating. So those are the two components.

Now how do you spot math anxiety?

Well, there's similar symptoms as test anxiety – so you get that worry component. You get that emotionality component. But with additional symptoms of – what I would call "mental paralysis." Meaning – they can't think. When they're doing a math problem, they're para— they're paralyzed. They don't wanna eve— they can't – it's almost as if they can't even look at it without getting ill. The very thought of having to doing – doing math creates such intensity.

The other thing that you can tell is that impulsiveness and reckless responses. You know, a lot of these students will just put down whatever they can think of. They're not even looking at the plus, the minus, the division, the times – they're just like, looking at the numbers and just throwing something down. "Let's get – let's get out of here! Let's flee!" You know? It's fight or flight, and usually it's flight. And typically, it can be fight too, as parents know there's a lot of push back when you're doing homework like this. So that's how you spot math anxiety.

OK, the next slide is reading anxiety.

[26:39]

Uh, this is my – like – my baby. It's a form of anxiety where the subject of reading and/or the reading situation triggers a student's emotionality and worrisome thoughts – but here's the other thing. That reading anxiety is not only associated with those things – worry, emotionality – but it also leads eventually to a student's disengagement – intellectual disengagement of curiosity – assertiveness – I should have said assertiveness – and independence.

So, these people start to lose their ability to be curious. They don't want to learn anything. Or they're afraid to be curious, because they don't wanna read because it's too hard. But they're also – they're not – assertive in their reading situation.

Ah, I don't know if they still use this word but when I was a kid they used something called – when you're learning to read for the first time – it's called "word attack." You're – what you have to do when you're reading is that you have to be aggressive or intellectually assertive. When you're reading, you have to ATTACK those words! You have to pull them apart and you have to put them together and then you have to put those words together to make sentences. It takes a lot of energy and assertiveness.

And finally, many of these people lose their intellectual independence. They don't wanna read. They don't – they can't do anything independently. They always need support. Because they just don't feel confident enough to be able to read.

So that's how you spot it. You typically spot it with the worry, the emotionality – but oftentimes, many of these people with reading anxiety are inattentive, distracted, and they're disengaged. And they look apathetic – and oh my God that word – it kills me – lazy.

I mean I just hate that word because it says nothing to me. And I remember, you know, working with some of my colleagues – colleagues I dearly loved – but when they would use the word "lazy" – it didn't go anywhere! It typically meant that they had given up on them. But typically, teachers have given up on students because THEY couldn't reach the student. And as you know, teachers are so committed to educating people that they feel shame, guilt – when they can't educate a student or when a student's not responding to them and then the word, "lazy" comes out unfortunately.

I get it. I could never be a teacher. But it – it's tough.

[29:45]

So, the next slide is how do you spot test, math, and reading anxiety. It's kind of like a -- a summary. Uh, worry, negative thoughts: "I can't do this," "I'm going to fail," "people think I'm stupid," "I'm a failure," "I'm letting people down," "I'm letting my parents down," "my parents aren't going to love me." You know, "they're not going to take me someplace." "They won't love me anymore." "They're going to think I'm lazy." "My parents are gonna be mad at me." Or the parenting one – whoever that person is in that dynamic.

[30:33]

Next slide – how do you spot test, math, reading anxiety? Again, the somatic and physical complaints. I'm going over this again but that's OK. Head and stomachaches, hyperventilation, nausea, panic, acting out – oh my God! Screaming, crying, throwing objects, noncompliance – and here's a great one – running out of the room! You know?

And it's like, "Oh my God, what do I do?" You feel so helpless. I mean, I felt so helpless. I don't know how you guys felt but – feel, but I felt completely unhuman. I mean, I don't know. I mean, I felt like – just like God, I can't reach these people – my sons (laughing).

[31:00]

So, what are we gonna do about this? OK? We've identified it. What are the needs of these people? Both adults and children. Well, first of all, they have an inability to attend and sustain concentration. Their anxiety is overwhelming. And as a byproduct of that, they can't attend and concentrate. And there's a lot of overlap here – and if people want to ask a question about that – between anxiety and attention deficit disorder.

Very often, when I'm diagnosing a student, I diagnose them with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which comes in three variations, which we can talk about if you want me to. But also, with anxiety – attention deficit hyperactivity disorder with anxiety. Or anxiety with ADHD – or with depression, or with interpersonal problems. Um, or with aggression – oppositional defiant disorder.

Many times, these people have a difficult time with maintaining their energy and effort to complete a task. But they also have a very difficult time regulating strong emotions. So, there's typically a lot of other things going on in the package that look like they're non-compliant, look like they're oppositional defiant, but a lot of times when you – when you dig deep down into this diagnostically, it's the anxiety that preceded a lot of this stuff. And then the anxiety became so pervasive that it inhibited the person's ability to – to think.

And then lastly, a lot of these people have a very difficult time retaining information. And remember when we started this that when I was showing you that information processing model? And I was telling you that working memory – that seat of consciousness – what we're thinking about in the here and now? Well, again, let me say that it's a limited duration – 30 seconds – and limited capacity. So, when you're this anxious, what happens is that the anxiety inhibits the working memory and creates what we call a "cognitive load." The load becomes so great that the computer – or the mind of the person – crashes and they can't function. They can't retain information. They can't think.

[33:58]

Uh, the next page is called, "what are we going to do about this?"

You know, I so I was – I've been pretty good about defining the problem, telling you the needs – but what are the implications? How are we going to try to like, alleviate this?

We're not gonna fix it. It doesn't go away. It's managed.

The first time I took my psych exam for my licensure, I went down to Columbus. 200 multiple choice questions (laughing). They give you 4 hours. I broke out into this unbelievable sweat, and I had to leave the room (laughing). And I didn't come back to take that test for another year. And I took a, uh – a test course – to learn how to take this test. But, um, it was just so humiliating.

But what we try to do – the implications for this – is number 1 – I, I say that because you know, it's not gonna go away. There's no quick fixes to this. So if you're asking me for – I will give you – I will try to do – to give you suggestions, but a lot of times it's a managerial situation. We have to learn how to manage it better. And then we – how do we do that? We try to build up these people's resilience and their self-esteem. Because if they truly have these anxieties, their self-esteem is in the basement. And they don't have much resilience. They just want to get outta there – and I get it.

But we also have to understand the curvilinear nature of anxiety. We're not trying to eliminate anxiety totally. We're trying to control it. And this is the – this is the key to the manage— to the instructional implications. We have to try to bind the anxiety.

Anxiety is like a nuclear explosion. It's like a chain reaction. And we have to try to manage and alleviate the anxiety – to make the anxiety – remember that curvilinear thing? We have to – we don't wanna reduce anxiety to zero. But we don't want it to go to 100. We want it to go right like around 50. So that they can at least manage the anxiety. But we want them to – we want these people to remain – and your children to remain motivated. But we don't want them to be so anxious that they're paralyzed.

So, we have to try and manage, and bind, and harness this energy – that's just free-floating. It's just, you know, it's just that' it's uncontrollable. We have to try to bind that energy. Harness it.

Um, next slide. What do we do about it?

[36:50]

Um, well first of all, I didn't mention this – when you're dealing with people with anxiety disorders, or academic anxiety disorders, anxiety – you have to be really careful – anxiety is viral. It catches. It's epidemic.

When I was working with my children who had difficulty with anxiety, I could feel myself losing it while I was trying to work with my children. Because I started catching their anxiety. And I wanted to do something for them. Anything. And then before I knew it, I was spinning out of control. So, when you're dealing with these situations, you gotta watch yourself – that you don't get so involved that you lose yourself in the situation – the academic or the anxiety type situation that's occurring.

So, what can we do? Well, we need to – in some instances – we want to extend their time – to be able to do these things, such as take a test. Um, to complete their math homework or the math test. And to read a passage. But we also want to – the time element can be extended but also, we wanna also – and I didn't put this down there so, you could put a slash and say "limit the time." There's a point where you have to stop if a person is very – having an anxiety attack. And there – there's a point where you have to say, "OK this is it. We've hit the wall. We can't do any more tonight." Even if things are not completed – you have to pack it in. Because if you go any further, you're just going to exacerbate the anxiety and make it worse.

Another implicat– instructional modification is to perform these academic demands in a less stressful environment. Some place where the person feels comfortable. Maybe in their bedroom. Maybe not at the kitchen table all the time. Maybe on the couch where you're sitting with them. Something like that.

Third is to stimulate, um, stimulate in a less-stressful environment. Uh, like for example, like, um, reading, math, written language, uh, reading, math, testing, you know put it – give them a test – or a reading or a math assignment – in a more comfortable environment where they're not – they don't feel the pressure to perform.

A lot of times, this sounds kind of counter-intuitive, but many times people who have problems with testing ore reading or math, they – they're into avoidance. So, what happens is they wanna do less of it which just makes the problem worse. So, we wanna try to keep them in the ballgame because the more

they avoid, the less they're going to be able to build up resistance to their anxiety and to be able to bind and control it.

So, practice is a big one. Review before the test. Review before the math test. Uh, but in a less-stressful situation. Because they need to know what to be – what is expected of them.

(clears throat) Excuse me.

They need to prepare – to be prepared. To – to have a feeling that they can't go in there cold. Like, you know, like the famous pop-up quizzes that we used to have in the old days? I don't know if they're doing that as much, but we would have these quizzes where all – out of the blue – the um, educator – the teacher would say, "um, OK. Put down your – put your books away. We're gonna have a quiz today." And I felt like, you know, "oh my God," you know? I – I never passed those things, because I just – I may have known the information, but I – I became paralyzed by it because I wasn't prepared.

And last but not least – and I don't know why I didn't put this on here – but physical exercise is probably the most important thing. You know, more and more people are doing less and less exercise. And I find that when I go to these conferences or when I've attended conferences on anxiety – many times these people will say that exercise has been just as effective in the research studies medications.

Now I'm not saying that you should stop medications. I'm just saying that exercise is very important to reduce a person's ability to reduce their stress level and their anxiety. So please put that into your handout. It's so important. I don't know why I didn't think about it because I was just thinking about everything intellectually. But today I was working out before I went to work, and I felt so much better because I'm an anxious kind of guy. And so, to – to get that exercise, it's really important. I mean, they tell you that you should read with your kid 15 minutes a night or something... 20 minutes? 15 minutes? But just as important – that person should go outside for 15 minutes – or do something physical. Because we're just so inundated – you know, you've heard this a million times – with um, technology.

Um, next slide?

[43:06]

Um, managing emotions. OK, I – I kind of alluded to this. When you're working with your child, it's really important to try not to overreact. Take it from me. Um, God. I – I – Being anxious myself, the anxiety that my children had – became infectious and viral. I mean and then I started – I started being the anxious person. It just hyped me up more.

So, it's important to and I – and I, um, this is like – OK, when I was a kid, like in my late 20s early 30s and I was a psychologist for the first time, I remember that before I had kids, I used to tell parents really crazy stuff. Which in retrospect, I just shiver when I think about it now that I'm in my 60s and I've raised my children. I would say to parents stuff like – and it was true, it's true. But it's almost ridiculous to think about. It's like, "you know what's wrong with your parenting?" I would tell parents, "you're not consistent enough." You know, "you're inconsistent with your discipline."

Well, then I had my own kids. And then on top of it, I became a single parent. And I was raising these guys and they destroyed me. And I realized what I should – what I say now to parents is "cut your losses and pick your battles." Yeah, being consistent is important, but try it. It's impossible! At least it was for me. I mean, to be totally consistent. It'll drive you insane.

So, the second thing is try to break that cycle – push the reset button on these guys. You know, if they're so upset and anxious, it's time to pull away and do something different for like 15 minutes. You know, relax. Reboot the computer. You know? Reboot these guys. They can't deal with it at that point.

Reduce as much as possible – and I want to be realistic about this: try to reduce their stimulation in the environment. I know that's like, you know, I was never really great at that, but there's so much stimulation with the iPhones, and the TV, and the computer, and it's – there's so much coming at these people that they don't have time to ever be at peace with themselves. So, try to reduce it if you can, but I understand it if you can't. But try.

But last – oops – next is – introduce items that have comforted your child in the past. I had a high school child. A child, student, adult, young woman – who came in with her teddy bear yesterday. And uh, I thought, well, you know, "who's your friend?" (laughing) She said, "well this is my friend, Bunny, and she's been" – she or he's been – "part of my life since I was in kindergarten and I wanted him – to bring him along." And I said, "well, that's cool. Let's go for it!" you know?

I mean if they need a stuffed animal? I don't care what the age is. I don't care if you're 50 – 60 – if you need a stuffed animal. Whatever does it to comfort you sometimes in these anxious situations. As long as it's you, know, obviously legal. But you know what I'm saying.

And then lastly, breathe. Oh, I mean one of my hardest things is to breathe. I just – I – (breathing in loudly) I just hold my breath all the time when I'm anxious and I get stressed out. But I can't believe how better I feel when I can breathe. When I THINK about it. But I don't consciously think about breathing. I have to like – I have to remind myself. I know that sounds like a no-brainer, but I'm telling you that it really works.

Uh, lastly, uh... this is my contact information. I work at Ken De Luca and Associates – Kenneth A. De Luca and Associates. I had one more slide – but sometimes I – I've done this presentation for teachers. Uh, do you have that last slide? It's called, "the learning alliance."

So, I told you the things that you can do, but at – when I'm working with teachers, I tell them, "in psychotherapy we have a situation in which we call it the therapeutic alliance." And over and over again, it's shown that no matter how skilled the therapist is, whether it's behaviorism – a behaviorist, cognitive psychologist, psychodynamics, psychoanalytic, humanistic, existentialist – I mean they're – it's coming out of the woodwork. There's so many different um, uh, disciplines now.

Uh, but they found that the one thing that makes all the difference in the world is "can you relate to this person?" Can the client relate to the psychologist? Can you talk to this guy? Is there a similarity of fit between you and the person? Not how skilled they are, you know, diagnosing, or interpreting dreams – or challenging cognitions – or the DM... DBT or whatever. Um – you know, well a lot of it is, "do you like this person?" If you think the person, well you don't like them, you're not gonna like, you're not gonna buy in to what they're telling you.

And re– and well, psycho– what, what's interesting about when you go back to psychotherapy – psychotherapy comes out of magic. The first – the first psychotherapists in history were witch doctors in the villages. They were the psychotherapists. But we've refined it since then. But in a sense, a person changes when you believe in them.

So, when I present this to teachers I say that what you need to do is to present – you have to develop a learning alliance. Not a – a therapeutic alliance but a learning alliance with your student. You have to agree on goals with your students. The assignment of tasks – and I'm not just saying assignment of homework but assignment of like – what – where the boundaries are and the development of bonds. Students learn from teachers that they fall in love with.

I know that sounds kind of heavy, but a person will learn when they love the other individual. They'll do anything – even things that they don't wanna learn. And so, I tell teachers that if you wanna try to reach a student, no matter how good at you are at teaching, reading, math, written language – which is absolutely important and essential – you have to develop an alliance with these people. A therapeutic alliance with your students – they have to like you. Because if they don't like you, they're not going to do anything. And you can move heaven and Earth but they won't do anything.

So that's the lecture portion of, um, my presentation. Do we have any questions?