

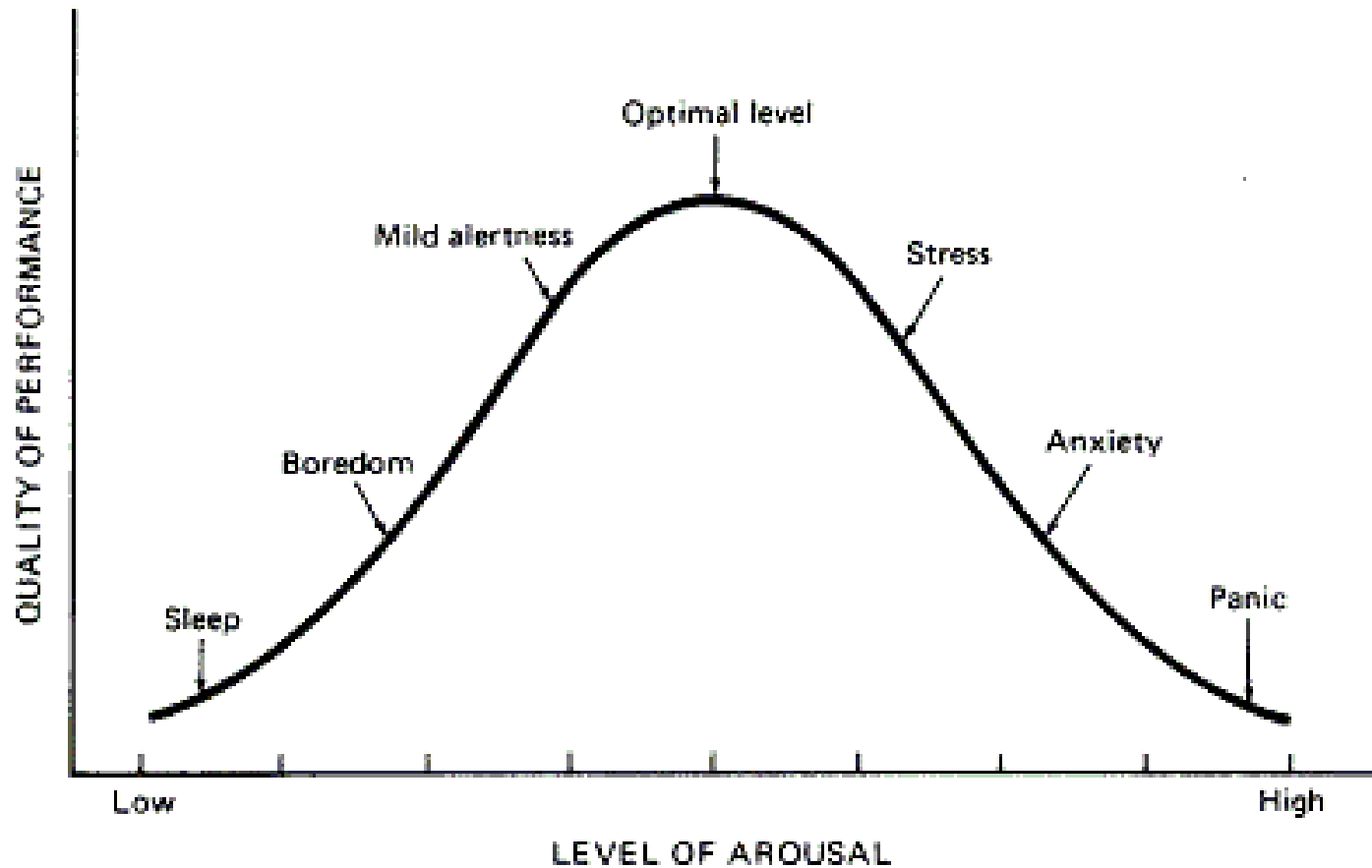
A Tweeny Bit Anxious

Anxiety in the Life of a Middle School Student

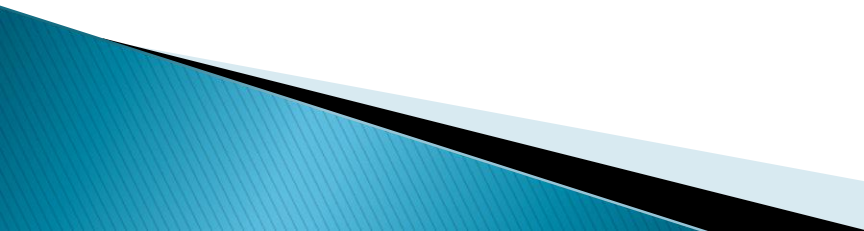
Ryan Hartmann, Ph.D.



Peak Arousal



Common Developmental Factors

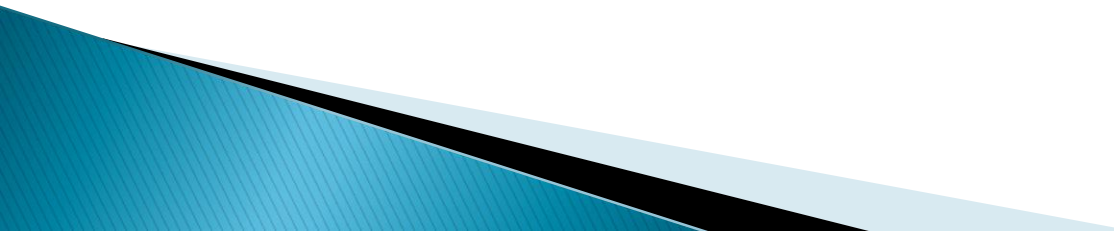
- ▶ Hormones
 - Emerging Sexuality
 - Pressure to like the opposite sex
 - ▶ Girls developing earlier
 - Can look fully developed
 - ▶ Boys slower to develop
 - ▶ Children are more aggressive
 - Mean towards each other
- 

Common Developmental Factors

▶ Technology

- Cell phones and laptops
- Many social opportunities

▶ Online Grades

- Accountability for students
 - Parents and students watching grades
 - Self-advocacy
- 

Developmental Factors by Grade

▶ 6th Grade

- Much larger environment
- Different peer configurations, new classmates
- Multiple Teachers and classes
 - Different teaching styles
- Different expectations
 - Parents
 - Teachers
 - Self

Developmental Factors by Grade

▶ 7th Grade

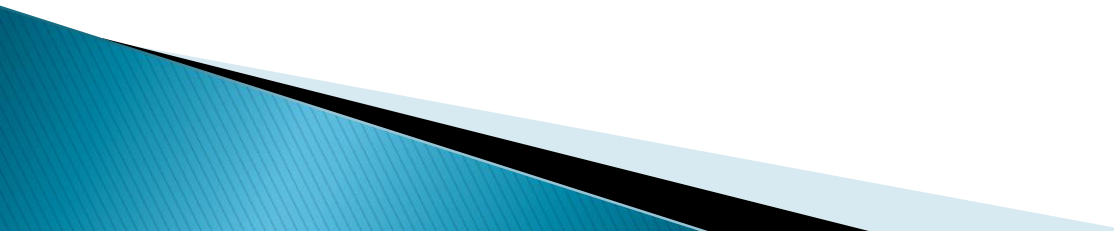
- School is not as easy
- Middle Child Syndrome
- Identity Crisis
 - Want the help provided to 6th graders
 - Yet want the freedom and respect of 8th graders

Developmental Factors by Grade

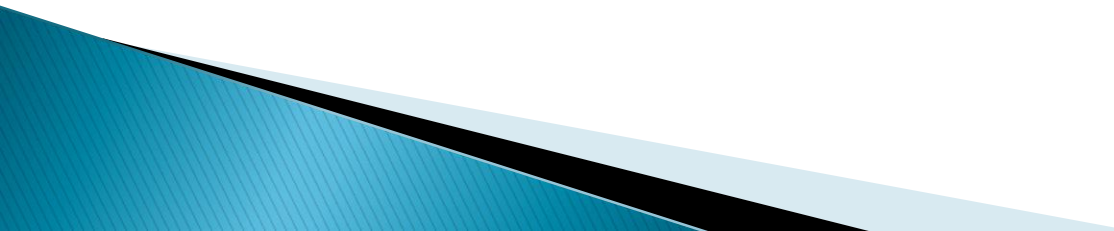
▶ 8th Grade

- Academic performance has more impact
 - Increased difficulty, some studying for first time
- Preparing for High School
- Worries about unknown of High School
- Physically Growing and Maturing
 - Boys starting to catch up with Girls

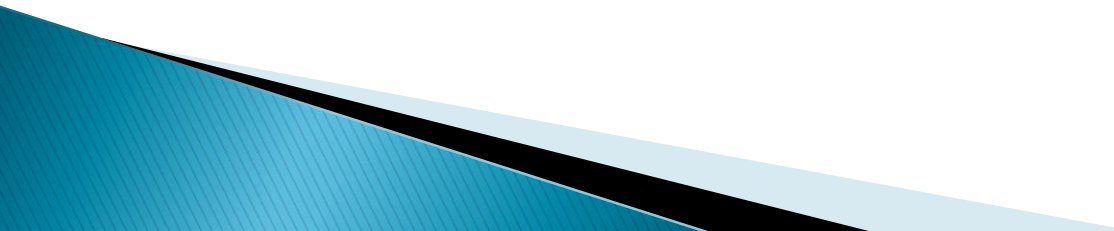
Common Questions For All Grade Levels

- ▶ Can I do the work?
 - ▶ Do other kids like me?
 - ▶ Do I fit in?
 - ▶ Can I be cool if everyone knows I am smart?
 - ▶ What if I'm not as smart as...
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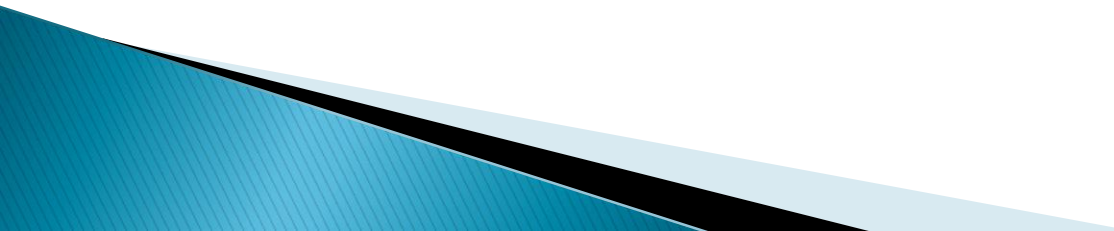
Co-Occurring Problems

- ▶ Learning Disabilities
 - ▶ Dyslexia
 - ▶ Processing Speed
 - ▶ Executive Functioning
 - ▶ AD/HD
 - ▶ Depression
 - Low Self-esteem
- 

Types of Anxiety

- ▶ Generalized Anxiety
 - ▶ Panic Attacks
 - ▶ Social Anxiety
 - ▶ Phobias
 - ▶ Test Anxiety
 - ▶ Obsessive Compulsive
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Anxiety Symptoms

- ▶ Excessive Worry
 - ▶ Difficulty Controlling the Worry
 - ▶ Racing Thoughts
 - ▶ Rumination
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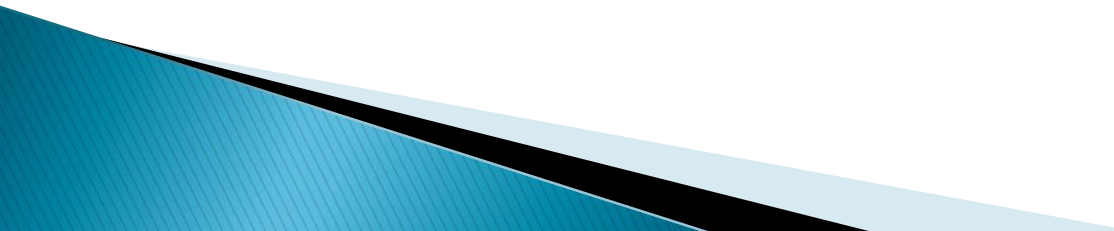
Anxiety Symptoms

- ▶ Restless, Keyed Up, or On Edge
- ▶ Easily Fatigued
- ▶ Mind goes blank
- ▶ Irritability
- ▶ Muscle Tension
- ▶ Sleep Disturbance
- ▶ Psychosomatic Complaints
 - Headaches or Stomachaches

Common Presentation

- ▶ Irritable, Angry, and/or Snotty
- ▶ Can be fine at school, snarky at home
- ▶ Withdrawn when left alone
 - Avoidant of activities and interactions

Other Signs

- ▶ Dependent
 - ▶ Overly emotional or restrained
 - ▶ Rigid Thinking
 - ▶ Difficulty with Transitions
 - ▶ Refusal to go to School
 - ▶ Continuous Need for Reassurance
 - Repeatedly asking the same questions
 - Difficulty separating from parent
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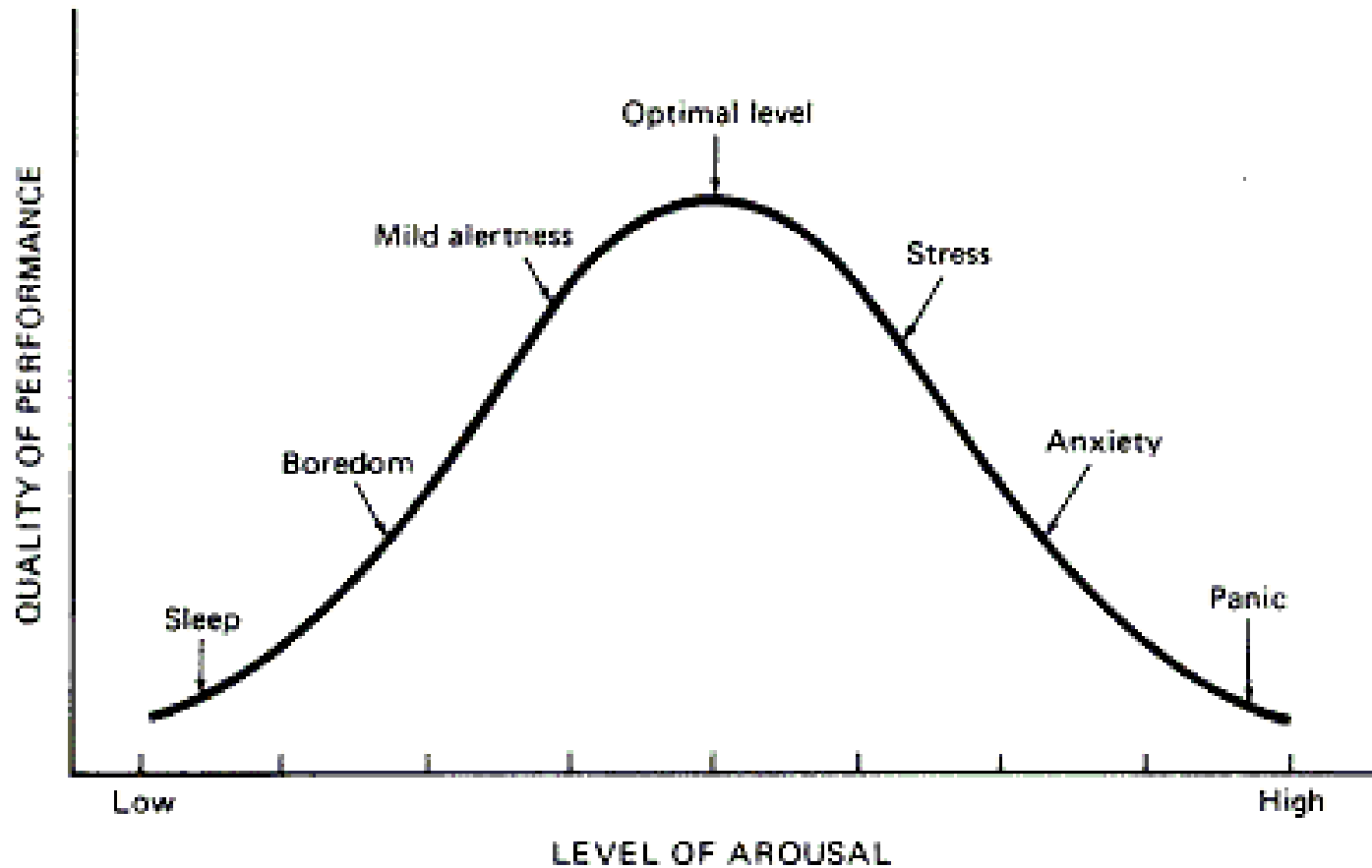
Negative Thinking

- ▶ Anticipatory Anxiety
 - Preparing for the worst
- ▶ Cognitive Distortions
 - All or none, black and white thinking
 - Discounting the positive
 - Mental filter
 - Mind reading
 - Emotional reasoning

Negative Thinking

- ▶ Outside appearance seems fine
- ▶ Others are not aware of the anxiety and do not have information about it
- ▶ Not communicated well or maybe at all
- ▶ Experience on the outside could be positive
 - Thoughts make overall experience negative

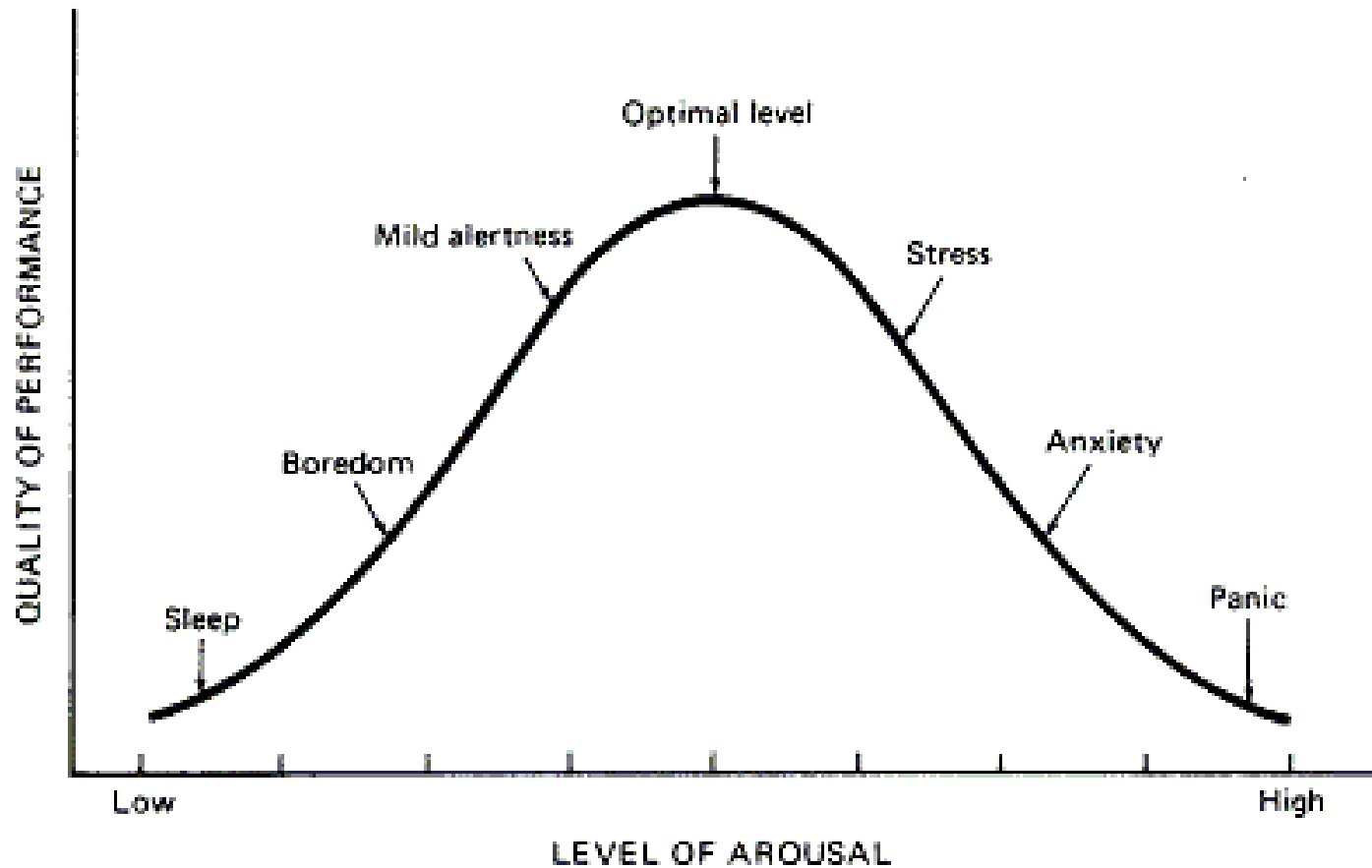
Peak Arousal



Peak Arousal: Parent–Child Interaction

- ▶ Parenting Style
 - Very relaxed
 - Micro–managing
- ▶ Child factors
 - How much your child feels they need/will seek help
 - How much your child actually needs help

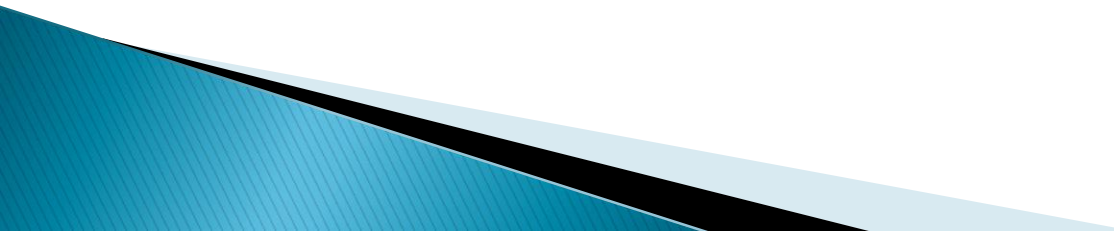
Peak Arousal



Everyone Has Anxiety

- ▶ So what is a normal amount of anxiety?
- ▶ How do I know if my child needs more help than I can provide?

How Serious is the Anxiety?

- ▶ How frequently is it happening?
 - ▶ How intense is the anxiety?
 - ▶ How long does it last?
 - ▶ Are the tasks, activities, or obligations of life still being completed?
- 

“When Anxiety Turns Negative”

- ▶ “Anxiety becomes a problem when it causes emotional pain and disrupts your child’s ability to function well at school and in daily life.”

- Mayer (2008)

Healthy Anxiety Management Tools

- ▶ Relaxation Techniques
- ▶ Physical Activity
- ▶ Artistic Expression
- ▶ Entertainment
- ▶ Interpersonal Communication
 - Peers
 - Parents

Parent–Child Communication

- ▶ Supportive
 - Do not discount feelings
- ▶ Localize problem, reduce overgeneralization
- ▶ Problem–Solve
 - Discuss child's abilities
 - Identify coping strategies
- ▶ Identify ways to reinforce desired behaviors
 - Increase motivation to face fears
 - Avoid enabling avoidance

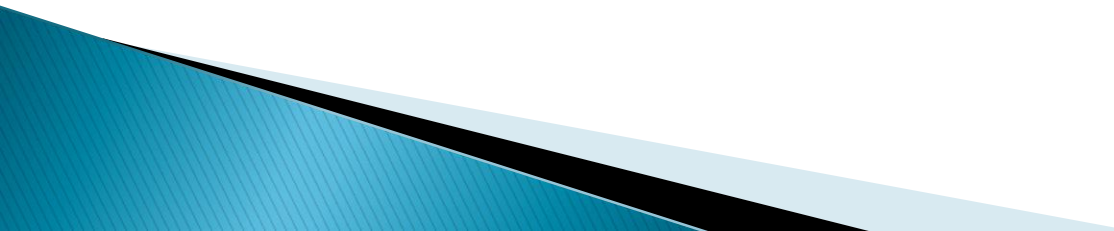
Anxious Thoughts

- ▶ Challenge
- ▶ Replace
- ▶ Reframe
- ▶ Automatic Thoughts can be Resistant
- ▶ Keeping a journal can be extremely helpful
 - Increase psychological insight

When to Seek Professional Consultation

- ▶ Consistent and unremitting pattern of not managing responsibilities
 - Remove self from activities
 - Push away support
 - Not trying in school
 - Panic
 - Self-medication

Professional Consultation

- ▶ School Personnel
 - ▶ Pediatrician
 - ▶ Mental Health Professional
 - Individual Psychotherapy
 - Group Psychotherapy
 - Family Therapy
 - Psychological/Psycho-educational Evaluation
 - Medication Evaluation
- 

Long-Term Change

- ▶ “Your child can overcome anxiety problems by making gradual changes in his or her life. Persistence and patience are more important than boldness to ensure your child’s long-term success. The journey to recovery is not a straight line. Long-term progress includes plenty of temporary setbacks.”

- Spencer, DuPont, & Dupont, 2003

Books

- ▶ A Smart Girl's Guide to Starting Middle School
 - Julie Williams Montalbano
- ▶ My Anxious Mind: A Teen's Guide to Managing Anxiety and Panic
 - Tompkins and Martinez
- ▶ The Anxiety Cure for Kids: A Guide for Parents
 - Spencer, DuPont, and DuPont
- ▶ Overcoming School Anxiety:
 - How to Help your Child Deal with Separation, Tests, Homework, Bullies, Math Phobia, and other Worries
 - Diane Peters Mayer

Questions?