

# Preparing for Young Adulthood: Understanding the Role of Anxiety in Youth Mental Health and Development

Lauren Hoffman, Psy.D.

February 27, 2024



Mountain Plains (HHS Region 8)

MHTTC

Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (Mountain Plains MHTTC) provides training and technical assistance to individuals who serve persons with mental health concerns throughout Region 8 (Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming).

We belong to the Technology Transfer Center (TTC) Network, a national network of training and technical assistance centers serving the needs of mental health, substance use, and prevention providers. The work of the TTC Network is under a cooperative agreement by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA).



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The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED  
AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND  
ACCEPTING OF  
DIVERSE CULTURES,  
GENDERS,  
PERSPECTIVES,  
AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND  
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS  
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR  
OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND  
FREE OF LABELS

NON-JUDGMENTAL AND  
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR  
AND UNDERSTANDABLE

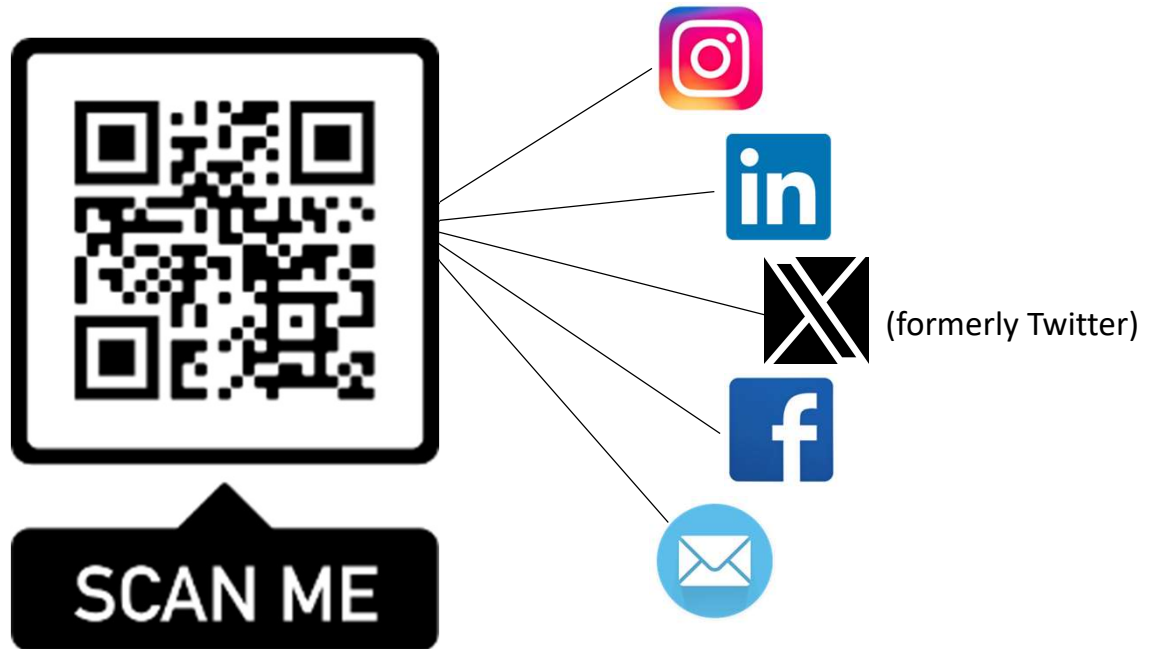
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Adapted from: [https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide\\_2019ed\\_v1\\_20190809-Web.pdf](https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide_2019ed_v1_20190809-Web.pdf)

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# Preparing for Young Adulthood: Fostering Mental Health and Independence

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 **New York-Presbyterian**  
Youth Anxiety Center



Thanks To:

Anne Marie Albano, PhD, ABPP  
NYP Youth Anxiety Center

Columbia University Clinic for  
Anxiety and Related Disorders  
(CUCARD)





# Agenda

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Introduction to Anxiety

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Developmental milestones of adolescence and young adulthood

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The role of parents and schools

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Assessing & fostering independence

# Anxiety is a basic human emotion

Anxiety is:

- ✓ Adaptive
- ✓ Natural
- ✓ Occurs automatically
- ✓ Signals Danger



Anxiety **URGES** us to  
*Fight, flee, or freeze*

# Normative Anxiety Throughout Development

Toddlers  
(0-2yo)

- Strangers, separation from parents, large looming objects

Preschool  
(3-6yo)

- Dark, animals, separation, strangers, supernatural beings

School age  
(6-12yo)

- Tests, school performance, death, lightning, injury

Adolescence &  
Young Adulthood

- Relationships, appearance, future, school, world events, health

# When to be Concerned about Anxiety (or any other emotion)

## Healthy

- Reasonable
- Manageable
- Mobilizing
- Time limited

## Concerning

- Excessive
- Uncontrollable
- Paralyzing/Restricting
- Chronic

# Anxiety Disorders: A Growing (Up) Problem

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	12-month Prevalence Rate
Preschoolers	3% to 6.5%
Preadolescents	12%
Adolescents	15%
Young adults (19-29yo)	22.3%
<hr/>	
<b>Anxiety Age of Onset</b>	
< 15 years old	54.5%
< 26 years old	85%

# Why?

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Emotional changes are *expected and normal* throughout development

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Tasks of development trigger emotional reactions

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Complex cognitive skills develop

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Social comparison skills are formulated

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Peer-group approval becomes important

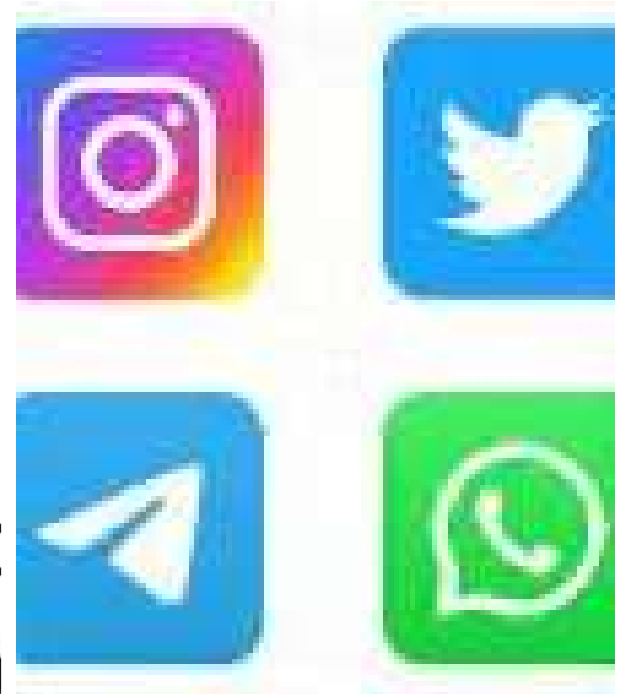
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Academic demands increase

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“Next steps” happen continuously and often concurrently





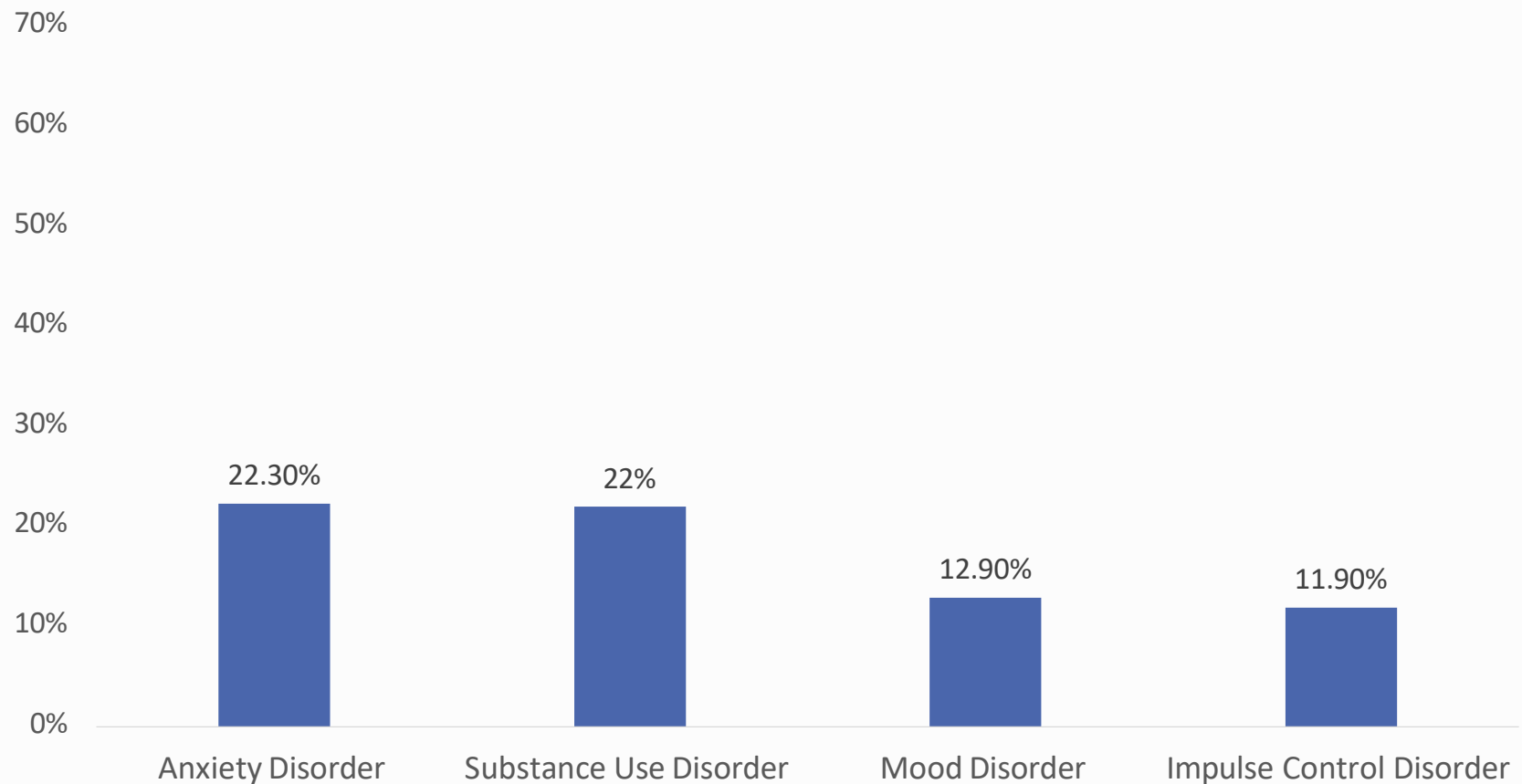
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# Modern Day Stressors

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# Prevalence Rates for Psychiatric Disorders: 18-29 yo (n=9282)

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Kessler, et al. (2005). Prevalence, severity, and comorbidity of twelve-month DSM-IV disorders in the National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R). *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), 617-627

# Consequences of Anxiety and Mood Disorders in Adolescence

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Peer relationships suffer

Academic decline – school refusal / drop out?

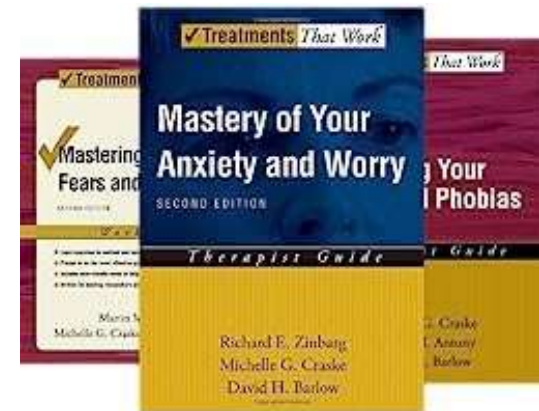
Lower self esteem, self-efficacy

Limited independent functioning

Family struggles

Comorbidity builds quickly over time

Failure to achieve developmental milestones



Evidence-based treatment is vital...but how else can we help?

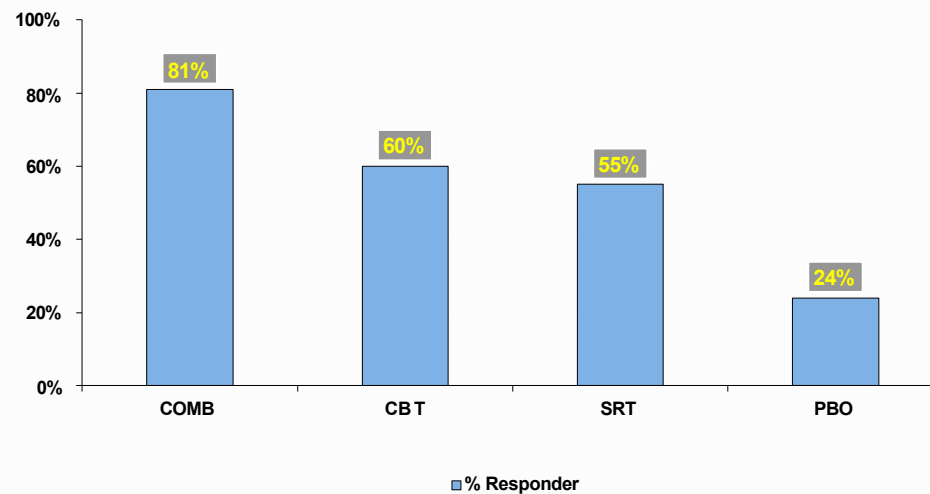
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# Evidence Based Treatments for Anxiety Disorders

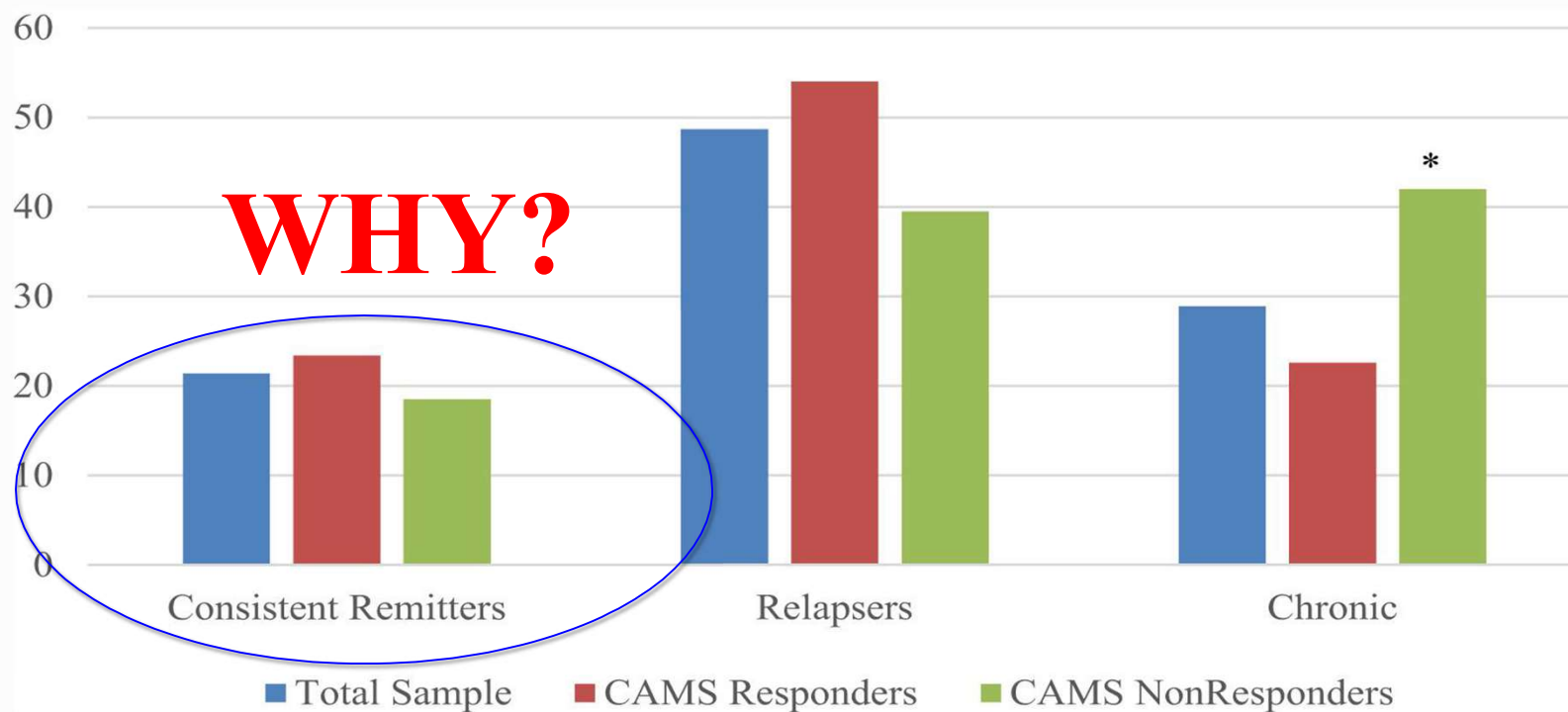
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## Child/Adolescent Anxiety Multimodal Study CAMS

Acute Outcomes (n=488)



# CAMELS: Percent Remitters, Chronic, and Relapsers Across Follow-up Period



Responder status associated with increased likelihood of group membership.  
\* $p < .05$

Ginsburg et al., 2018, *JAACAP*

# What Happened?

## Limitation of CAMS Outcomes

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Focus is on symptomatic improvement

- Goal: less anxious overall

### **Functional impairment may persist**

- **Still does not attend school; call friends; unable to self-soothe; overly relies on parents**

### **Developmental trajectory is not addressed**

- **Is the child/adolescent on par with age-related tasks?**
  - **Study treatments did not address development**
- 





## Focus on development

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### Assess

- Social-Emotional development

### Address

- The contexts within which youth live

### Prepare

- Youth for the transition to post-high school

We all know the main milestones of  
childhood...

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Language

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Toileting

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Motor

---

Social



# Then what?



## Jeffrey Jensen Arnett (2000) & Emerging Adults (18-29)



- Identity exploration
- Self-Focus
- Possibilities
- Instability
- Feeling in between
- Occurring in all developed countries across socioeconomic groups



# Key Developmental Milestones

- Independence
- Identity
- Responsibility
- Socialization



# Independence



## Behavioral independence

- Completes tasks on own
- Takes initiative
- Asserts self to meet needs

## Emotional independence

- Express thoughts/feelings
- Soothe self when confronted with disappointment or challenge
- Seek advice appropriately

# Independence



## Financial independence

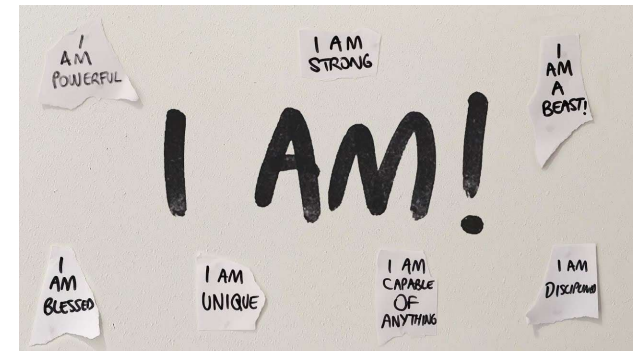
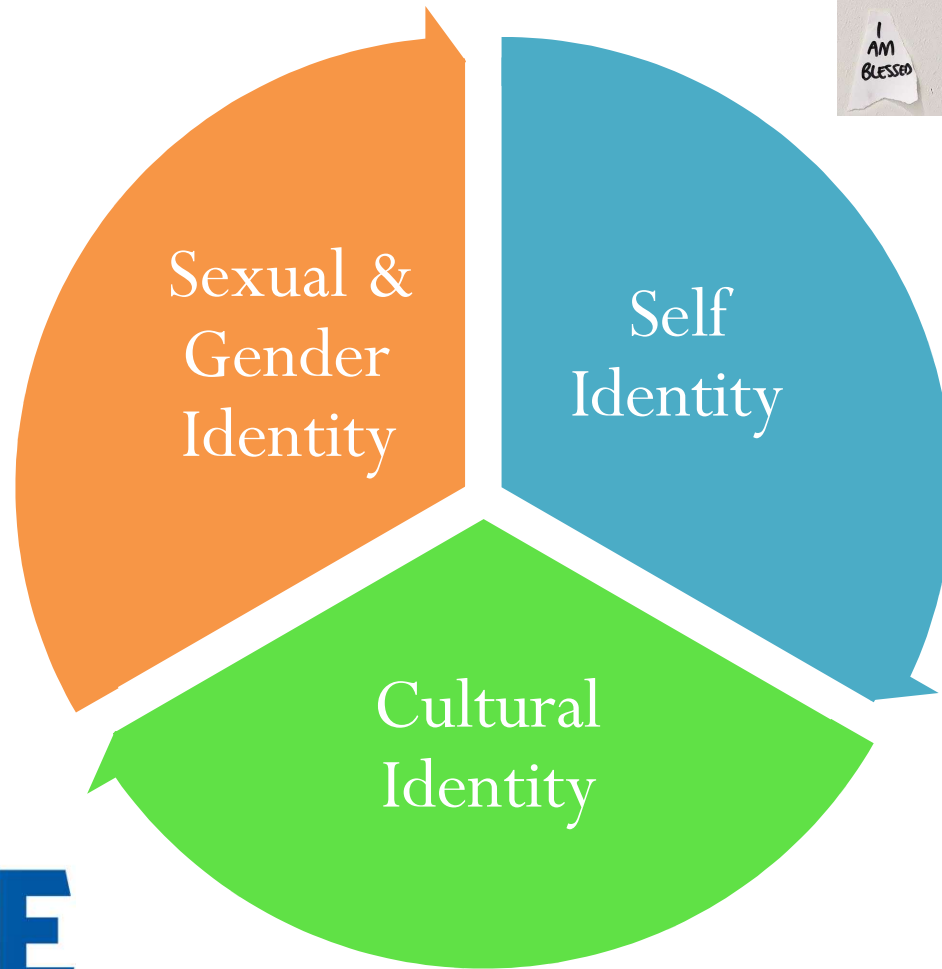
- Open/manage own bank account
- Earn & save own money
- Pay rent/bills

## Living independently

- Potentially in stages
- Dorm, roommates, independent



# Identity Formation



**VOTE**  
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

# Responsibility



## Personal self-care

- Regulate sleep; eat balanced diet
- Hygiene; laundry
- Manage medication and doctors' appts



## Complete educational/vocational requirements

- Register for classes; create resume; apply for jobs
- Manage time and workload
- Seek guidance when necessary



## Manage money responsibly

- Manage budget
- Purchase own food, clothing, etc.
- Manage own banking

# Socialization

- Make and maintain long term friendships
- Pursue healthy and meaningful romantic relationships
- Maintain family relationships
- Form adult relationship with parent
- Travel alone or with peers
- Participate in cultural and civic events



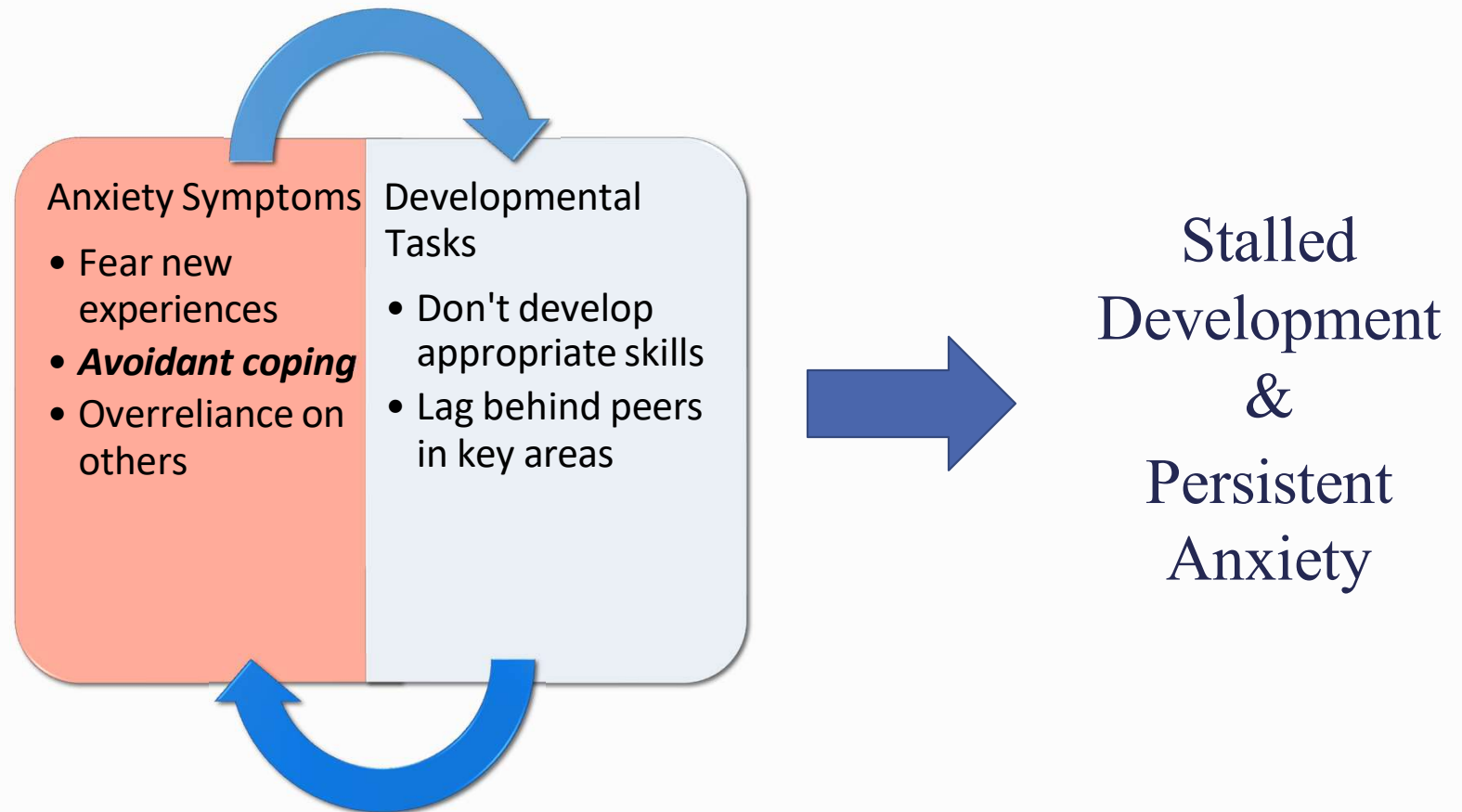
Your replies: *What areas of independence do young people in your community struggle with?*

A word cloud of responses to the question 'What areas of independence do young people in your community struggle with?'. The words are arranged in a diagonal pattern from top-left to bottom-right. The largest words are 'self-care/hygiene' (red), 'managing finances' (blue), 'communicating with adults' (blue), and 'managing relationships' (red). Smaller words include 'future planning' (blue), 'housing' (yellow), 'emotion regulation' (red), and 'self-advocacy' (blue).

self-care/hygiene  
future planning  
managing finances  
communicating with adults  
housing  
emotion regulation  
managing relationships  
self-advocacy

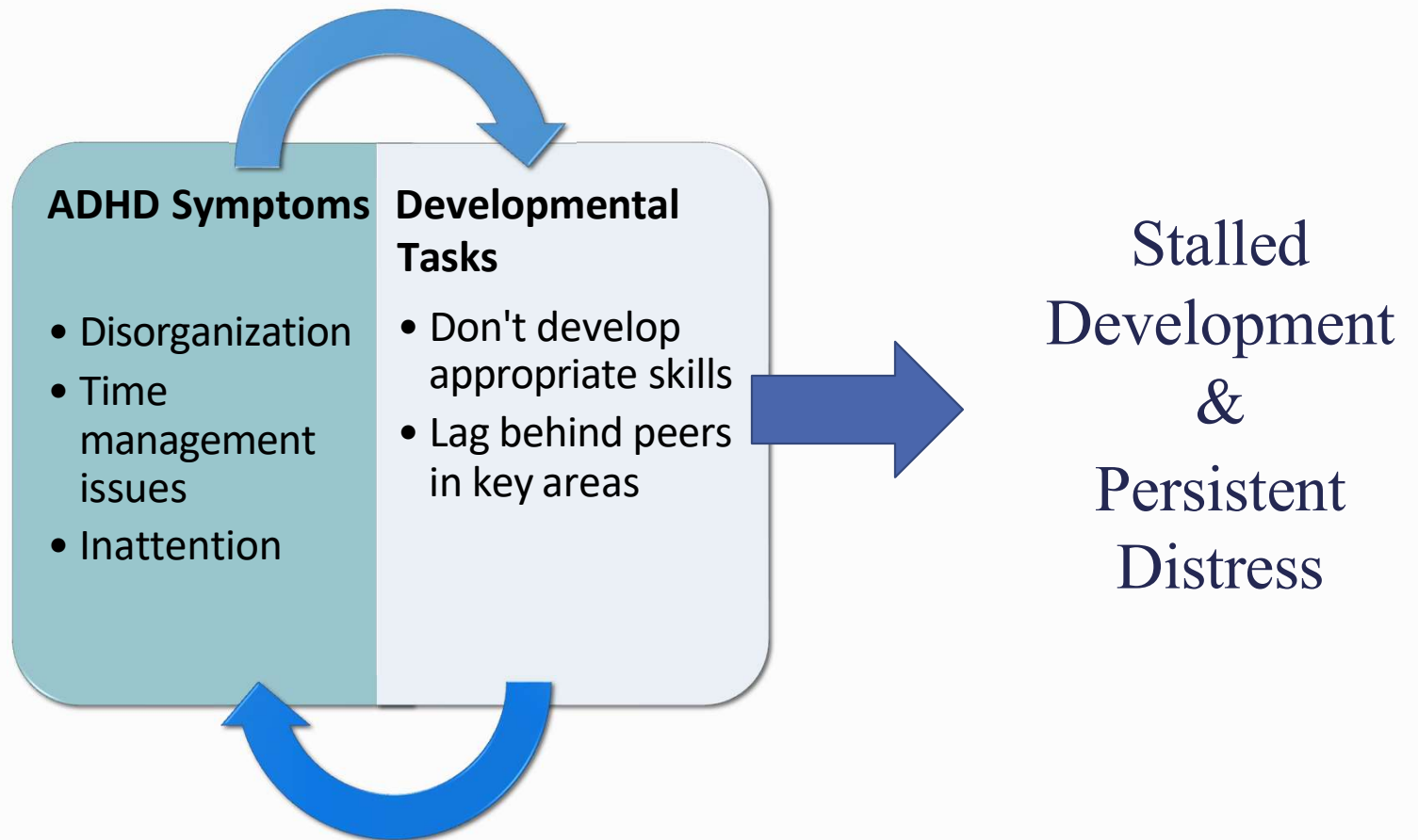
# What if Anxiety Is Excessive?

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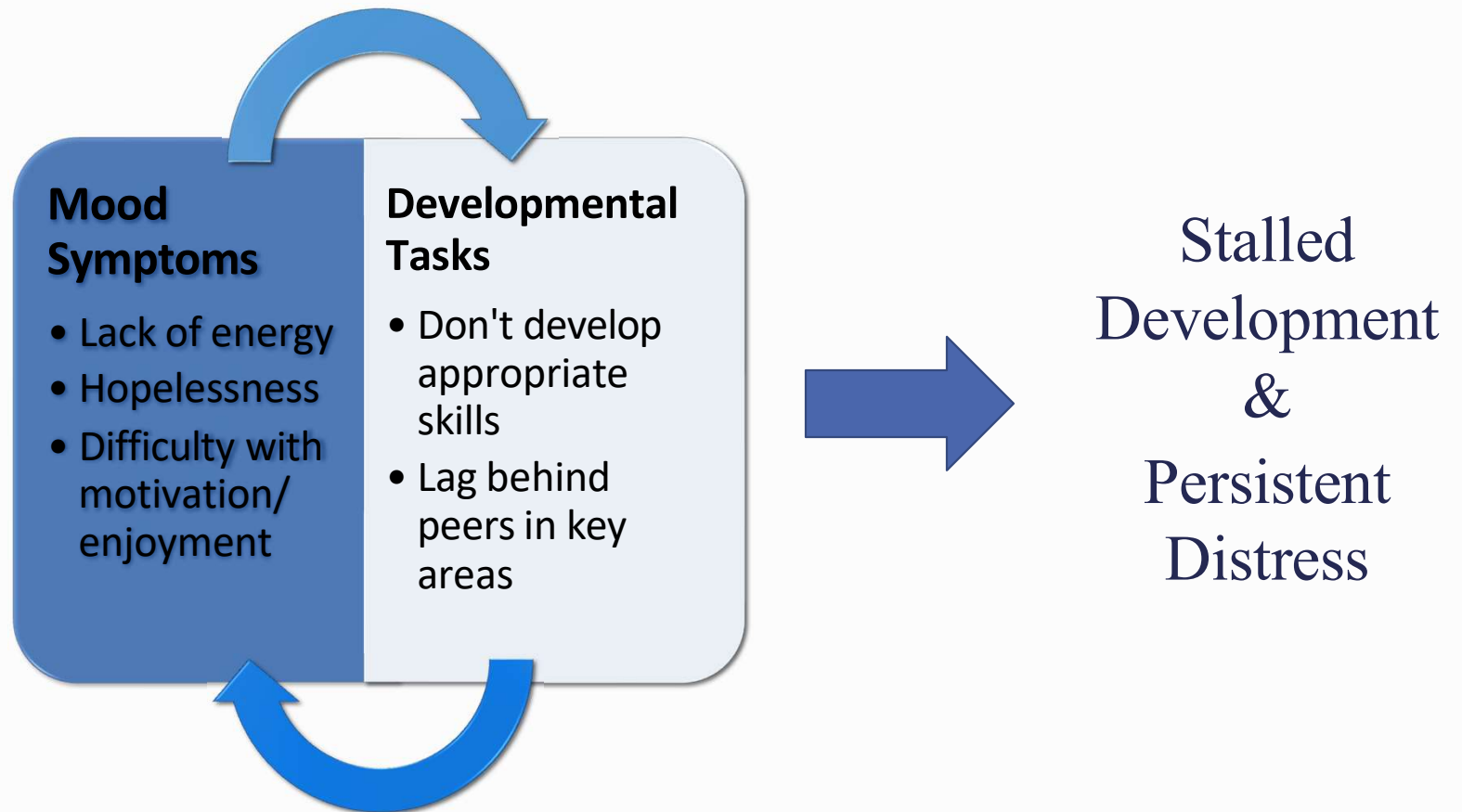
# Not Just Anxiety...

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# Not Just Anxiety...

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Your replies: *What gets in the way of youth development/independent functioning in your community?*

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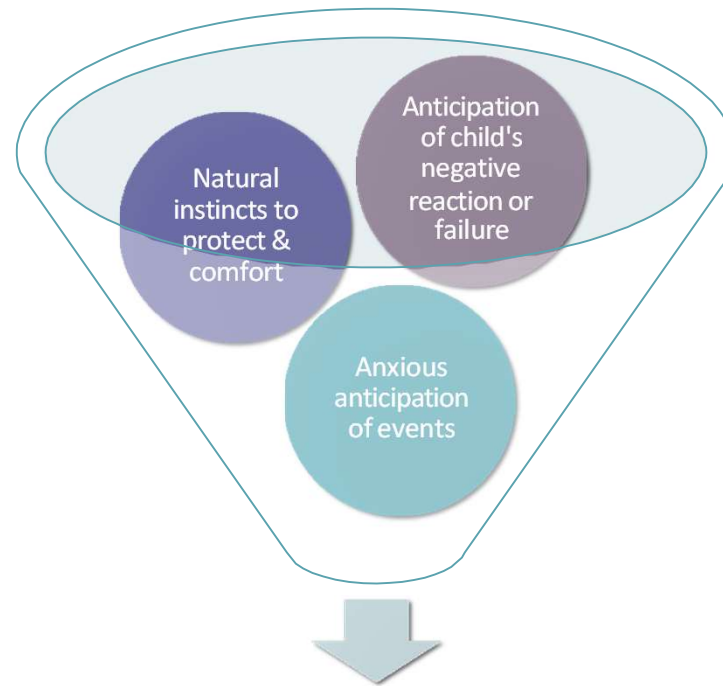
*overinvolved parents*  
lack of opportunities  
lack of support  
lack of *peers* resources  
lack of *anxiety* education  
*mental health and substance issues*  
ACES  
*high cost of living*  
lack of modeling or guidance  
*stigma*  
social media  
poverty

What role do  
parents,  
schools, and  
communities  
play?

All parents and families want their teens and  
young adults to be happy and successful...but  
there can be barriers



# The “Too Much Support” Trap



Overprotection Trap

# How it starts...

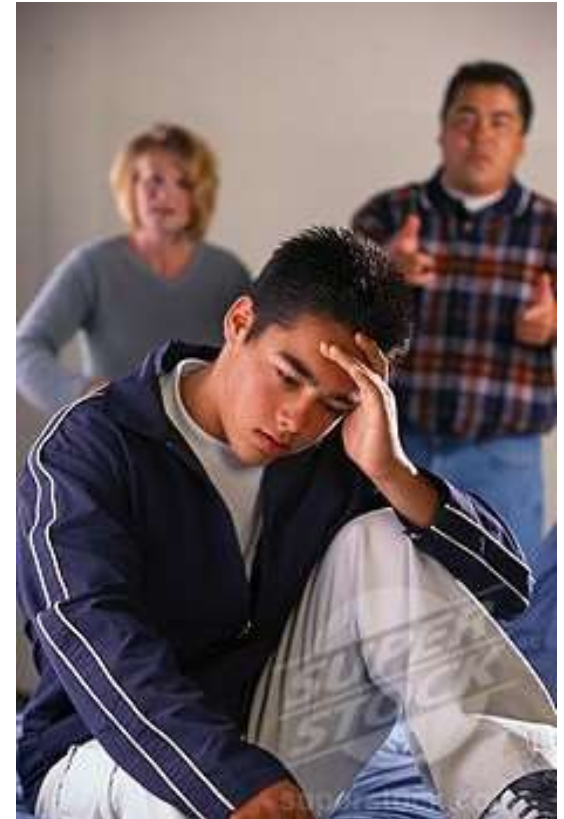
- “Go on, Johnny....pet the dog!”
  - Johnny isn’t sure about this
  - He hesitates
  - The tears start to well up
  - “I don’t want to....”
- Dad/Mom swoop in and take him away.....and Johnny feels much, much better



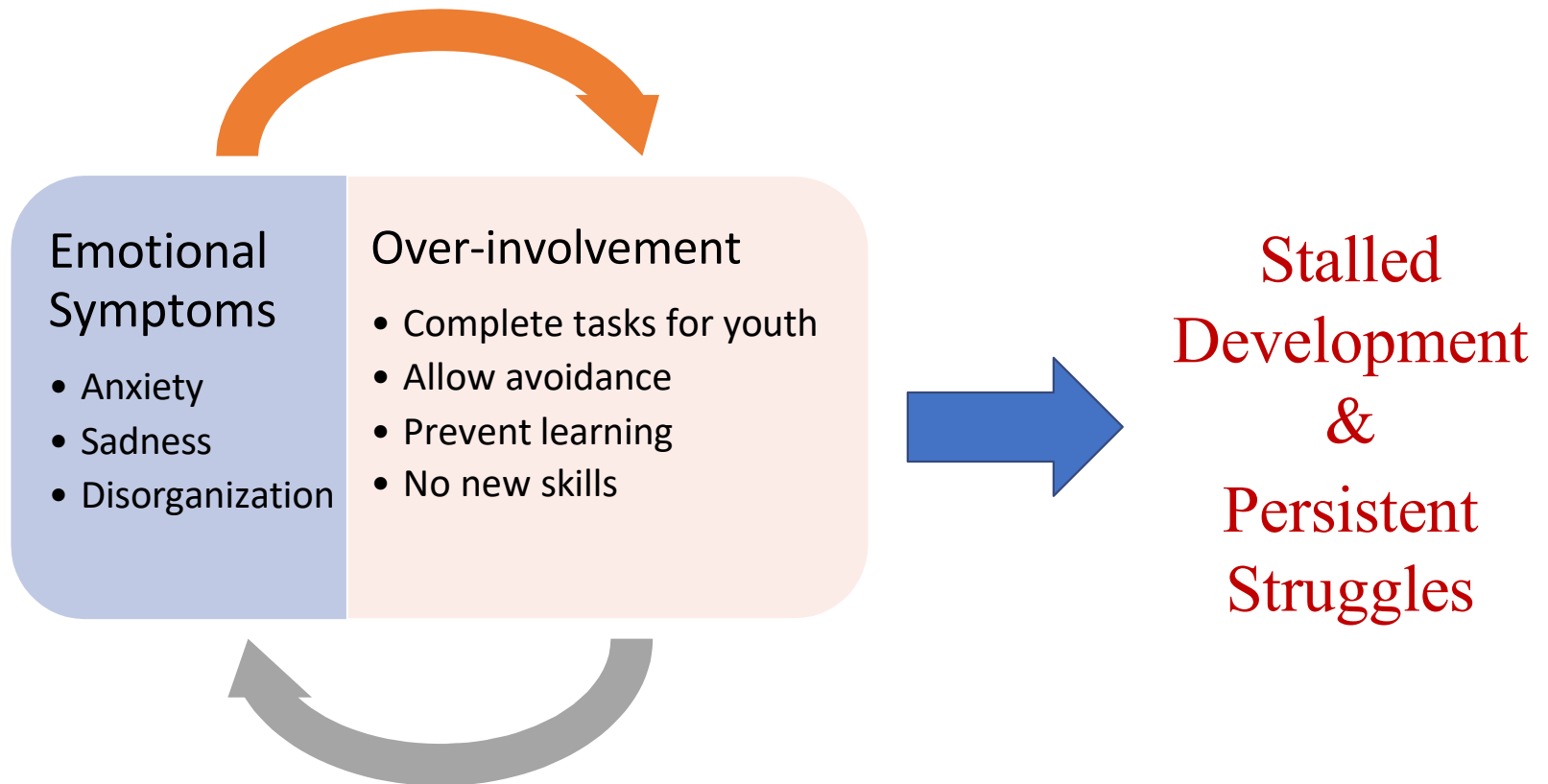
Slide: Anne Marie Albano, PhD  
Columbia Psychiatry

# Turns into...

- “Come on, Mary....submit that application!”
- “Alex, we asked you three times already. Text your coach about the game tomorrow!”
- “Fine... I’ll do it for you **just this once!**”

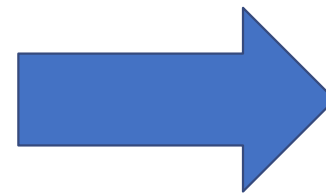


# Relationship between Emotional Symptoms & Over-involvement



# The “Too Little Support” Problem

- Be mindful of reasons:
  - Systemic barriers to accessing opportunities, limited parental education, or limited community resources
  - Parental mental health or substance use problems
  - Family stress
  - Poverty
  - Family or cultural values around independence “I did it myself so you should too” mentality
- Lack of support, scaffolding, or modeling
  - pressure to figure it out alone
  - limited education about important life skills
  - limited practice with new skills



Stalled  
Development  
&  
Persistent  
Struggles



# Assessing Developmental Milestones



# Assess Youth Development

<b>Task</b>	<b>Dependent</b> <i>Lots of Help</i>	<b>In Transition</b> <i>Some Help</i>	<b>Independent</b> <i>On own</i>
<b>Waking up</b>			
<b>Picking out clothes</b>			
<b>Managing a budget</b>			
<b>Completing HW</b>			
<b>Dealing with teachers/adults</b>			
<b>Organizing belongings</b>			
<b>Managing friendships</b>			
<b>Making meals (breakfast/lunch)</b>			
<b>Brushing teeth / showering</b>			
<b>Completing paperwork</b>			
<b>Completing chores</b>			
<b>Uses public transportation</b>			

# Assess Youth Development

Task	Dependent <i>Lots of Help</i>	In Transition <i>Some Help</i>	Independent <i>On own</i>
Waking up	X		
Picking out clothes			X
Managing a budget	X		
Completing HW		X	
Dealing with teachers/adults		X	
Organizing belongings		X	
Managing friendships			X
Making meals (breakfast/lunch)	X		
Brushing teeth / showering			X
Completing paperwork	X		
Completing chores		X	
Uses public transportation		X	

**Dependent**  
•Lots of help



**In Transition**  
•Some help

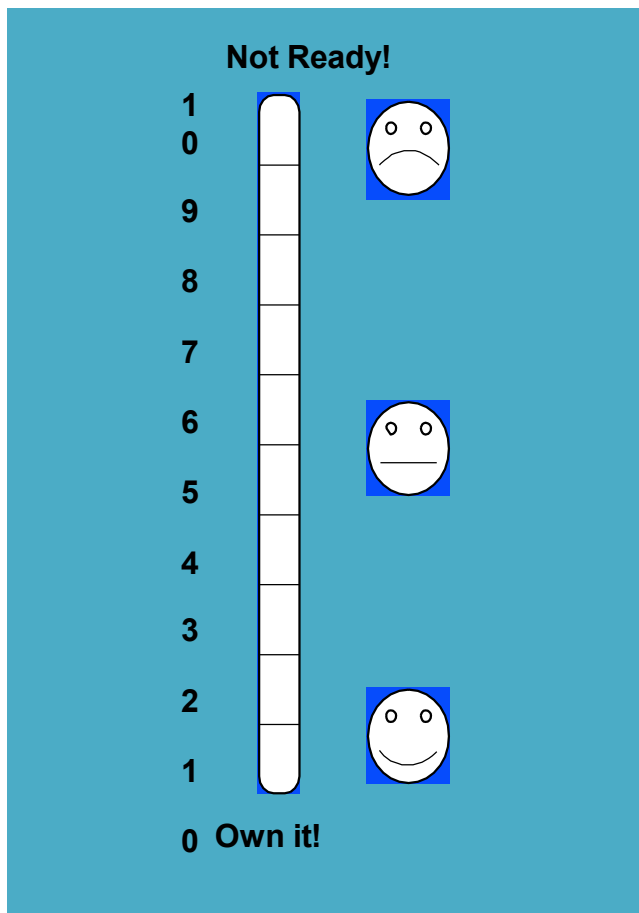


**Independent**  
•On own

<b>Sleep schedule</b>		X, use an alarm every <u>day</u> Reminders to get in bed/lights off	
<b>Completing HW</b>		X, lots of reminders (except math/science) but do it on my own	
<b>Dealing with teachers / coaches</b>			X
<b>Handling friendships &amp; social activities</b>			X
<b>Managing meals &amp; snacks</b>		X make own snacks but not meals	
<b>Managing time &amp; belongings</b>		X – on time, manage belongings well Time management re: priorities harder	
<b>Hygiene</b>			X
<b>Registering for classes / filling out paperwork</b>			X
<b><u>chores / helping out around the house</u></b>		X, room is a <u>mess</u> Do own laundry! Unload the dishwasher <u>sometimes</u> Walk the dog regularly	
<b>Scheduling / attending appointments</b>	X mom handles other appts (dentist, haircut)	Set up meetings with teachers/coaches	
<b>Dealing with emotions</b>			X
<b>Using a budget n/a</b>			
<b>Other: traveling</b>	Don't take the train		Take the bus, can travel to tournaments w/o parents
<b>Other:</b>			

# Developmental Hierarchy: 10 year old

## Success Thermometer



## Developmental Hierarchy

Situation	How Ready?
Owning up to when I make a mistake or mess something up at home	10
Finding something to do when I'm bored	8
Walking my dog after school each day	7.5
Calming myself down	7
Making my own snack/lunch	6
Waking up to an alarm	5
Picking out my own clothes to wear each day	2

# Middle School / Early High School Goals

<u>Situation</u>	<u>Goal Achieved?</u>
Ask the teacher for extra help or to discuss a grade	Not yet
Ask a friend to do a sleepover	Yes
Go to the doctor's on my own for annual exam	Not yet
Get to know 1 or 2 new people in my class	Yes
Sit with other students at lunch	Not yet
Join an after school club or activity	Yes
Calm myself down when upset by someone or something	Yes
Use public transportation on my own to get to school	Not yet
Get up on time by myself	Yes

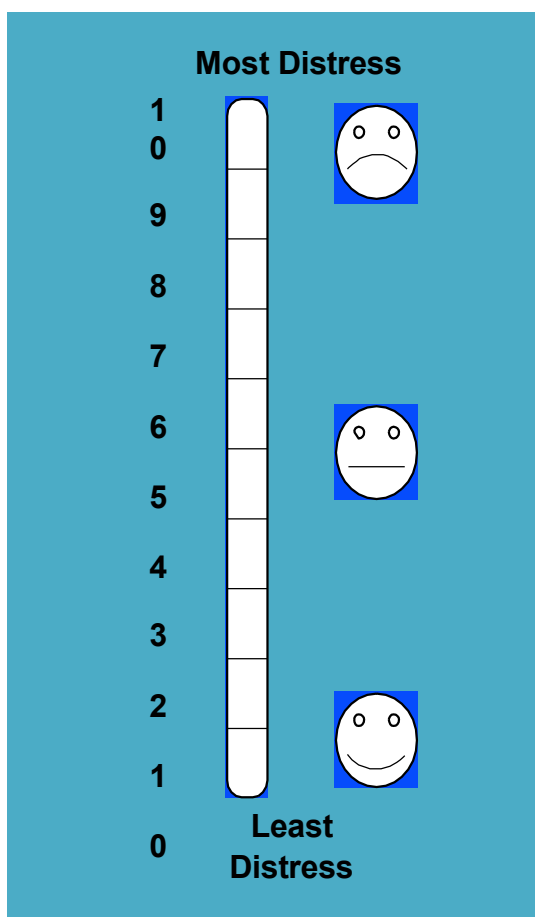
# Late High School Goals

<u>Situation</u>	<u>Goal Achieved?</u>
Go to a job interview on my own	Not yet
Plan, buy, and make my own meals for the month	Yes
Go to the doctor's on my own	Yes
Handle my own bank account	Not yet
Make phone calls	Yes
Do my own laundry	Yes
Take driving lessons	Yes
Assert myself appropriately with peers and adults	Not yet



# Developmental Hierarchy

## Distress Thermometer (SUDS) Developmental Hierarchy



Situation	SUDS
Asking teacher for help	10
Make phone calls	8
Go to doctor's on own for annual exam	7.5
Calming myself down	7
Making plans with a friend	6
Waking up on my own	5
Picking out own clothes	2

# Ideas for practice

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Ordering in cafes -  
send something  
back, make a  
special request

Phone calls

Emails

Grocery shopping;  
preparing meals

Ask for directions  
or help from a  
teacher, boss,  
coach

Driving lessons

Job interviews

Stores (interacting  
with clerks; making  
decisions)

Filling out  
paperwork

Navigating public  
transportation

# Skills for Youth

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Realistic thinking skills

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Time management skills

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Delay of gratification

---

Emotion regulation strategies

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Positive health behaviors (exercise, diet, sleep hygiene)

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Problem solving skills

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Social skills

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Opportunities to learn and mess up

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Adult support, but not overprotection!

# Working with Families

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# Caregiver Roles in Young Adult Treatment

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## Treatment Enhancing

- Enrollment in treatment
  - Informant
  - Coach
  - Model
- Ensure attendance/ engagement

## Treatment Interfering

- Accommodating problem behaviors
- Modeling problem behaviors
- Reinforcing problem behaviors
- Distress intolerance/overreaction
  - Misunderstanding young adult capabilities

# Considerations for Caregiver Involvement

- Degree of young adult depressive symptoms or risky behavior
  - E.g., amotivation, suicidality, significant substance use
- Degree of impaired functioning / dependence
- Degree of parent/young adult conflict
- Parental psychopathology
- Degree of overall family stress/dysfunction
  - E.g., financial, marital, health





# First Step: Manage your own distress!

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- Parent emotions are transferred and modeled for the child
- Learn to recognize parent triggers
- Self-soothe: BREATHE
- Stick with realities
- Educate about development
- Be patient and compassionate
- Take care of parent needs!

Rather  
than give  
advice,  
swoop in,  
or  
criticize....

- *Hmmm, that does sound tricky. What options are you considering for next steps?*
- *How would you like to handle this?*
- *How can I support you in taking the first step?*
- *What if you saw a friend with this problem? What advice would you give them?*



# Empathize & Encourage

## Empathize

- Show child that you hear him and understand his concern
- Demonstrate calm, accepting attitude towards child
- Encourages open communication
- Helps child identify and label feelings and thoughts



## Encourage

- Express confidence in child's ability to cope
- Remind child of past successes and inherent strength
- Engage child in problem solving

# Empathize and Encourage

YOU CAN DO IT.

- “I know you’re worried about talking to your teacher about your math grade. That can be hard. You’ve managed tough conversations before. I know you can handle it again.”



# Goal Setting and Contracting

One goal our family wants to focus on is: \_\_\_\_\_

Some small steps to achieve independence in this goal are:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

An achievable goal for this week is: \_\_\_\_\_

Caregiver's job: \_\_\_\_\_

Young adult's job: \_\_\_\_\_



# Goal Setting and Contracting

One goal our family wants to focus on is: Mark completing financial aid paperwork for college

Some small steps to achieve independence in this goal are:

1. Research required documents online
2. Meet with school team to ask questions
3. Compile documents
4. Fill in relevant information about myself

An achievable goal for this week is: Do 15 minutes of research

Caregiver's job: Provide reminders, offer assistance in locating documents

Young adult's job: Sit down at computer without distractions to learn about the process



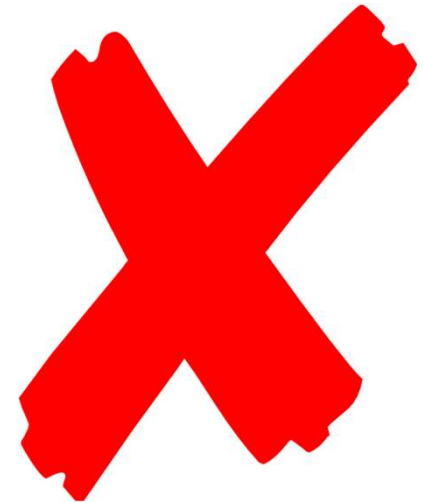
# Parenting and Teacher “Do’s”

- Be a “coping model”
- Praise small steps
- Express confidence in the youth
- Resist urges for over-involvement
- Ask for help from the community when possible
- Collaborate on first steps
- Provide prompts and reminders for coping skills
- Give more chances to try, try again
- Manage your own distress!



# “Don’ts”

- Agree with or model anxiety
- Model “mastery” only
- Reinforce avoidance
- Accommodate by completing tasks for the youth
- Criticize the youth for experiencing anxiety or being lazy when depressed
- Focus on the negative
- Praise for the sake of praising
  
- For schools----go light on accommodations and limit the time they are in effect:
  - *Janie will take her exams in a separate room for the next month while she works towards her goal of taking exams in class.*



# Ready to thrive?

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Assumes responsibility for self care

Manages age-appropriate developmental tasks

Anticipates next steps

Effectively problem solves

Healthy reliance on supports

Recognizes when to seek help

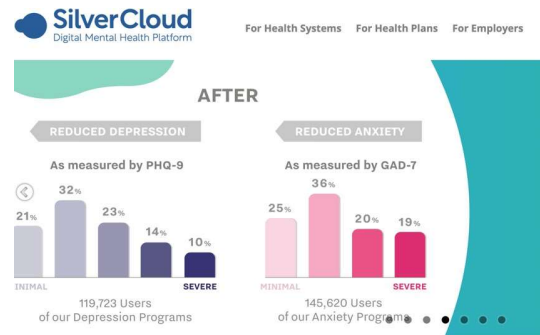
# For more information

- [www.effectivechildtherapy.org](http://www.effectivechildtherapy.org)
  - Excellent site with videos for parents about childhood behavioral and mental health conditions
- [www.anxietycanada.com](http://www.anxietycanada.com)
  - Downloadable app (MindShift) and plenty of handouts and information about anxiety
- [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)
  - Anxiety & Depression Association of America, consumer and professional organization with great resources





**MindShift**  
The Totally Free Scientifically Based Anxiety Tool



**Calm**

**Find Your Calm**

Our goal is to help you improve your health and happiness.

What can we help with today?

- Improve sleep quality
- Reduce stress or anxiety
- Improve focus
- Self-improvement
- Something else

A little help from technology



# Thank You for Joining Us!

Lauren Hoffman, Psy.D.

[lauren@laurenhoffmanpsych.com](mailto:lauren@laurenhoffmanpsych.com)

