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Depression and Anxiety

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Module: Depression and Anxiety

Overview & rationale

This module will explore many aspects of depression and anxiety and how individuals with these disorders are affected by them throughout their development. Students will use topical readings and videos from Sesame Street and other media sources to learn about risk and protective factors, symptoms, and treatment of depression and anxiety. Students will also explore the impacts of parental depression and anxiety in addition to children's understanding and experience with these disorders. Students will participate in activities and discussions that broaden their understanding of how these disorders can impact children and adolescents and analyze these disorders' effects on their social and cognitive development.

Potential classes: Introduction to Psychology, Developmental Psychology, Abnormal Psychology, Clinical/Counseling

Potential format: Lecture or seminar class; online, hybrid, in-person

Topical Readings

Risk/Protective Factors

- Dooley, B., Fitzgerald, A., & Giollabhui, N. (2015). The risk and protective factors associated with depression and anxiety in a national sample of Irish adolescents. *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine, 32*(1), 93-105. <https://doi:10.1017/ipm.2014.83>
- Hidaka B. H. (2012). Depression as a disease of modernity: Explanations for increasing prevalence. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 140*(3), 205–214. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2011.12.036>
- Menéndez-Aller, Á., Postigo, Á., Montes-Álvarez, P., González-Primo, F. J., & García-Cueto, E. (2020). Humor as a protective factor against anxiety and depression. *International Journal of Clinical and Health Psychology, 20*(1), 38-45. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijchp.2019.12.002>

Attitudes

- Connery, H., & Davidson, K. M. (2006). A survey of attitudes to depression in the general public: A comparison of age and gender differences. *Journal of Mental Health, 15*(2), 179-189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638230600608818>
- Hansson, L., Jormfeldt, H., Svedberg, P., & Svensson, B. (2013). Mental health professionals' attitudes towards people with mental illness: Do they differ from attitudes held by people with mental illness? *International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 59*(1), 48-54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764011423176>

Issakainen, M. (2015). Young people's views of communicating their depression. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 20(1), 86-99.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2013.770767>

Treatment/Self-help

DeAngelis, T. (2022, October 1). Anxiety among kids is on the rise. Wider access to CBT may provide needed solutions. *Monitor on Psychology*, 53(7).

<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2022/10/child-anxiety-treatment>

- Alternate to Stein and Sareen (2015) for entry-level classes, could be read in addition to Stein and Sareen

Lambert, J., Barnstable, G., Minter, E., Cooper, J., & McEwan, D. (2022). Taking a one-week break from social media improves well-being, depression, and anxiety: A randomized controlled trial. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 25(5), 287-293.

<https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2021.0324>

Saeed, S. A., Cunningham, K., & Bloch, R. M. (2019). Depression and anxiety disorders: Benefits of exercise, yoga, and meditation. *American Family Physician*, 99(10), 620-627.
https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2019/0515/p620.html?cmpid=em_AFP_20190318

Stein, M. B., & Sareen, J. (2015). Generalized anxiety disorder. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 373(21), 2059-2068. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMcp1502514>

- For Clinical, Counseling, Abnormal, or upper-level classes

Video clips

Regulating feelings/Meditation

These videos could be useful clips for Introduction to Psychology, Developmental Psychology, and Abnormal Psychology classes as they introduce students to several emotion regulation techniques and open up discussion on individual differences.

▶ Sesame Street Monster Meditation #1: I-Sense with Cookie Monster and Headspace 3:06

- Summary: Cookie Monster and Andy practice a meditation technique.

▶ Sesame Street Monster Meditation #3: Focus Rhyme with Grover and Headspace 3:15

- Summary: Grover and Andy practice a breathing meditation technique using a rhyme.

▶ Sesame Street Monster Meditation #5: Belly Buddy Breathing with Rosita and Headspace 3:06

- Summary: Rosita and Andy practice belly breathing

Slow Down and Settle Down 1:40

- Summary: Abby shows a method using a bottle of glitter for calming down while anxious.

▶ Elmo Feels Afraid 1:49

- This clip shows Elmo hiding in a fort to stay away from germs, shining a light on feelings of anxiety that many children developed due to the pandemic.

Background Information

These videos could be good clips for Introduction to Psychology and Abnormal Psychology classes as they provide a good overview of anxiety and depression.

▶ What's normal anxiety -- and what's an anxiety disorder? | Body Stuff with Dr. Jen Gunter 5:10

- Summary: Dr. Jen Gunter gives a brief overview of the temporary feeling of anxiety and when that becomes an anxiety disorder,

▶ What is depression? | APA 2:11

- Summary: A brief overview of depression symptoms and treatment.

▶ The Science of Depression 3:45

- Summary: A brief overview of the neurobiology of depression

Activities

Shorter Activities (1-2 Class Periods)

- In class, watch Monster Meditation [#1](#), [#3](#), and [#5](#). Splitting students into groups of 2-4, invite a discussion on the following questions: In what situations may meditation be the most beneficial to an individual? For example, if the sound of fireworks startles an individual, the most helpful way for them to reduce stress may be meditative breathing exercises. On the other hand, when faced with a fight or misunderstanding with a friend, it may be better to talk the situation out with the other person to relieve stress rather than engaging in meditation. In cases where mediation may not be the best strategy, what are alternative methods of stress management one can use regularly? What strategies work best for younger versus older children? Next, have students work independently to design their own method of anxiety relief. It does not have to be meditation. Instruct students to write clear steps of their practice so that people of all ages could easily use their method. Students can make two versions (one for children, one for adults) if the method needs to be slightly modified. For example, a student may choose to adapt the well-known “5,4,3,2,1” method about what one sees, feels, hears, tastes and smells, to draw them all instead of only thinking about them. Another student might create a video outlining proper breathing exercises. Invite students to share their method with the class, giving them a look at how their peers approach the management of stress and anxiety.
 - Students may use Sesame Workshop’s [‘Watching for Signs of Stress’](#) as an additional resource.
- In class, pass out copies of the [supplemental handout](#) and ask students to consider if the action in each scenario is mostly “normal” or “abnormal.” After they complete the handout, have students watch [Body Stuff with Dr. Jen Gunter](#) in class. Pose the following idea: Different levels of anxiety or depression can be considered “normal” or “abnormal”. Without proper context, it can be difficult to discern whether one’s emotions/behaviors are healthy or disordered. Next, present the context of each scenario which may lead

students to reconsider the ‘obvious’ answer, and ask them to discuss why the new context may have changed their initial thoughts. For example, “Estelle often eats grass” may be perceived as abnormal, but with the added context that “Estelle is a cat,” the behavior becomes fairly normal. In groups of 3-4, ask students to discuss the following: What do the terms “normal,” “abnormal,” and “disordered” mean? How may these concepts impact children's perceptions of those around them (e.g., behaviors of other people)? How could these be explained to children (often kids classify behaviors as “weird”) and how could a worksheet like this help kids understand why that may be negative? Consider when feelings of depression and anxiety are normal and expected, such as after a friend's death or while preparing for an important exam, and when these feelings become disordered. Invite students to watch and discuss [Sesame Street in Communities: Elmo Feels Afraid](#) to expand on this question.

- Assign Lambert et al. (2022) for students to read before class. Challenge students to spend a week, weekend, or until the next class meeting without using social media. Students are encouraged to pick a classmate to check in with and keep each other accountable. After this challenge is completed, hold an in-class discussion asking students to share how they believe social media impacts themselves, people’s mental health, and overall mood during withdrawal. Some examples of questions to pose to the class are:
 - How can the ability to access constant stimulation and entertainment impact mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression? How might such rushes of dopamine make us feel better in the moment, but potentially worse in the long run? Should there be an age limit for social media? What negative consequences are there to children using social media? What changes or policies could be made to lessen social media's impact on mental health?
- Assign Connery & Davidson (2006) and Hansson et al. (2013) to read before class. At the start of class, watch [Slow Down and Settle Down](#). Break students into groups of three to four to discuss how children are exposed to these attitudes directly and indirectly. Using their knowledge of children’s cognitive development, groups should brainstorm interventions to help parents and children identify and change these attitudes towards individuals with depression, anxiety and mental health issues more generally.
- Assign Issakainen (2015) and Hidaka (2012) for students to read before class. Split the class into groups of three to four, invite students to discuss the growing prevalence of depression and anxiety in modern society, the increasingly young onset of these disorders, as well as young people’s attitudes towards speaking about their mental health struggles.

Longer Projects

- Assign Stein & Sareen (2015), Saeed et al. (2019), and DeAngelis (2022) for students to read before class. Split the class into groups of four or five to discuss their thoughts on the articles. In addition, have students consider the differences between their beliefs and the actual answers to the following questions:

- Using Stein & Sareen (2015), have students detail how anxiety presents itself in children and primary care. What methods of therapy does this article recommend for children, adolescents, and adults, and how do they differ or relate? Why do you think these treatments may differ in relation to cognitive and social development? How do these treatment options differ in accessibility?
- Using information from the articles, invite students to work alone or in pairs to create a public-facing product geared towards children and adolescents with generalized anxiety disorder or those who may know someone who has it. For example, students may create a pamphlet, YouTube video, TikTok, Instagram reel, poster, or newsletter outlining the following: What are the characteristics of generalized anxiety disorder and how might they affect different age groups and social groups? How is generalized anxiety disorder diagnosed and does it increase the risk of other mental and physical health conditions? What are management/treatment options for this disorder and how can they be accessed? Encourage students to conduct further research from reputable sources on the disorder to include in their final product.
- Note: this assignment is best applied in Clinical and Abnormal Psychology courses.

Supplemental Materials

For classes interested in parenting/developmental aspects of anxiety and depression:

- Ebrahimi, L., Amiri, M., Mohamadlou, M., & Rezapur, R. (2017). Attachment styles, parenting styles, and depression. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, *15*, 1064-1068.
- McCabe, K. M., Zerr, A., Cook, M., Ringlee, L., & Yeh, M. (2022). The relation between parent mental health and child internalizing symptoms in parent–child interaction therapy. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, *31*(8), 2065-2076.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-022-02254-9>
- Activity: Have students read Ebrahimi et al. (2017) and McCabe et al. (2022) before class (they may also utilize Sesame Workshop ‘Watching for Signs of Stress’). In class, split students into two groups, one focusing on how parent-child interactions/relationships influence anxiety, and the other on depression. Ask students to discuss the following questions: What are common parenting practices that can be harmful to mental health? How might parents change their interactions with their child to reduce risk of depression and anxiety? What are barriers that prevent parents from making these changes?
 - For a longer project, students could create some type of media that shows parents what harmful behaviors they should avoid or helpful behaviors they should implement toward their child. For example- a student could create a flier that shows the negative impact of spanking, or they could make a TikTok encouraging gentle parenting.

A page with resources related to stress was provided by Sesame Street Workshop.

<https://sesameworkshop.org/resources/watching-signs-stress/>