
Supporting vs. Enabling:

Helping loved ones with Anxiety Disorders

— Amanda Ramirez, PhD & Tess Collett, MSW —
Utah Center for Evidence Based Treatment

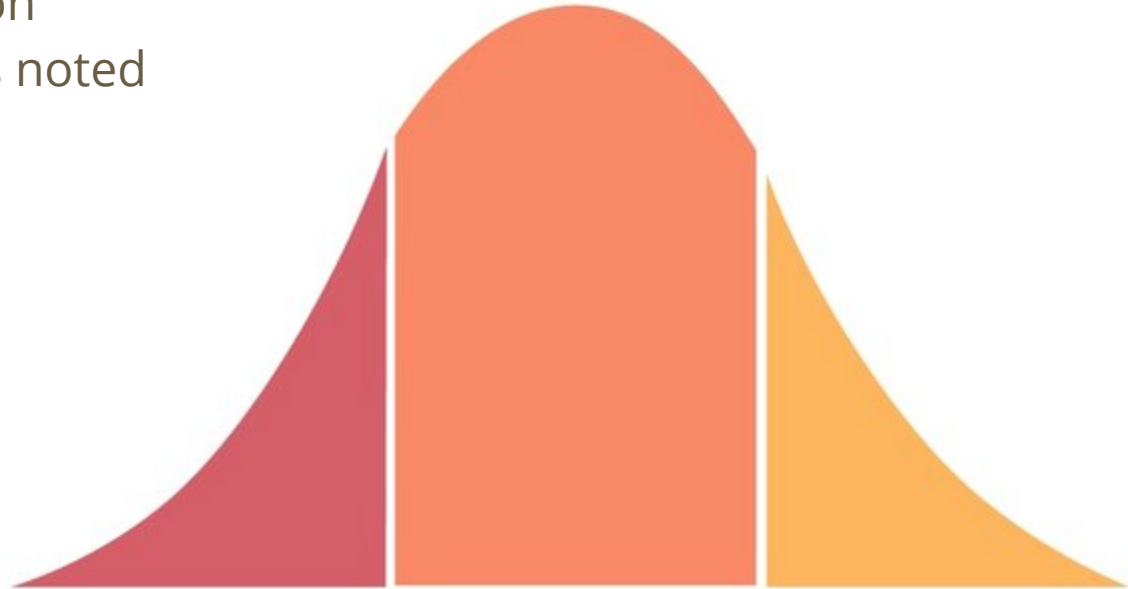
Objectives

- First, we will discuss the development of anxiety disorders and the way families may unintentionally reinforce ineffective coping styles.
- Specifically, we will review how to differentiate between enabling and supportive behaviors.
- Second, we will examine the research on effective ways to provide support, without reinforcing ineffective behavior patterns.
- This will include discussion around the role of individual, family, and religious values in the management and treatment of anxiety disorders.
- Finally, we will address benefits of family members in evidence-based treatments for anxiety.

Anxiety vs. Anxiety Disorders

Normal Distribution of Anxiety

- Anxiety is a normal emotion
- Disordered Anxiety causes noted interference
- Anxiety levels can change



Do you have a loved one with an anxiety disorder?

Yes

No

Origins of Anxiety

Anxiety is caused by:

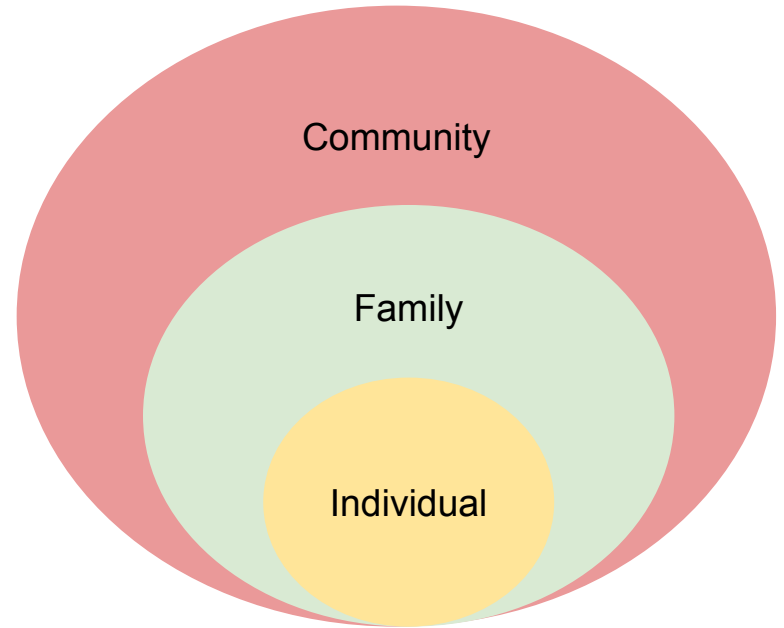
- **Biology:**
 - Genetics
 - Neuropsychology
 - Nervous System: Flight or Fight Response

Responses to anxiety are often learned behaviors that result from a fear or perceived threat to a person's health/happiness

What Influences Anxiety?

Socio-Ecological Model

- Individual
 - Beliefs, Thoughts/Feelings, Experience, Personality, Skills
- Family/Close Contacts
 - Culture, Education, Modeling, Expectations, Reactions, Stressors
- Community
 - Religion, Stigma, Media, Policies, Societal Expectations



What Are Values?

What are some of your values?



What's the function of the behavior?

Behaviorism: **Antecedent** -> **Behavior** -> **Consequence (ABC)**

A) Enter into a room full of people (anxiety goes up) ->

B) Leave the room -> **C)** Anxiety goes away



The person's response to the room full of people is negatively reinforced (provides relief, increasing the behavior by taking something away).

What would happen if we said, "That's okay. You did your best. We can stay away from rooms full of people."

Our Values: Family, Comfort, Community, Truth

Understanding the function

A) Mom leaves the room -> **B)** Child Cries -> **C)** Mom rushes back



The behavior here is positively reinforced (increasing the behavior by adding something)

What would happen if we always rush to pick our child up from school when they are worried about us?

Our Values: Family, Support, Protect, Provide For

Why is this important?

Sometimes we end up reinforcing the behavior when our intention is to help.

This is further complicated by an individual's thoughts, feelings, and other behaviors.

Understanding the function of the behavior and what we may be reinforcing helps us to figure out how to respond effectively.

Helping someone with anxiety can feel counterintuitive and may feel like it's going against our values in the short-term.

Understanding your long-term vs. short-term goals will be key.

It gets complicated.

Your partner suffers from OCD. It takes anywhere between 30 minutes to 2 hours to get ready for work in the morning. You carpool to work.

A) Partner does morning ritual and takes an extra 45 minutes compared to what you expected. **B)** You ignore it. **C)** You are 30 minutes late to work.

Is this supporting or enabling?

Supporting

Enabling

Does the OCD behavior change as a result of ignoring?

Yes

No

So what are your options?

A) Same antecedent, **B)** You tell them to stop their rituals and get in the car.

Our Values: Family, Work, Responsibilities, Support, Limit setting

What's the consequence of telling them to stop their rituals and get in the car?

So what would be the effective response that is more in-line with your values?

How can you support your loved one in making long-term gains without enabling them or making it worse?

Changing the behavior

Enabling

Supporting

(Un)intentionally encouraging avoidance of places, experiences, including therapy

Making excuses for the behavior

Fixing the problem so they avoid the consequences

Making threats, blaming or punishing.

Monitoring and controlling their schedule

Not being on the same page with other family members or supports.

Ignoring the behavior. Know why you are ignoring.

“You have a choice between doing X and Y.” “You can do it!” Small steps vs. big steps

Sit with them. Wait it out. Are we avoiding or taking time to regroup and try again?

Help them problem solve.

Validating the emotion. Find the colonel of truth in their experience.

- “This is hard for you.”
- “I can tell this is really difficult.”

Being clear on expectations and limits.

Asking for as-needed support from a therapist.

Allowing them to experience natural consequences.

Celebrate/reinforce small steps in and out of treatment.

Treatment

What is Evidence-Based Treatment?

Evidence-Based Treatment

- Standard
 - Number of studies
 - Quality of studies
 - Experts agree treatment works
- Common Components
 - Trained clinicians, assessment, informed consent, consultation, targets, adherence, measurement, time-limited, graduation.

EBT for Anxiety Disorders

- CBT, ACT, ERP, IPT, DBT, etc.



Treatment

Individual and Religious Values

Individual Values

- Values Guide Goals
 - Process of identifying values
 - Inform long-term and short-term goals
- Values Inform Distress
 - Values-inconsistent
 - Unclear on values

Religious Values

- Common Religious Values
 - Community, Knowledge, Truth
- Common LDS Values
 - Family, Good Works, Faith, Endurance, Practice, Service, Compassion, Grace, Justice, Forgiveness



Treatment

Where does family come in?

Family's Role in Treatment

- Support and Validate
- Information source
- Safe place for practice
- Continued encouragement of treatment and facing fears
- Member of team

General Guide

- Do's
 - Self-Care
 - Work on own anxiety
 - Set limits
 - Modify expectations
 - Cheerlead
 - Allow natural consequences
- Try Not To's
 - Criticize
 - Place blame
 - Become discouraged
 - Feel responsible
 - Be rigid



Questions?

Agenda

1. Development of Anxiety Disorders
2. What's the purpose of the behavior?
3. Changing the behavior
4. The role of individual and religious values in treatment
5. The role of family members in evidence based treatment
6. Questions