

Practical Strategies to Support High School-Aged Youth with School Attendance

November 23, 2020

Speakers

Sarah Anderson, PhD, RPsych, Julie Collette, MC, RCC, & Paula Foran, MEd, RCC

Panelists

Rosalind Catchpole, PhD, RPsych & Natasha Gates, MEd

A Collaboration Between

BC Children's Hospital, Vancouver Child & Youth Mental Health, The Vancouver School Board, & Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre



Welcome! We will begin the presentation shortly. Please note that your microphones have been muted automatically.

Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre



- We help families across the province by:
- Helping with understanding and navigating the mental health system
- Listening and offering peer support, and
- Connecting families to resources and tools.

Before We Begin...

- This information applies to the context in British Columbia. Some information is specific to the Vancouver School Board. If you are in another jurisdiction please consult local health and school authorities for further information.
- If you/your child, or someone you care about is having a mental health or substance use crisis: Call [911](#) or go to your local hospital's emergency room

Housekeeping

- Attendees are automatically muted and cameras are turned off.
- Please submit technical questions or comments through the “Chat” function.
- The webinar will be recorded.
- At the end of the webinar, a survey will pop up that we invite you to complete.
- Please submit questions for the speakers through the “Q&A” function. There has been an option enabled where you can vote for questions that you want answered.
 - If you wish to remain anonymous, before submitting your question change your name via zoom



Overview of Webinar Series

Part 1

Challenges with School Attendance:
Introduction for Parents & Caregivers

Part 2 is split by age

Practical Strategies to Support School
Attendance in:

- Elementary School-Aged Children
- High School-Aged Youth (Today!)

Land Acknowledgments

Speakers and panelists acknowledge with immense gratitude that they live, work, and play on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkwəʔəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nation.



Speakers Today

Sarah Anderson, PhD, RPsych (she/her)

Post-doctoral Fellow, Mood & Anxiety Disorders Clinic
BC Children's Hospital & UBC Psychiatry



Julie Collette, MC, RCC (she/her)

VCH CYMH Hospital & School Liaison Clinician



Paula Foran, MEd, RCC (she/her)

VSB District Counsellor, Mental Health



Panelists Today



Rosalind Catchpole, PhD, RPsych (she/her)

Psychologist and Clinic Head, Mood & Anxiety Disorders
Clinic, BC Children's Hospital



Natasha Gates, MEd (she/her)

VSB District Secondary Counsellor

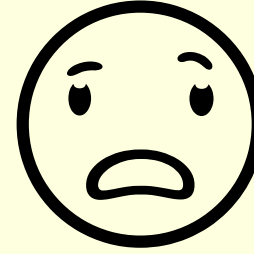


WHAT ARE WE COVERING TODAY?



- What is anxiety and how does it impact youth?
- How to set youth with heightened anxiety up for success
- Identifying supports and building a team
- Effectively harnessing support from your child's school
- Concrete steps to support your child's school attendance
- Troubleshooting
- Q&A

WHAT IS ANXIETY?



- a **NORMAL & NECESSARY** human experience
- Uncomfortable (sometimes **VERY** uncomfortable) but not **HARMFUL**

False alarm!

Anxiety during High School-Age

- Common types of stress/anxiety include...
 - Worries about peers and fitting in
 - Concern about academics
 - Worries about the future
 - Difficulties speaking up in class/presenting
- Which may be complemented by...
 - Sleep difficulties
 - Social challenges or stressors
 - Learning differences or academic difficulties
 - Problematic screen use / social media
 - Challenges with attention and/or concentration
 - Substance use
 - Language and/or cultural considerations

All of which can contribute to school nonattendance!



There's a Spectrum

Attends
regularly
with distress

Misses full or
partial days
once in a
while

Regularly
misses full
or partial
days

Misses
multiple full
days or weeks
at a time

Hasn't
attended
for months
or more

Step 1: Take Stock

- What areas is my teen doing well in? (e.g., sleep, physical activity, friendships, academics, certain classes, etc.) Are any of these areas ones that my teen is struggling in?
- How often is my teen getting to school?
- What is / was going on around the time that it was harder to get to school?
- How distressed am I / is my teen when it's time to go to school?
- What is my teen doing when they're not at school?
- Who is on my and my teen's 'team' (i.e., school staff, friends/family, mental health clinician [if applicable], doctor, etc.)

```
graph LR; A((Your Team)) --- B((Spiritual leaders)); A --- C((Friends & family  
Neighbors & other parents)); A --- D((After school  
care staff)); A --- E((Teachers,  
coaches,  
tutors, youth  
workers)); A --- F((Parent Support  
Groups)); A --- G((Healthcare  
professionals));
```

Your
Team

Spiritual
leaders

Friends &
family
Neighbors &
other parents

After
school
care staff

Healthcare
professionals

Teachers,
coaches,
tutors, youth
workers

Parent
Support
Groups

Core Areas of Teen Well-Being

- Social connection
- Family/caregiver or mentor connectedness
- Physical activity
- Spiritual/cultural/community connectedness
- Academic growth
- Leisure/unplugged time
- Hope
- All of which create meaning...

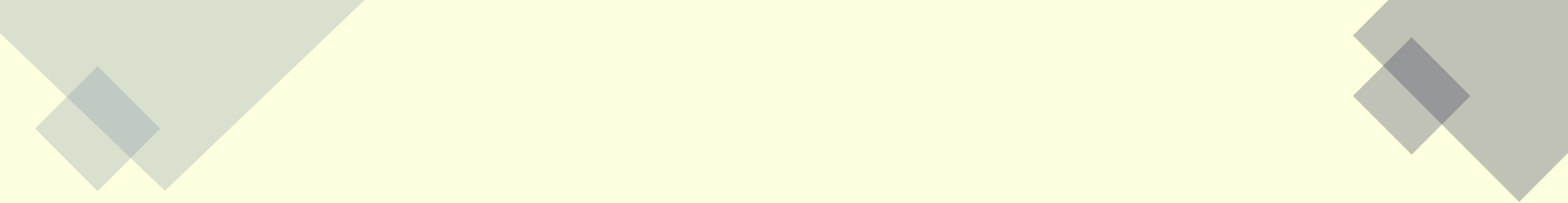


Additional Common Adolescent Barriers to School Attendance


Social challenges

Academic challenges

Executive functioning
challenges



Step 2: Setting the Stage

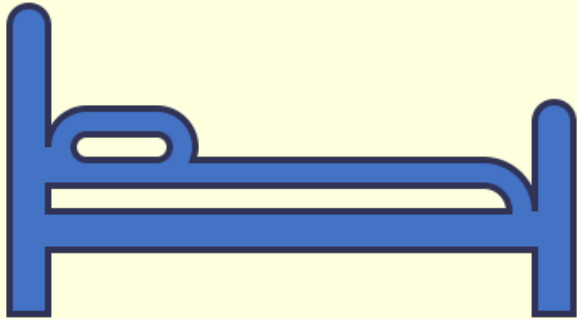
- What are those areas that I can address in advance to set my teen up for success?
 - Sleep
 - Physical activity
 - Screen / social media use
 - Anxiety-management tips
- 

Setting the Stage – Sleep

- When is your teen going to sleep and waking up?
- Strategies to support healthy sleep:
 - Sleep environment cool, dark, and quiet
 - Wind-down time 1 hour before bed
 - No daytime naps
 - Bed only for sleeping (i.e., no studying)
 - Avoid stimulation before bed (caffeine, intense physical activity, screens)
 - **Consistent** sleep and wake times (within 1-2 hours on the weekends)



Sleep Challenges – How to Help



- Collaborative goal-setting
- Removal of devices
- Reward/reinforcement system
- More severe or entrenched problems may benefit from CBT-I

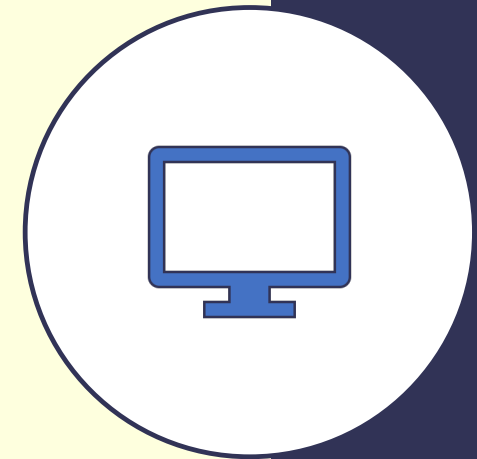
Setting the Stage – Physical Activity

- Elevates mood
- Decreases anxiety
- Elevates energy
- Helps teens regulate their bodies
- Recommendation = at least 1 hour/day of activity such as walking with friends, participating in a sport, etc.



Setting the Stage – Screen & Social Media Use

- First, understand your teen's usage
 - How much time is your child on screens (TV, phone, computer, other electronic device) each day?
 - How are they using screens? Social media?
 - Do you have family guidelines about screen use (amount and type)? Social media?
- If usage is problematic, develop a plan to help
 - Develop a tech contract
 - Setting limits
 - Set 'no tech' times
 - Model healthy usage



Setting the Stage – Tips To Manage Anxiety

- Supporting teen's independence & gentle encouragement for facing fears in small steps
- Practice, practice, practice!

- Rewards for following the plan
 - Screen time, small amount of \$, special activity

- Positive reinforcement for small “successes”
 - Be specific!

- Helping teen redirect when anxious

- Supporting teen to develop regular & predictable routines and structure

Step 3 – Talk to your Youth's School

Reach out as soon as you identify a problem

- Personnel involved in supporting students include the school counsellor, classroom teachers, resource teachers, support staff, administrators
- Information is helpful to the school to provide appropriate context and supports
- The school will determine what level of support is needed while classroom teachers use universal classroom strategies that support emotional safety

My Youth's School Based Team

- SBT considers learning complexities, social, emotional and behaviour supports and challenges that may be impacting school experience
- Recommendation could include small group or individual supports including assessments, academic testing, school counselling or outside referrals


What to Expect

The Home/School Meeting Goals:

- Collaboration with family, school and other mental health and/or medical health professionals is critical to supporting school attendance
- Creation of an individualized plan for appropriate supports like environmental changes, developing a 'Plan B', Check in/out system
- Development of realistic attendance and academic goals



Options for Supportive Learning Environments

- Smaller settings
 - Quieter spaces
 - Friendly faces
 - District Programs
- 

Step 4 – Make a Realistic Plan Together



Identify components of school that your teen is motivated to attend (e.g., to see friends.)



Collaborate with them to set goals for attending school (realistic goals vs non-negotiables)



What to say: "I hear you that you feel really anxious at school – that sounds incredibly hard and I'm so impressed you've been able to go the days you have. I know you want to get back to school to see your friends but that feels impossible right now. Why don't we start by planning a first step together?"



Identifying First Steps for School Attendance

- Collaborate with your teen and the school counsellor on a feasible plan to slowly increase their time at school
- Tailor to youth's specific strengths and stretches
- Initial goals may include:
 - Visit the school grounds
 - See a friend at school
 - Connect with a trusted school staff member
 - Join a class for 30 minutes in “audit mode”



Example Ladder for School Attendance

- ☐ Visit school grounds and meet w/ trusted staff member or friend
- ☐ Attend school for 30 mins w/o expectations to complete schoolwork ("audit mode")
- ☐ Attend school for 30 mins
- ☐ Attend school for 45 mins
- ☐ Attend school for 1 hour
- ☐ ... Continue to titrate up to full amount of expected in-person schooling

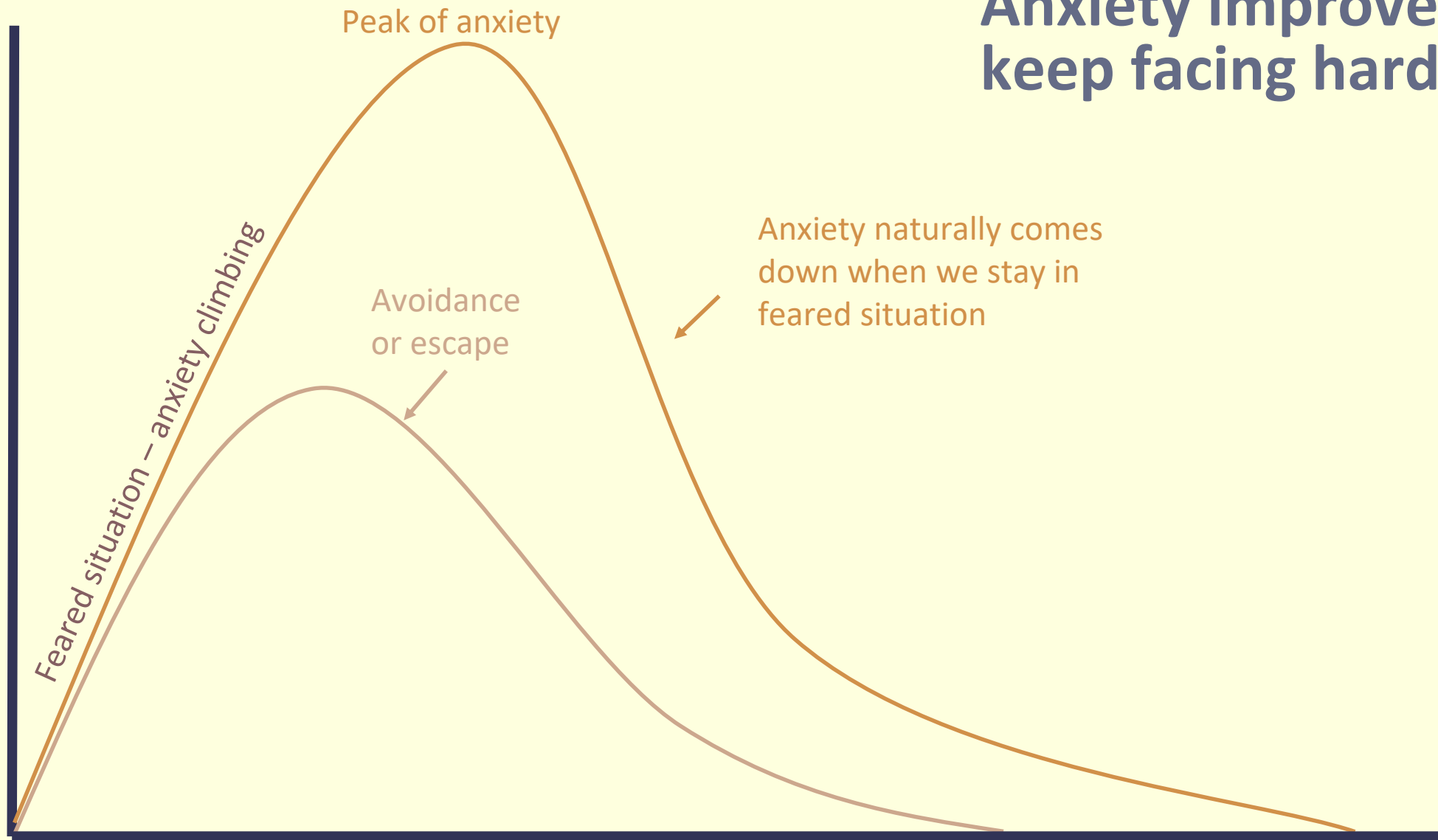
REMEMBER:

Reinforcement
for each step



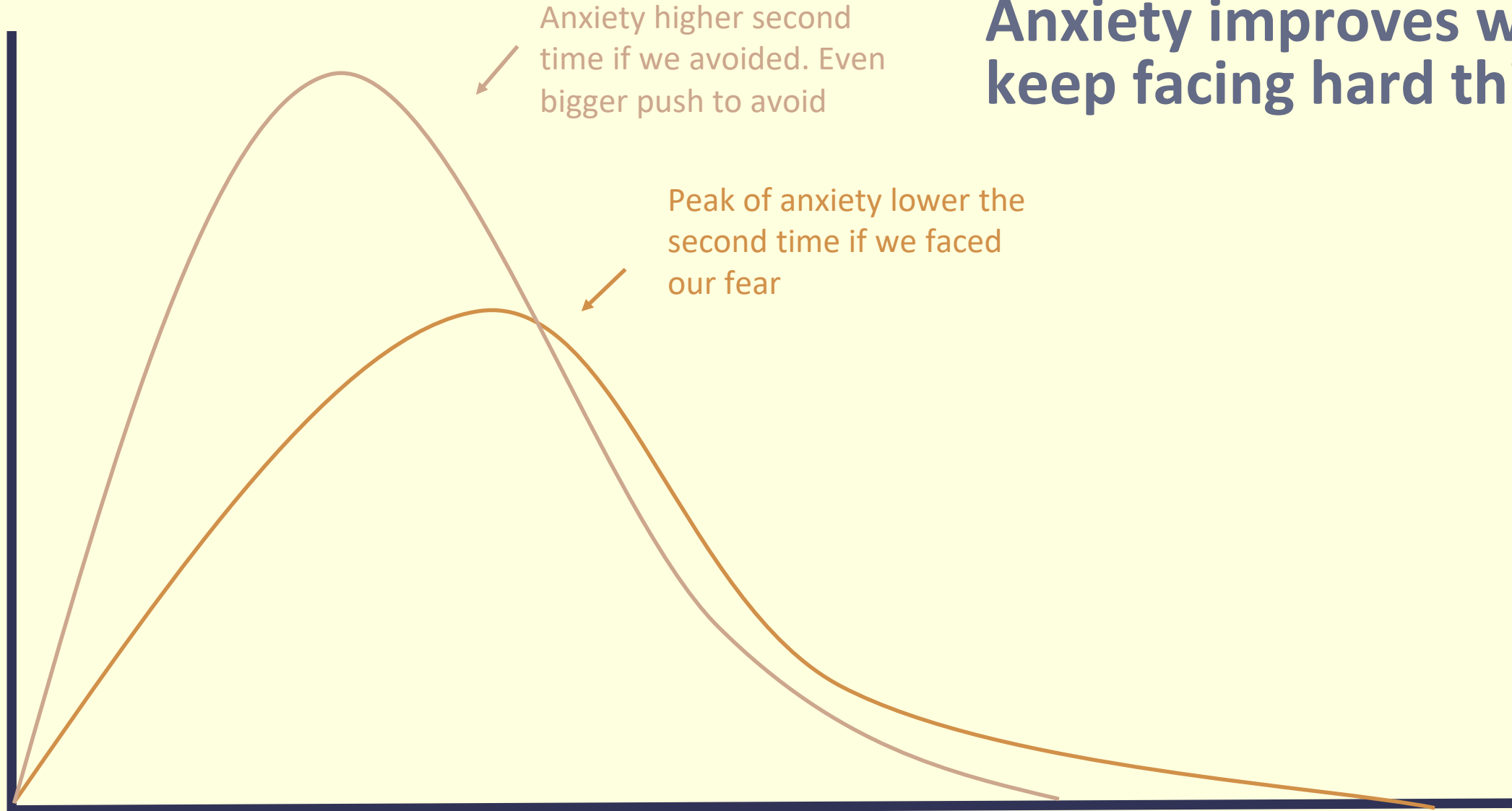
Spend roughly a
few days at each
step

Anxiety improves when we keep facing hard things



The first time we try something hard...

Anxiety improves when we keep facing hard things



The second time we try something hard...

Spectrum of School Attendance

Attends regularly with distress	Misses full or partial days once in a while	Regularly misses full or partial days	Misses multiple full days/weeks at a time	Hasn't attended for months or more
---------------------------------	---	---------------------------------------	---	------------------------------------

Spectrum of Intervention/Support

'Setting the stage' strategies	AND implement a prevention plan with school	AND implement an intervention plan with school	AND consider involving other professionals	Coordinated and intensive approach with professional support
--------------------------------	---	--	---	--

Helpful vs. Unhelpful Things to Say

Helpful/Outside Voice

- I know how difficult this is for you, AND when the anxiety “wave” subsides slightly, let’s walk to the car together.”
- I can see you’re really trying, AND I wonder what you need right now that will be helpful?

Unhelpful/Inside Voice

- You were able to go to school yesterday. I’m really late and need to go!
- I’m disappointed that you’ve been missing so much school... when I was a teenager that wasn’t even an option!

Remember: Validate child’s concerns about school attendance **AND communicate confidence in their ability to attend**

What if my teens stays at home?

- Home environment should not be fun during school hours
 - Limit access to electronics, treats, special privileges, extra attention
- If your teen continues to be motivated to stay home, be vigilant for inadvertent reinforcers (e.g., chatting with others on social media, access to snacks, attention from caregiver)

Who is Responsible for What?

- **Caregiver** is responsible for:
 - Communicating confidence in their teen
 - Making sure the home setting is **boring** during school hours
 - Ensuring youth is getting enough sleep and awake in time to attend school
- **Youth** is responsible for:
 - Being brave and going to school
- **School** (counsellor, case manager, support team, etc.) is responsible for:
 - Identifying the best schooling program for your child
 - Supporting and developing a school re-integration plan or IEP (if needed)
 - Setting up school team meetings with all players
 - Liaising with mental health clinician
- **Mental health clinician** (if applicable) is responsible for:
 - Providing individual therapy and/or parent training
 - Consulting with school team to develop school re-integration plans and/or IEPs, as needed; attending school team meetings

Step 5 – Getting Additional Support

- Parents may want additional support from a mental health clinician to help manage challenging school nonattendance, such as:
 - Setting appropriate expectations (*step-by-step plan*)
 - Setting contingencies for attendance and avoidance of school
 - Limiting any reinforcement for non-attendance (*no wifi in the day!*)
 - Responding to anxiety-driven behaviour effectively
- Here to Help; Employee & Family Assistance Program

When Does my Teen need Additional Support?

- Additional mental health challenges, engagement and interest in therapy, etc.
- Reach out to your local Child & Youth Mental Health (CYMH) team or the Foundry
- Individual support may include:
 - CBT for anxiety
 - Other therapies such as behavioural activation, social skills training, executive functioning skills training, support with substance use
- Medical management of comorbidities (severe anxiety, OCD, depression, ADHD)
- Medical support for physical health comorbidities that led to school nonattendance (chronic pain, asthma, chronic health condition, etc.)



Take Home Messages...

- Facing fears is hard but not harmful
- Identifying your 'team' members is key
- You are an essential part of supporting your teen's school attendance
- Expect some anxiety!
- Reach out for help if you need it

Resources

- Kelty Mental Health Webinar (on YouTube) 'Setting Children & Youth up for a Successful Return to School in the Era of COVID-19'
<https://youtu.be/4ZW6Ojq2uuU>
- What to Say to Kids When Nothing Seems to Work (A Practical Guide for Parents & Caregivers) – Adele Lafrance & Ashley Miller
- 'Treating Childhood and Adolescent Anxiety: A Guide for Caregivers' by Eli Lebowitz and Haim Omer
<https://keltymentalhealth.ca/collection/keltys-recommended-resources-anxiety-parentscaregiver>
- Anxiety Canada (formerly AnxietyBC)
<https://www.anxietycanada.com/>
- Kelty Mental Health <https://keltymentalhealth.ca/>
- Mindshift app

Questions?



Thank-You!!

Thank-you for joining.

Contact the Kelty Mental Health
Resource Centre:

e-mail: keltycentre@cw.bc.ca

phone (toll-free): 1-800-665-1822

