ANXIETY

& ITS MANIFESTATION IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD - ADOLESCENCE

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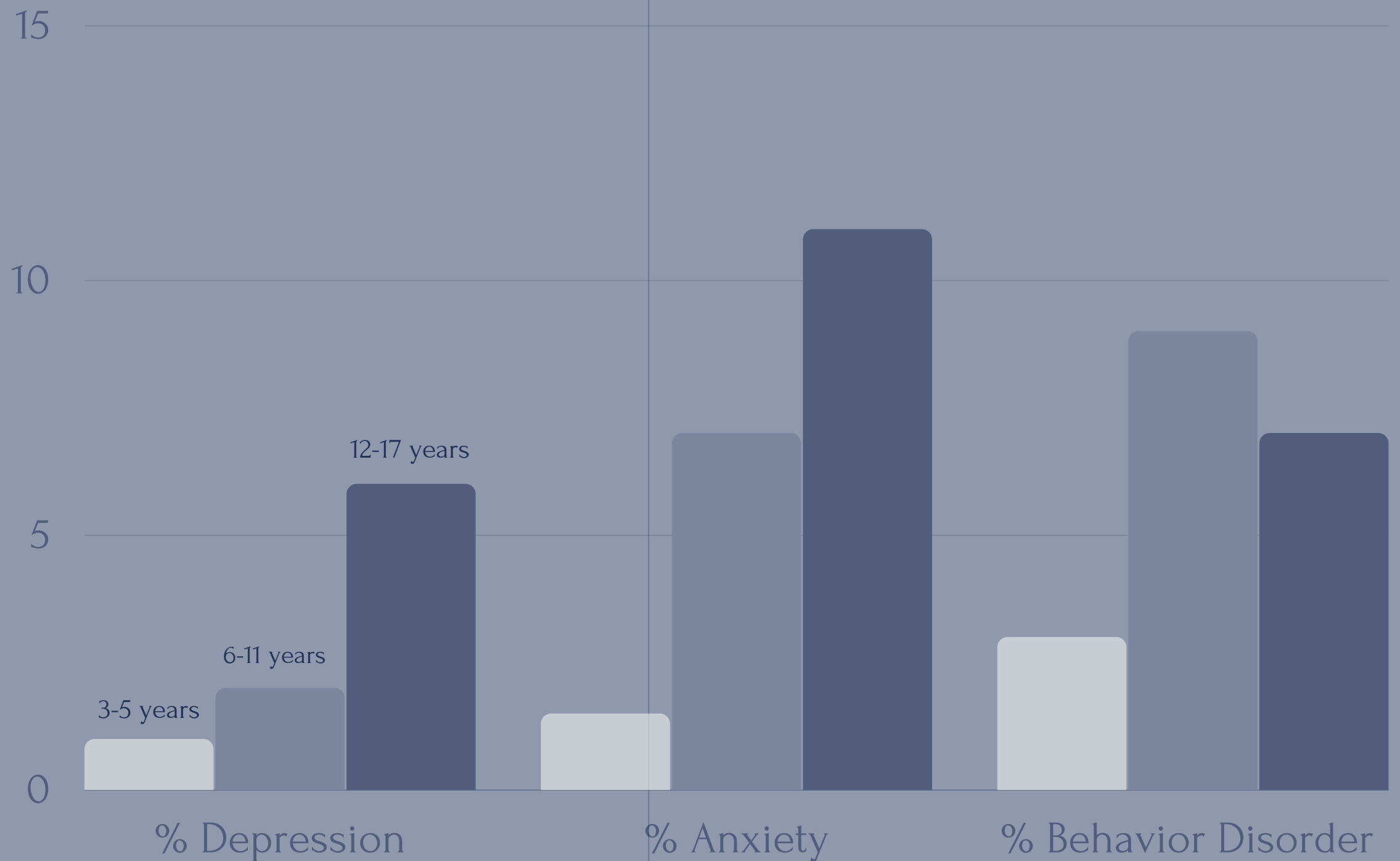Natalie Linares & Isabel Herrera

RESEARCH-BASED STATEMENT

The purpose of our research was to identify the causes of anxiety and the various milestones, warning signs, developmental influences, and familial role and impact all pertaining to middle childhood-adolescence.
We also included resources that provide insight and information in regards to this critical topic.
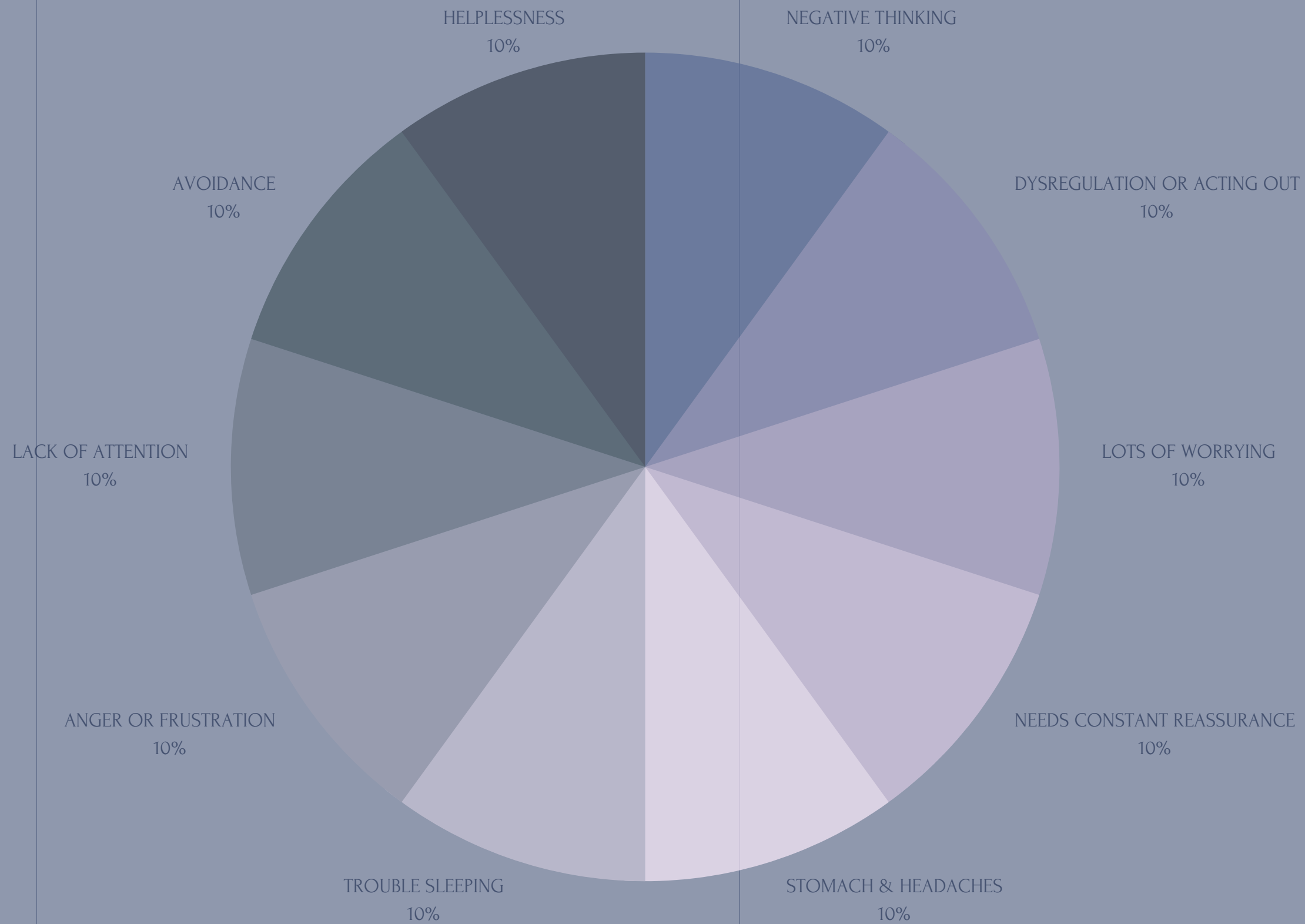
WHAT DOES ANXIETY LOOK LIKE?

"When a child does not outgrow the fears and worries that are typical in young children, or when there are so many fears and worries that they interfere with school, home, or play activities, the child may be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder."
-(CDC)

Bar chart showing percentages by age group (3-5 years, 6-11 years, 12-17 years) across % Depression, % Anxiety, and % Behavior Disorder, with a vertical axis from 0 to 15.

LOTS OF WORRYING

WHAT WE OFTEN THINK ANXIETY LOOKS LIKE IN YOUTH

HELPLESSNESS
10%

NEGATIVE THINKING
10%

AVOIDANCE
10%

DYSREGULATION OR ACTING OUT
10%

LACK OF ATTENTION
10%

LOTS OF WORRYING
10%

ANGER OR FRUSTRATION
10%

NEEDS CONSTANT REASSURANCE
10%

TROUBLE SLEEPING
10%

STOMACH & HEADACHES
10%

HOW YOUTH ACTUALLY SHOW THEY ARE FEELING ANXIETY

- All children experience some anxiety. Anxiety in children is expected and normal at specific times in development. For example, from approximately age 8 months through the preschool years, healthy youngsters may show intense distress (anxiety) at times of separation from their parents or other people with whom they are close. Young children may have short-lived fears, such as fear of the dark, storms, animals, or a fear of strangers.

- Anxious children are often overly tense or uptight. Some may seek a lot of reassurance, and their worries may interfere with activities. Parents should not dismiss their child's fears. Because anxious children may also be quiet, compliant, and eager to please, their difficulties may be missed. Parents should be alert to the signs of severe anxiety so they can intervene early to prevent complications.

UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

- Severe anxiety problems in children can be treated. Early treatment can prevent future difficulties, such as loss of friendships, failure to reach social and academic potential, and feelings of low self-esteem. Treatments may include a combination of the following: individual psychotherapy, family therapy, medications, behavioral treatments, and consultation to the school.

- If anxieties become severe and begin to interfere with the child's usual activities (for example separating from parents, attending school, and making friends), parents should consider seeking an evaluation from a qualified mental health professional or a child and adolescent psychiatrist.

(AACAP)

ROLES OF FAMILIES & CAREGIVERS

- Providing companionship, emotional support and often even economic support can have a positive impact on the student coping with a mental health problem.

- Family and caregivers can be most responsive when they understand the strengths, interests and needs of each individual child in their care.

- To make sure the individual is healthy and safe, equip them with the skills and resources to succeed and cope with their mental health.

- *Relationships between parents, caregivers, and child during early, middle, and adolescence years.*
    - -Are warm, open, and communicative
    - -Include appropriate limits
    - -Provide reasoning for rules for behavior
    - -Leads to higher self-esteem, better performance in school, and fewer negative outcomes such as depression or anxiety in teenagers.

MILESTONES
IN EARLY TEENAGE YEARS

(1) PHYSICAL

Milstones:
- rapid physical changes through hormones and puberty, students may be worried about these changes, different rates of growth, body image, and eating habits change/develop

How Anxiety Shows Up:
- stomach discomfort, rapid heart rate, flushing of the skin, perspiration, headaches, muscle tension, sleeping problems, nausea, refusing to shower, hygiene.

(2) PSYCHOSOCIAL

Milestones:
- facing peer pressure, independence, self-focused, moody, experience more stress from school, gain sense of responsibility, begins to question authority, seeking acceptance from peers, distancing from parents.

How Anxiety Shows Up:
- restlessness, fidgeting, task avoidance, rapid speech, irritability, withdrawal, perfectionism, lack of participation, failing to complete tasks, seeking easy tasks, unable to self-explore, role confusion

(3) COGNITIVE & LANGUAGE

Milestones:
- more complex thought process, able to express feelings, sense of right and wrong, increased attention span, logical thinking develops, problem solving, desire for just outcomes, figurative language

How Anxiety Shows Up:
- concentration problems, memory problems, attention problems, problem-solving difficulties, worry, and low academic performance .

MILESTONES
IN EARLY TEENAGE YEARS

(4) IDENTITY VS ROLE CONFUSION

During middle school, our students are entering into a stage of psychosocial development that psychologist Erik Erickson labels as *"identity vs. role confusion"*.

In this stage, youth are exploring their independence and developing their sense of self. They are discovering who they are!

This is an important milestone for the early teenage years. In regards to anxiety, if a child cannot explore their identity, they will be stuck and have trouble continuing to develop progressively. Anxiety can be a cause and an effect in this situation.

DEVELOPMENTAL INFLUENCES

(1) CULTURE

- Culture gives people a sense of who they are, this includes: customs, beliefs, art, language, and religion.

- It is important to show an understanding and acceptance of diverse cultures.

- Children and teens continuously learn through exposure and observation. Positive influences favorably impact development while negative influences do just the opposite. All shaping who a person is.

- Social cues can help or hinder development. This includes: speaking another language, eating different foods, and celebrating other holidays...they all affect self-image and how someone builds a belief system and understanding of self.

- When identity is at odds with the social environment due to cultural differences, it can hinder an individual's learning and lead to anxiety.

- It is important to note that anxiety is expressed differently across cultures and that one's culture directly "affects the way we express our thoughts, behaviors and emotions." More specifically, depending on one's culture, they may or may not have limited resources. Some cultures believe that anxiety should be treated and discussed, while others believe just the opposite.

DEVELOPMENTAL INFLUENCES

(2) LINGUISTICS

- **What is linguistic?**

"The study of the nature, structure, and variation of language, including phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, sociolinguistics, and pragmatics..."

- Children with speech and language impairments are at a higher risk for developing anxiety, especially in Middle/High school.

- Language impairment, rather than speech impairment alone, is most associated with persisting behaviour problems. Language-impaired youth often have social difficulties and may be bullied or socially excluded by their peers. All these components can lead to heightened anxiety.

DEVELOPMENTAL INFLUENCES

(3) SOCIAL ISSUES

- **What does a social issue entail?**

A social issue or problem is an issue that has been recognized by society as a problem that is preventing society from functioning optimally. For example: homelessness or gun violence.

- Youth are impacted by the events that transpire in their communities and beyond. For example: school shootings are a topic that have continuously become more discussed. These traumatic and tragic events are covered throughout the media and the information is accessible for students.

- This day in age, access to technology is at an all time high, which means middle school youth are exposed to the various social issues surrounding our world and country. Social media immerses them into a world of information and misinformation which can lead to heightened emotions, including anxiety.

- It is challenging for parents/guardians to stay ahead of the ball because they might not always know what their child has heard outside of the home. This is why it is vital that parents/guardians take the time to have discussion with their child(ren) about social issues in the safety of their own home.

- One example of how a conversation can unfold is asking them about a current event and how that current event "makes them feel..."

- The family is the primary social group of every child, thus the teachings from the family will have a great impact in adolescent years

- In middle school, an adolescent should have already learned values, skills, and socialization based on their upbringing.

- The quality of parenting and economic status plays an important role in the child's physical, cognitive, language, and psychosocial development.

- Families should be sensitive and patient to the many emotional, physical, and social changes that the adolescent undergoes during the middle school years.

"The way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice."
-Peggy O'Mara

FAMILY
IMPACT
ON
DEVELOPMENT

(1) PHYSICAL

Middle school years can be tough for adolescents - they undergo physical changes that can cause much anxiety.

- It is critical that adolescents feel loved and supported by their families during this time of their lives.

Caregivers should promote and model a healthy lifestyle, this includes:

- adequate sleep
- eat a well balanced diet
- stay active
- keep up with regular health check ups and immunizations

FAMILY IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT

(2) COGNITIVE

It is essential that caregivers provide harmony and stability for healthy cognitive growth.

The parenting style a family chooses to use will have an impact on cognitive development in the middle school child/adolescent

- Warm/support vs. control/structure parenting
- At this age, house rules and structure are still important because of the many changes occurring: academics, sports, friendships, puberty, etc.
- An attentive, responsive parent can help the child cope with anxiety; importantly, model healthy ways to manage stress, changes and life's challenges.

Low-income families will have fewer enriching experiences and learning resources that can affect cognitive growth.

A negative home environment can lead to:

- poor language skills
- behavior problems
- deficits in academic achievement
- high school graduation
- teen parenthood
- adult employment & earnings

FAMILY
IMPACT
ON
DEVELOPMENT

(3) PSYCHOSOCIAL

During middle childhood and early adolescence, children work to form their identities, thus tend to pull away from their parents and spend more time with peers.

- Caregivers should nurture the child's friendships and guide them toward developing healthy relationships

The parenting approach should be modified:

- to accommodate independence and autonomy
- promote self-esteem, competence, and social responsibility
- Offer more of a distal supervision and monitoring as they spend more time away from parents

Healthy experiences and interaction with family will help the adolescent become a positive contributing member of our society

FAMILY IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT

"Create memories, not expectations"

Responsible parenting: Create memories, not expectations | Austeja Landsbergi...

Watch later   Share

Watch on ▶ YouTube

FAMILY
IMPACT
ON
DEVELOPMENT

FAMILY FRIENDLY RESOURCES
LEARN THE SIGNS & ACT EARLY

(1) MODEL BEHAVIOR BY USING POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES

- Deep breathing
- Remind them of their past successes
- Establish and maintain a routine
- Rewarding their efforts

Link: Anxiety in Middle School | Tips to Help Address Your Child's Anxiety | Understood - For learning and thinking differences

(2) EFFECTIVE PARENTING PRACTICES

- Responding to children in a predictable manner
- Showing warmth and sensitivity
- Using appropriate discipline without harsh consequences
- Speak on health and safety
- Go over household rules

Link: Child Development Basics | CDC

FAMILY FRIENDLY RESOURCES
LEARN THE SIGNS & ACT EARLY

(3) STAYING HEALTHY

- Have a meal plan (some children may react differently to some types of foods)
- Participate in physical activities (sports)
- Getting the recommended amount of sleep (8-10 hours of sleep per night)
- Practice mindfulness/ relaxation techniques (yoga, meditation, breathing exercises)

Remember: This is based on age

Link: Anxiety and depression in children: Get the facts | CDC Sleep in Middle and High School Students (cdc.gov)

FINDING TREATMENT

- Psychologist Locator, a service of the American Psychological Association (APA) Practice Organization.

- Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist Finder, a research tool by the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP).

- Find a Cognitive Behavioral Therapist, a search tool by the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies.

- If you need help finding treatment facilities, visit MentalHealth.gov.

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