

Just Between Us

We're anxious about normal anxiety



By William C. Nichols Ed.D.

Somewhere, somehow many of us pick up the idea that our behavior should be effortless and perfect.

Coping with life should be easy. We think that we should be able to meet difficulties without difficulty. If we become anxious in facing a new situation, for example, this is upsetting to us.

We assume that others don't experience such anxiety or difficulty. Because we do, we think that something is wrong with us.

Sometimes the problems of coping are compounded for us. A spiral is set off.

Experiencing unexpected difficulty or anxiety causes further feelings of upset. The mere fact that we are anxious causes us to feel even more anxious. Upset feeds off upset.

Occasionally we may be unable to complete the task that we face. If we do manage to get through with it, we expend much more effort and energy than others seem to use in comparable situations. Things are harder for us than is necessary because of the anxiety spiral.

WHAT IS MISSING is a baseline for judging normal behavior. We lack an appropriate gauge for

measuring what is happening to us.

Our ignorance about human behavior comes from many and varied sources. Two can be readily identified.

One is the "assumption of adult omnipotence." As children, we tend to feel that adults are all-powerful. We usually don't see adults experiencing difficulty in doing things. Certainly, by comparison with ourselves when we were children, they do things easily.

As we grow up some of us do not change this attitude toward others. Unwittingly, we continue to view ourselves as childlike and others as "omnipotent adults."

"False reassurance" is another common source of ignorance and confusion for us.

As children we sometimes are told by others that we shouldn't feel uncertain or uncomfortable. "It's all right." "Don't be afraid." "There's nothing to it." "It's easy, give it a try."

Such well-meaning attempts to reassure us may do more harm than good. Many youngsters never learn that the adults are assuming the presence of anxiety and uncertainty.

The unsuspecting adults don't know that they are

heard as calling for effortless behavior. Children have little opportunity to "test reality."

Youngsters may conclude that something is wrong with them because they are afraid. Things don't seem easy. They don't seem all right.

AS ADULTS we can be in a different position.

We can examine our experiences more knowledgeably than children. We have many more external sources against which we can check our perceptions.

A simple baseline for judging normal behavior includes two significant parts. Understanding and accepting them can help us to avoid getting into a spiral.

First, it is normal to feel insecure, uncertain, or frustrated in certain circumstances. Whenever we get into unfamiliar situations, it is normal to feel uncertain.

Starting a new job or learning a new task causes us to feel awkward. Feeling "all thumbs" or as if we have "two left feet" is to be expected.

Typically, such feelings recede as we become more familiar with the new task and role. There are many other situations in which feeling uncomfort-

able is par for the course.

SECOND, WE ARE not alone in our feelings. Others do have the same kinds of feelings that we have in unfamiliar circumstances.

We sometimes feel as if others are "superpersons" who have no difficulties. Seemingly, they do things with ease. We may compare ourselves unfavorably with them.

The truth is that we usually don't know what is happening inside other persons. They may not be having very much trouble in coping with the situation. Or they may be masking their anxiety very well.

The chances are that they also are undergoing difficulty in dealing with the problems in the situation. If there ever were "superpersons" around—which is doubtful—they are a rare, endangered species today. Most of us are "more simply human than otherwise."

Understanding that anxiety is a normal human emotion experienced by others is important in our coping. Such understanding will not help us to avoid normal anxiety or difficulties in living. But it can help us to avoid becoming "anxious because we are anxious."

Ask the Educator

Teacher calls mother at work



JOSEPH HADDAD

QUESTION: My 11-year-old sixth grade son is full of life and mischief. His teacher has called me at work three times to talk with me about it.

I don't think these problems are serious enough to interrupt me at my job. Also, it's embarrassing. Teachers are paid good money nowadays and should be able to teach and control small children with out bothering parents at work.

I must work in order to pay the local school tax which pays that teacher's salary. I'm fed up. What with high taxes and lazy teachers who earn more than me, I shouldn't be asked to do their job, too.

How can I keep the school people from hassling me at work.

Mrs. A. S.

ANSWER: I am sorry, Mrs. A. S., but I think you're wrong. You had better pay attention to your son's school behavior before it develops into more serious incidents.

He couldn't be learning optimally if he is a chronic classroom behavior problem. Your son is showing quite clearly the result of your lack of involvement in his school life.

Thank goodness your son's teacher is persistent. I hope she continues to prod you until you find you can no longer brush off the school's concern.

Teachers work very hard for their pay and deserve every penny they earn. It has only been during the last 10

years or so that teacher salaries have risen to a respectable level.

Teachers, like nurses, have traditionally been expected to minister to us for hardly a thank-you.

SADLY, THERE are increasing numbers of parents who wish to hold schools responsible for child rearing as well as teaching.

There is no denying that schools do teach right and wrong and basic ethics, but we can't expect them to replace the family in moral training.

Please heed your teacher's warning and involve yourself in your son's school life. In just two or three years he will be well into adolescence and less amenable to your influence. You really don't have much time.

Now In Progress

Winter Sale

Save 25% to 50% off our Scandinavian and domestic furniture



Our Winter Sale has started and now is the time to take advantage of great savings on all our furnishings and accessories. Like our dining tables and chairs. We have a large selection of sizes, shapes and styles. If you are looking for teak, rosewood, or glass and chrome, we have the leaders in contemporary dining tables and chairs—Bolling, Dytund, Thavel Coggin. And, right now, some dining sets are priced as low as \$368.00

Solid Teak
Reg. \$1969.00
NOW \$1478⁰⁰

scan
design

bransch interiors, inc.

West Bloomfield
3325 Orchard Lake Road
Keego Harbor, MI 48033
626-0031

Troy
1081 E. Long Lake Road
Troy, MI 48068
528-9050

Store Hours: Mon., Thurs., Fri. 10:00-9:00. Tues., Sat. 10:00-5:30. Sunday 12:00-5:00. Closed Wednesday.

Michigan Chandelier Co.

ANNUAL JANUARY LAMP SALE!

SAVE 10% to 40% OFF!

EVERY TABLE AND FLOOR LAMP IN STOCK REDUCED!

Famous makers include Stiffel, Koch + Lowy, Laurel, Edward Alden and many others!

Classic To Contemporary!

Michigan Chandelier Co.
...you'll see us in a better light




ALBANY, N.Y. 12205 TEL: 518-434-1111

AT: 440-222-1111

BLOOMINGDALE, ILL. 61701 TEL: 815-899-1111

ROCHESTER, N.Y. 14603 TEL: 716-434-1111

ST. LOUIS, MO. 63101 TEL: 314-434-1111

UNIVERSITY CITY, MO. 63101 TEL: 314-434-1111


