

New, Quicker Treatment for Child Anxiety Could Revolutionize Therapy

Instead of Traditional Exposure Therapy, Anxious Children Were Given a Mega-Dose of Independence, Inspired by "Let Grow"

NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, July 9, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A [study just published](#) in the prestigious Journal of Anxiety Disorders describes a “novel intervention” for clinically anxious kids: Having them do new things, on their own, without their parents.

In other words, a "mega-dose of independence."



Psychologist Camilo Ortiz treated anxious children with a "mega dose of independence."

The pilot study, by Long Island University Psychology Prof. Camilo Ortiz and his doctoral student Matt Fastman, was inspired by Let Grow, the nonprofit promoting childhood independence. Ortiz

“

One girl, 9, was too scared to sleep in her own bed. We didn't even focus on it.”

Camilo Ortiz

treated four 4th-8th graders who had a diagnosis of anxiety. In his everyday practice, Ortiz would often such kids with Exposure Therapy. This involves exposing the patient to the very thing they're afraid of, so they realize it's not as scary as they thought. A person deathly afraid of dogs might be shown a picture of a dog, then stand in the same room as a dog, and finally have to pet the dog.

But in “Independence Therapy,” says Ortiz, “We didn't actually have the kids face the things they're afraid of.” And afraid they were:

*A boy, 13, experienced headaches and a pounding heart, and routinely assumed the “worst case scenario” – that he was very sick.

*A girl, 9, was so anxious about attending school she experienced “frequent shaking, stomach issues, nail biting and crying.”

*A girl, 11, experienced “extensive worry and extensive avoidance of everyday activities out of the home.” Her fear of being judged or embarrassed led to shaking and abdominal pain.

*And a boy, 10, wouldn’t go anywhere without his mom.

The Independence Therapy involved each family separately visiting Ortiz five times. At the first session, only the parents came. Ortiz discussed the value of independence and showed

them [a video](#) of formerly anxious kids who'd done [The Let Grow Experience](#), a free, independence-building program used in schools that inspired Ortiz' study. Then he asked the parents their biggest concern. One couple said their daughter was too scared to sleep in her own bed.

Another said their son wouldn’t go up or downstairs in their home without them.

On the next visit, the child accompanied the parents. But without mentioning the big fear, Ortiz enthusiastically asked the kids if they had some new things they’d like to start doing on their own. And, despite their anxiety, they did! They wanted to walk home from school, or play chess in the park, or take public transportation...lots of things. Okay, said Ortiz: Your assignment is to do one “Independence Activity” a day for the next four weeks. The parents’ assignment? Let them!

And yet, Ortiz confides, “The whole time I was rooting for things to go wrong.” It’s when you go from “I CAN’T HANDLE THIS!” to, “Whoa -- I handled it!” that the biggest growth occurs.

Sure enough, for one of her Independence Activities the girl afraid to sleep in her own bed took a city bus – and missed her stop. She was so upset she actually talked to a stranger, the person next to her. That person told her to get off and walk two blocks back. She did it! And then?

“During the last week of treatment, unprompted,” Ortiz wrote, the girl “slept in her bed after never having made it through a night previously.” And then she kept doing it.

Similarly, the boy obsessed by his health was out on his own when suddenly, “He really had to pee!” Ortiz says. So he relieved himself on the side of a building. “We had a good laugh, but he actually learned something – that life can be messy and it’s okay.”



Being psychologically flexible is one of the most important factors for predicting a good life.

In the end, all the kids' anxiety went down. That was true even for the one patient who didn't finish the treatment. After two sessions, she was already "over the hump," said her parents, who reported that "she requested to stay home alone for four hours, went into a restaurant to ask for a table, babysat three kids and organized an online art auction."

In psychological terms, it seems the kids' confidence "generalized" from the new things they were doing to the things they'd been too scared to do. This mirrors a recent a study of people afraid of both heights and spiders. Treated for one, they became less afraid of the other.

If further studies of Independence Therapy show this kind of success – Ortiz is seeking funding -- it could prove a valuable alternative to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for three reasons:

1 – It seems to work quicker, which also means cheaper.

2 – It doesn't require much training, and could be done in schools.

3 – It doesn't require the parents, kids, or therapists themselves to deal with the triggering fear.

"This is a pretty big finding -- that you don't have to actually treat directly the thing someone is afraid of to make that thing better," says Ortiz. Independence fights anxiety. "Or as someone responded to my Tweet, 'Something every Gen X person already knows.'" ###

Lenore Skenazy

Let Grow

+1 646-734-8426

lenore@letgrow.org

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/721337784>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2024 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.