



TORONTO ANAPHYLAXIS EDUCATION GROUP

MEETING MINUTES - Wednesday, September 17, 2014

TOPIC: Dealing with Anxiety – Yours and Theirs

GUEST SPEAKER: Doone Estey, [Parenting Network](#)

Doone Estey- Question for Group: Imagine your child at 18 yrs old, leaving home for the first time. What life skills would you want them to have?

Answers:

Independence, confidence, resiliency, problem solver, happy, responsible, adaptable, self-advocate, self-esteem, “street smart”, included/ belonging, respectful, un-entitled

Doone: No one ever puts “obedient” on this list, but as young children, we want them to be obedient: eat, brush your teeth, get dressed, put on your EpiPen....

We don't think about long-term goals of the person we want them to become at 18; we're just thinking about getting them out the door in the morning.

Kids think about long-term goals – they want to be responsible, confident, adaptable, but they can't if we don't give them the opportunity.

Most importantly, kids want to be included in the family, peer group, etc. Temper tantrums occur when children feel they aren't being included; they say “You're not the boss of me!” (this feeling stays from age 2-18). Even young kids want respect “I'm a BIG boy/ girl!”

Kids are entitled b/c we give them too much. Parents cause this.

There is a disconnect between how we parent and what our long-term goals are. Kids want to have a say or some power in their life. We as parents need to figure out what things are not negotiable and what can be left to the kids.

This is more difficult for allergic families, as there are more life-threatening situations to manage. For other families, the list of what things are non-negotiable are safety related (e.g. seat belts, crossing street, stranger danger, drugs/ alcohol, etc.)

We must try to parent with our long-term goals in mind as much as possible. If we want independence, we must give them a chance to be independent.

Example: 9 mo. old baby with full diaper, but doesn't want to cooperate with changing; can leave child in crib for few minutes & come back later to see if child is ready to cooperate.

The more opportunities we give our kids to practice confidence, self-advocacy, decision-making, the better they get. Kids start to learn how to manage themselves at a young age – they learn when they are away at day care/ nursery/ school.

In order to learn resiliency, kids must face adversity and learn how to bounce back. We must give them opportunities to make mistakes.

Types of parenting styles:

1) Autocratic Parenting:

EXAMPLES: “How many times have I asked you to get dressed?”; “I’m sick & tired of asking you to stop fighting – give it back!”; “If you touch him one more time, I’m going to scream. I don’t care if he touched you first”

CHILDREN FEEL: powerless, punished, and misunderstood. EFFECT: kids stop listening.

2) Permissive Parenting:

EXAMPLES: “Don’t bother, I’ll get your breakfast for you. You’re too messy”; “You don’t like the French Toast? How about scrambled eggs instead?”; ”You forgot your backpack again? We’ll have to go back. I’m going to be late. I hope you’re happy”

CHILDREN FEEL: they can do whatever they want (path to entitlement); incapable, unmotivated.
EFFECT: children don’t do anything, they wait for parents to do it for them.

3) Democratic Parenting:

EXAMPLES: “Sugar frosted fruit bombs? You can have cornflakes or rice krispies, those are your choices”; “I understand you’re not ready, but you’ve run out of time for breakfast”; “How much time do you need to get ready? OK, I have to leave by 8:30. If you’re not dressed by then, you’ll have to go in your PJs.”

CHILDREN FEEL: empowered to make choices (within limits) EFFECT: learn consequences of their actions.

To teach respect, we have to be self-respecting. We put up with so much from our kids we wouldn’t put up with from anyone else. We have to follow through & do what we say (e.g. really leave without them, take them in their PJs). If we don’t set boundaries, they won’t respect boundaries – they will either become entitled kids or let others take advantage of them.

HOW TO DO THIS:

- Have a family meeting, explain a problem. Come up with ideas collectively about how to manage. Involve kids in the process, so that they feel included, respected, involved.

- Don't say "I told you so" when things go wrong. Instead say, "Tomorrow we'll have a better day" or "How will you remember to bring your backpack tomorrow?"
- Teach them the long-term skills

Strategies to Deal with Anxiety

1. Exercise: kids need to exercise/ get outside, boys in particular need to move around. Some children learn better when moving.
2. One-on-one time with parent: each child needs alone time with a parent to discuss their concerns.
3. Affection: hugs, kisses, touching, etc. calms kids.
4. Routine: anything that makes things automatic simplifies things. Kids can check off list of things they need to do.
5. Sleep: very important for both adults & children.
6. Meditation/ yoga/ breathing exercises: newer idea: train kids to take deep breaths, do yoga, meditate (aka "imagination exercise")
7. Buddy: helpful for a child to find someone they can depend on when they are in stressful situations so that they don't feel alone (e.g. when being teased in school, or, for allergic kids, when they are eating). Also important for adults to have support (reason why groups like TAEG are good – helps parents to feel they are not alone).

Other ways to Manage Anxiety about Allergies:

- Science Project: inform themselves so they understand the condition and can educate/ advocate.
- Preparation for Medical Procedure: (e.g. skin test, oral challenge) familiarizing kids with procedure ahead of time can desensitize them. Studies show that if kids can control the process, it is less stressful. Don't lie to a child. Tell them "it will hurt a little, but you'll be able to manage and you'll feel fine afterwards."
- "Calm-Down Space": create a "safe" place in the home (even a chair, blanket, quiet corner) where they can be quiet and calm down.
- Roll Playing: Practice scenarios before the situation presents itself, "what would you do if..." For example, going to a party alone: "what would you do if someone offers you a cookie?"; being bullied "what would you do if someone teases you about your allergies?". Practice what words to say, stand in front of a mirror and watch self. You can make cards for them of agreed-to responses

How to Get Children to Talk about What's Bothering Them

What can you do if your child is anxious, but not talking about it? Good times to talk to kids are:

- While doing another activity (playing sports, cooking, crafts)
- In the car (no direct eye contact, which many kids find too intense)
- At bedtime (again, dark, no eye contact)

It is impossible to remove all their anxiety b/c anxiety is a fact of life. Some anxiety is necessary b/c it keeps you vigilant, but too much is debilitating.

It's important to show kids that adults get anxious too. Don't deny feeling anxious. Tell them anxiety is normal, BUT I can manage it/ I know you can handle it/ we can get through this situation. Brainstorm solutions to the problem together.

DISCUSSIONS BY TAEG MEMBERS ABOUT REAL LIFE ANXIETY-INDUCING SITUATIONS:

- on Girl Guide weekend trip, where one leader gave out treats with nuts despite being told they weren't supposed to and there were several Guides with severe nut allergies
- sending allergic teen on class trip to Quebec; how to manage allergies on own
- asking other passengers on plane to refrain from eating nuts (one suggestion: make it about them. Tell them, "if you open that package of nuts, you could cause my child to have a severe allergic reaction and the plane will have to make an emergency landing, so you won't be making it to Orlando")

Final Thoughts:

There will always be a disconnect between parents about handling allergies – just as there is about money, religion, education, vacations, etc. Must discuss, plan & agree.

Kids won't respect you if you don't respect yourself.

Try to let kids do their own thing within limits. Give them freedom. Have as few rules as you can. Let them have messy room, dirty clothes, whatever haircut, etc. but when it comes to safety – be strict! They are more likely to follow those rules.

Remember your long-term goals. When kids do something independent/ resilient/ responsible, point it out to them specifically & praise them. Give them an opportunity to develop these skills.