

Raising Confident Kids with Allergies

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Goals and Objectives

- Recognizing the food allergy/anxiety connection
- Identifying some basic facts about anxiety... what it is, how it develops, causes and contributing factors
- Addressing parents' anxiety about anaphylaxis...what helps
- Tips for explaining food allergies to kids (at different ages/stages)
- How to minimize worry/anxiety
- Strategies for helping your child cope with fear/worry
- How to help build competence and confidence
- Nurturing resilience



Food Allergies and Anxiety

The Connection

- One study found that children with inhibited temperament (a possible risk factor for anxiety) had a higher incidence of allergies and asthma than children without this trait
- Children with severe anaphylaxis are often anxious
- One of the signs and symptoms of anaphylaxis can be neurological – anxiety, sense of doom
- Anaphylaxis can mimic anxiety/panic attack
- Due to the life-threatening nature of food allergies – some anxiety is normal and may even be helpful

Identifying the Basics of Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety disorders are common, treatable conditions
- Anxiety is a universal emotion experienced by everyone
- Anxiety is only a problem to the extent that it interferes with day-to-day functioning



Causes

- Anxiety disorders are caused by a combination of factors (e.g. biological, temperament, psychological, lifestyle, cultural/societal)
- Temperament of child – behavioural inhibition

Identifying the Basics of Anxiety

Continued

Causes

- Psychological factors – learned behaviour
- Stress/fear does not cause an anxiety disorder
- Its unrealistic fear which results in unnecessary avoidance of activities/situations that constitutes anxiety – food allergies can have both a realistic/unrealistic component

Contributing Factors

- Role of early relationships

Parental Anxiety About Anaphylaxis

- In studies, parents of food allergic children report that their child's allergy has a substantial impact on their quality of life (Manassis, Journal of Allergy, 2012)
- Those whose children had multiple allergies or anaphylaxis were most anxious



Parental Anxiety About Anaphylaxis

Continued...

Recommendations for addressing excessive parental anxiety include:

- 1) On-going education and advice about realistic vs. unrealistic risks
 - 2) Acknowledgment of psychological distress in families
 - 3) Tailored information for adolescents
 - 4) Recognizing patterns of family coping after an anaphylactic reaction
 - 5) Providing epi-pen and instruction on how to use
 - 6) Referral to consumer organizations
 - 7) Advocating for food labelling and public awareness
- In my practice I try to enlist parents as allies in managing the child's allergy, and emphasize their ability to ensure safety, model healthy coping and promote healthy coping in their child

Educate Ourselves

- Get all the facts re: allergies
- Confidence will come with information/knowledge/practice
- Rely on credible sources – not blogs etc.
- Learn from others/get support
- Attend a support group, conference, read books/articles,
- Role-play scenarios statements with a trusted person (practice makes perfect)



How to Communicate

- Intent of message – safety/protection not fear
- Be aware of non-verbal communication (body language) and tone of message
- Keep message age appropriate
- Convey message of confidence/competence

Younger Children

- Teach clear, simple, consistent rules
- Give choice where/when possible
- Teach them how to say “no”
- Model confident safety behaviour
- Encourage questions/dialogue
- Allow normal socialization
- Reassurance should focus on the child’s own ability to manage the risk
- Prepare for stressful events



Older Kids

(Tweens/Teens)

- Challenges faced by food allergic tweens/teens
- Understanding the adolescent brain
- Risk-taking behaviour with food allergies
- Education about anaphylaxis may result in a more realistic assessment of the risk (Manassis, Journal of Allergy 2012)
- Keep communication lines open
- Promote independent problem solving/decision making...focus on development of behavioural skills
- Focus on positive – praise efforts
- Letting go

Talk About Feelings

- Be open to hearing about/discussing feelings
- Avoiding talking about fears doesn't prevent anxiety – may actually increase worry

How do you feel?



Coping Strategies

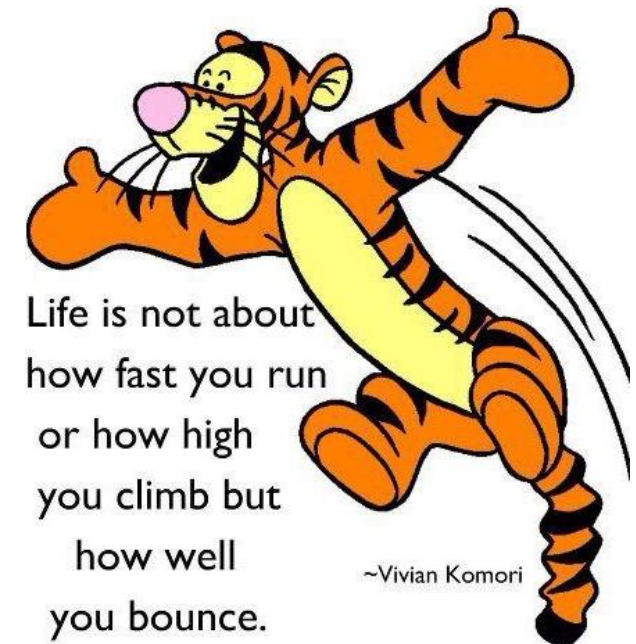
How to Help Your Child Cope with Fear/Worries

- Cognitive – Behavioural Therapy Approaches/Techniques
- Encouraging confident behaviour Addresses the behavioural aspect of anxiety which usually consists of unnecessary avoidance of certain situations
- Correcting worried thinking ... addresses the cognitive aspects of anxiety – identifying cognitive distortions, challenging realities of child's worries, labelling anxiety, coping self-talk
- Relaxation techniques – relieving physical symptoms and calming the mind

Nurturing Resilience

- “a) the ability to bounce or spring back into shape, position...etc. b) the ability to recover strength, spirits, good humour...etc. quickly (Webster’s New World Dictionary)
- Toronto Star Article – Judith Timson
- Martin Seligman “The Optimistic Child”
- Mary Pipher – Psychologist – “The Shelter of Each Other”
- If despite our best efforts children need help – okay to seek professional support/counselling

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Life is not about
how fast you run
or how high
you climb but
how well
you bounce.

~Vivian Komori