

THE NEW CALM COURIER

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Driving Me Crazy! by Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D.

It is so difficult to write about driving phobias. They are hard to pin down, and there is really not that much research literature on them. There is a lot of research on other fears and phobias, such as the fear of heights or agoraphobia, but not on the fear of driving. Yet I see plenty of people in my clinical practice who suffer from this problem.

I think one reason you don't see much on driving phobias is that there is probably a stigma that prevents people from discussing their fears of driving. Who wants to admit that they have trouble doing something that is supposed to be so basic in our culture? Who wants to try

and explain that it makes them sweat whenever they have to drive over a bridge or in traffic, or even to make a left turn?

I have looked for statistics on how common this problem is, but I have been unsuccessful. People just do not want to discuss this fear. They feel as though they are defective. How ignorant is it that they refuse to drive in the car pool? How can they explain why they are always asking for a ride but never offering to give a ride?

I think many people won't even admit to themselves that they have a driving phobia. Quite often, people will not even consult a psychologist such as me until their lives change in

such a way that they can no longer get around their problem. Here in Pittsburgh, people often take public transportation, or perhaps drive short distances, so they can fool themselves into believing that everything is fine. But when they have to get to a new job which is further away, or when they must travel out of their comfort zone, then they must confront reality.

Some people may have certain driving fears, rather than an overall phobia. I know many people in this town who fear driving over bridges, for instance. That has got to hurt in a

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Editor's Note

The Calm Courier is published four times a year. It is intended to inform and communicate with people who are interested in the anxiety disorders.

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Driving Me Crazy!

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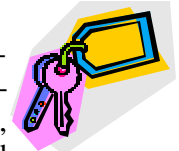
city like this one. Others just have a problem with highway driving, or with traffic jams. I would still like to count these folks among those with a driving phobia.

People who admit to their phobia tell me that it has an impact on their quality of life. They have to depend on others too often, they sometimes just can't get where they want to go, and their self-esteem suffers. Often they have tried to fix the problem themselves, but they do not un-

derstand it. What they do know is that they can't seem to get themselves to just get in the car and drive without feeling some strong sense of dread. Some of them worry that they will have a panic attack while driving. Others fear they will lose control of the car. Still others imagine what would happen if they had to stop somewhere due to their own fears, and they could not get themselves to start going again. What would they do? How could they explain it?

Of course, there is treatment for driving phobias, just as with any

other phobia. It generally consists of relaxation training, visualization, and very gradual practice. I have found that people generally make slow but good progress, and that they can cope better over time, if they are motivated to work consistently on this very elusive phobia. If you have this fear, I would encourage you to talk about it with a psychologist. Even though cars are often a pain in the neck, it is really useful to be able to drive them.



Adjusting to College Life by Christine Beaulé, M.A., Ph.D.

When the average high school student thinks about higher education, images of parties, pizza, and lofty debates in coffee shops come to mind. The realities of college life are much different, however, and adjusting to new academic expectations and social opportunities, as well as learning to be a self-reliant adult, can have unforeseen effects on a student.

The expectation of self-motivation and self-discipline is very different than what happens in high school, where attendance in class is closely monitored, parents are called if academic, social, or behavioral problems arise, and students have clear, immediate consequences if they shirk their responsibilities. This is just not the case in college. College students need to exercise self-discipline if they want to pass their courses and make the most of their years in school. Such differences in expectations



can cause college students a lot of anxiety and distress.

For instance, every once in a while I have an unmotivated student who comes to very few classes and consistently offers me excuses rather than completed assignments on time. He or she often just does not seem to understand that monitoring them and providing opportunity after opportunity to make up missed work is neither my responsibility nor their inalienable right. Neither their future employers nor I need to tolerate excessive absences and lack of performance. On the other

hand, those students not prepared to take on that level of personal responsibility for their own education may develop strong feelings of helplessness, depression and anxiety disorders. Recognizing these problems, schools often have professional therapists, tutoring centers, study groups, studying skills classes, and a wide range of other resources in place to help students adjust to their new academic and social environments, and develop the skills they need to fulfill their new responsibilities. As with college classes, however, students must ask for help themselves.

Awareness is a Powerful Tool

If you are a high school or college student, or if you are the parent, relative, or friend of someone who is, it is important to be aware of the academic

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Adjusting to College Life

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and social pressures that person will face in college. School counseling centers, undergraduate academic advisors in every department, many professors and staff members, Residential Assistants in dorms, and others at college campuses across the country are ready, willing, and quite able to point troubled students to the help they might need. Being aware of

these resources, as well as the problems students face, is a powerful tool for helping the students in your life to become confident students on their way to being happy and successful adults.

Ed: Dr. Beaule teaches Archaeology at the University of Pittsburgh.

Addressing Adolescent Anxiety

by Tony Del Prete

Laptop computers, cell phones, email and instant messaging. No one is more enamored with the ongoing advances in today's fast-paced world than our teenagers. Certainly these high-tech gadgets make life more convenient and efficient. Yet the complexities associated with our cyber-driven world also make daily living more stressful than ever.

As a result, anxiety – which was at one time primarily an adult issue – has become commonplace among young people. For some adolescents, the rapid pace of everyday life can be overwhelming. Others find the pressure to be ultra-productive is more than they can handle. And for a portion of today's teens, just the competitive nature of school and work can wreak havoc on their fragile mindsets.

One of the difficulties with identifying anxiety in teens is that there is a fine line between anxiety and adolescent angst. With all of the emotional outbursts, silent treatments, and secrecy typical of teens, how do we determine when it's time to "back off" or take action? Here are some things to look for that may suggest an adolescent is

anxious or depressed – and not just being a teenager:

Prolonged or extreme change in mood or behavior. Irritability, crying, oversleeping, lack of sleep, and not wanting to go to school are all telltale signs of an anxious state.

Sudden withdrawal from family and friends. Often, overly anxious teens will retreat into a shell, hoping to ride out the tough times. Sometimes, anxiety is a sign of depression, which, in teens, can be an insurmountable challenge to overcome on their own.

Use of drugs and/or alcohol. Much in the manner of adults, many teens will turn to mind-altering substances to numb their anxiety. The effects can be doubly troubling, especially when the teen's mental health issue is the result of a chemical imbalance.

Statements or hints that something is wrong. Many teens don't want to trouble their parents with problems, or are simply too embarrassed to express their concerns to an adult. When a teenager is in pain, however, they will often make veiled references or confide in others.

...there is a fine line between anxiety and adolescent angst.

A certain level of anxiety is normal and even necessary for one's well-being. However, when it begins to affect the quality of a teen's life, it may be time to take action. If a teen exhibits any of the above behaviors or expresses concerns, be open to discussing their issues. And don't be afraid to contact the family physician, a mental health practitioner, or the school counselor. Just having a trained professional talk with the teen can relieve the level of anxiety for everyone involved.

Tony Del Prete has written widely on issues related to adolescence, how parents can cope, and the state of education today. Currently, he is a counselor in the Seneca Valley School District.

Book Review: *Overcoming Shyness and Social Anxiety*

By M.M. Antony, MD and R.P. Swinson, MD
Reviewed by Lawrence M. Glanz, Ph.D.



Social anxiety refers to nervousness in social situations. Everyone feels this way at times, but when it becomes intense it can impair a person's life. It can affect one's ability to meet people, form relationships, express opinions, go on job interviews, or even use public restrooms. Surveys suggest that social anxiety is prevalent in as much as 7% of the population. Social anxiety is generally thought to be associated with a relatively intense concern about negative judg-

ments of others. The person fears appearing stupid, making mistakes, or appearing incompetent.

Despite the frequency of social anxiety, a review of the popular literature reveals few self-help books. While many such books are available for those with panic attacks and obsessive compulsive disorder, it is surprising to find so little attention paid to this problem. It is refreshing to see the book written by Antony and Swinson, two professors of psychiatry, who seem to understand social anxiety and treat it with com-

passion. The book is well written, up to date, and easy to follow. They describe the problem, explain the theories, and present a coherent approach to overcoming it. The book answers most of the questions people commonly ask about social anxiety, and it is never condescending. At the end of the book are suggestions for further reading, addresses of helpful organizations, and even internet resources. This is the book for you if you want to gain a basic understanding of a serious problem.

Self-Help

Oakland Shadyside Friends Meeting House
4836 Ellsworth 2nd floor, Pittsburgh PA 15213
412/578-2450

Panic/Anxiety Support Group:
St. Rosalia Meeting Room, Greenfield Ave,
Greenfield, PA Contact: Jim Madero 412/421-1874

Upper St Clair, Our Redeemer Church
Rte 195 & Gateshead Dr, Washington PA
15301 Contact: Kate 412/531-4748

South Park Grace Lutheran Church
6810 Hilldale Dr , Pittsburgh PA 15236
Contact: Bonnie 412/653-6132



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