



Child Anxiety

Publication Title: Your anxious child: How parents and teachers can relieve anxiety in children.

Publication Authors: John S. Dacey and Lisa B. Fiore.

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This self-help book was written by John Dacey (who, according to PsycINFO, has published primarily in the area of creativity and intelligence in children) and Lisa Fiore (for whom, according to PsycINFO, this is a first publication). The authors nominate that their goal is to teach parents how to empower their children with coping skills that help to relieve anxiety in diverse situations.

The authors promote a program called COPE which stands for – Calming the nervous system; Originating an imaginative plan; Persisting in the face of obstacles and failure; and Evaluating and adjusting the plan. The authors are explicit about the theoretical model that underpins COPE. They report that they have used aspects of behavioral, psychoanalytic and family systems perspectives in their work, but they espouse a cognitive model as the dominant paradigm for the COPE program. This program has apparently been successfully implemented in schools and with individual children for fifteen years. Although the authors talk about "...our therapeutic and research studies", I could find no citations to such research in either the PsycINFO or ERIC databases.

The program initially teaches parents and teachers (although most of the book refers to parents) to differentiate between the major anxiety disorders. They suggest that agoraphobia, panic disorder, PTSD or OCD need to be treated by a mental health professional, but separation anxiety disorder, generalised anxiety disorder, specific phobia and social phobia can be treated by the COPE method. However, they do add a caveat that, if the problem is not resolved, professional help can be sought. My feeling about the explicit inclusion of anxiety disorders in a self-help book blurs the boundaries between what can be managed without professional help and what cannot. I would have preferred that the authors refrained from talk about mental disorders and concentrated on everyday anxieties with an admonishment to seek professional help if the COPE program does not produce the desired relief.

The main body of the book is divided into four sections relating to the C, O, P, and E parts of the program. In the C section, prescribed activities include exercises to help children become aware of interoceptive cues to anxiety, scaling anxiety, slow breathing and massage techniques, and a range of cognitive strategies that can calm the nervous system. In the O section, there are a number of exercises designed to help children be creative in their problem-solving attempts and indulge in lateral thinking. There are some interesting ideas about creativity, which presumably flow from Dacey's work on creativity in adolescents. In the P section, topics covered include Tolerating Ambiguity; Handling Risk; Acquiring Courage; Avoiding Rigid Thinking; and Delaying Gratification. This is all good stuff! In the E section, they emphasis the value of being able to evaluate strategies, and go to great lengths to provide ways of evaluating progress. In the final section of the book, the

authors first attend to parenting styles that help or hinder children to cope with anxiety. They refer to Diana Baumrind's well-known typology of parenting styles based on the dimensions of *demandingness* and *responsiveness*. They suggest that an authoritative style (reasonably high expectations coupled with reasonably high responsiveness) reduces anxiety in children due to the firmness, fairness and consistency characteristic of the style. Then they pay lip service to the contributions of heredity and temperament to children's anxiety, parenting style, and goodness of fit between child and parents. For my money, this final section would have been better placed at the beginning of the book to emphasise the importance of these factors. If parents understand their own and their children's personalities in the first instance, they would be able to use this knowledge in order to tailor the COPE programme to fit themselves and their children. One of the failings of manualised treatments is that "one size doesn't fit all", and programs need to be individualised to suit particular people and their families.

The book is clearly written with technical terms being explained, but I wonder whether it would be digestible for the majority of our clientele. Therefore, I would recommend that the book be used in conjunction with explanation and clarification by a clinician. All activities have a clear goal set at the outset, which provides a rationale for the exercise and helps to maintain focus. Target ages are also included for each exercise, which will help to keep exercises age-appropriate.

All in all, this book is a useful adjunct to one's arsenal of anxiety management texts for children, with some interesting and innovative ideas about creative problem-solving.

Reviewer: Fran Vertue

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