

Danielle Einstein spoke to the APPA NAC on the trend of rising anxiety in children.

Raising Anxiety, by Judith Y. Locke and Danielle A. Einstein, examines the rise in anxiety among children and adolescents and argues that well-meaning changes in parenting, schooling and culture have unintentionally increased youth vulnerability to anxiety. The authors frame the problem as a convergence of social trends i.e. overprotection, lowered expectations for independent coping, pervasive technology and shifts in institutional practices. These factors create fewer opportunities for children to experience and learn to manage normal stress and uncertainty. They emphasise that anxiety is a normal, adaptive emotion that signals threat and motivates problem-solving. When children are sheltered from manageable stressors or given repeated messages that inevitable discomfort is catastrophic, anxiety becomes chronic and disabling.

Locke and Einstein explain the mechanisms (avoidance, intolerance of uncertainty, lack of coping practice) and offer developmentally informed, practical suggestions to restore resilience.

- Anxiety is a normal, adaptive response; it becomes problematic when avoidance and lack of practice dominate.
- Overprotective parenting, lowered expectations and instant problem-solving remove necessary challenges.
- Technology and constant monitoring limit independent coping and peer conflict resolution.
- Repeated shielding from discomfort fosters intolerance of uncertainty and chronic anxiety.
- Gradual, developmentally appropriate exposure to manageable stressors builds resilience.
- Teach concrete coping skills (emotion labelling, cognitive reframing, exposure) instead of rescuing.
- Schools and clinicians should avoid reinforcing avoidance through unnecessary accommodations and use evidence based interventions.
- Consistent collaboration among parents, teachers and clinicians is crucial.
- A cultural shift is needed to tolerate short-term distress in service of long term wellbeing.