



HARNESSING ANXIOUS ENERGY FOR GOOD

ANXIOUSNATION

A DISCUSSION GUIDE TO SUPPORT SOLUTIONS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview • 4

Using this Guide • 4

About the Film • 5

HOSTING A SCREENING • 7

Tips for Planning • 8

Tips for Facilitating • 9

Background: The Crisis in Adolescent
Mental Health • 11

Discussion Questions: Pre- and Post-Screening • 14
After
Screening: Art an Entry Point
for Conversation • 15

Post-Screening Topics for Engage- ment • 16

Parenting an Anxious Child • 19

Anxiety and the Body • 22

Managing Anxiety and Self Care • 24

Prevention • 26

Appendix • 28

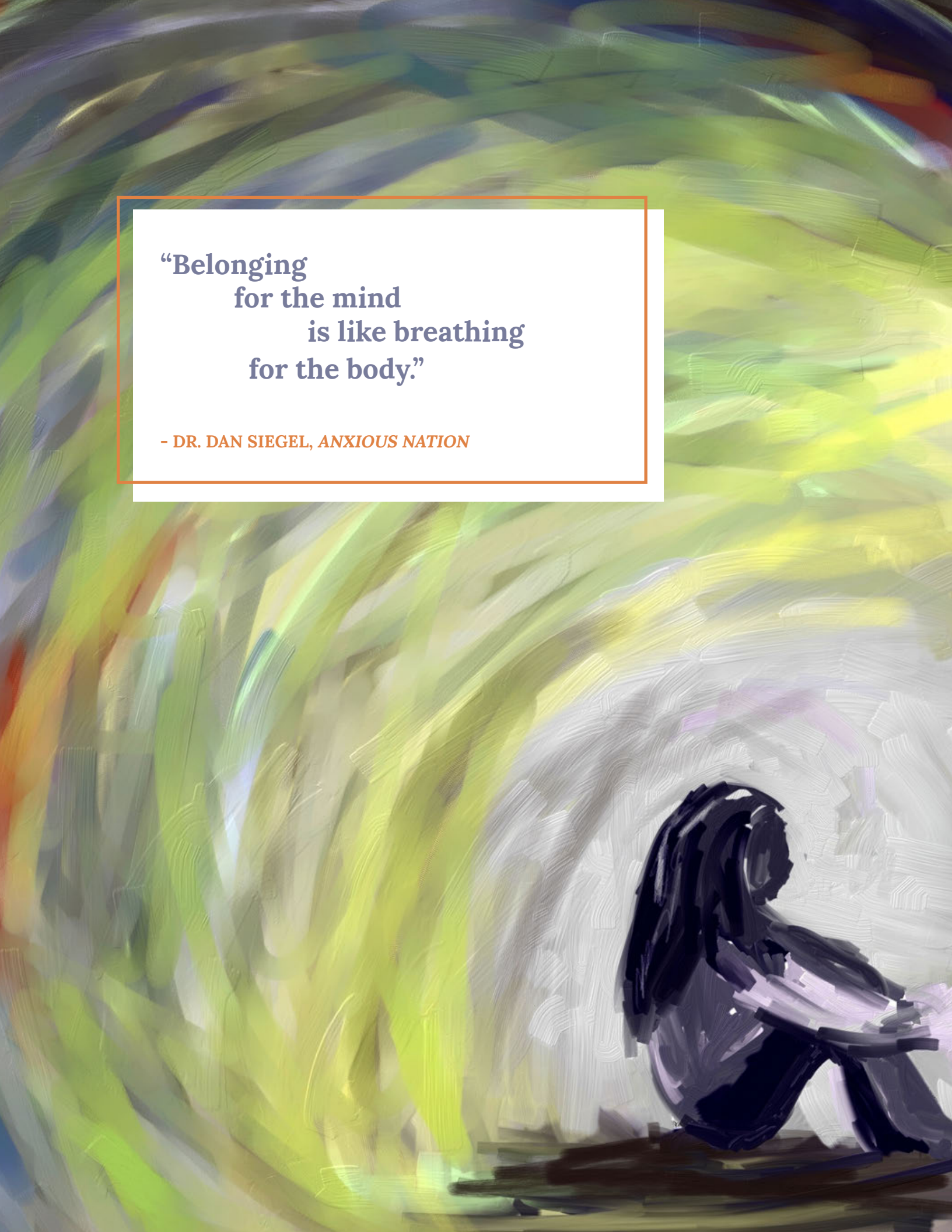
FAQs • 29

Who's Who in the Film • 31

Resources • 33

Excerpted Film Reading -
Are You Doing the Disorder? • 36



An abstract painting with vibrant, swirling colors of green, yellow, and blue. In the lower right corner, there is a dark, shadowy figure that appears to be a person sitting or crouching, rendered in dark tones against the lighter background.

**“Belonging
for the mind
is like breathing
for the body.”**

- DR. DAN SIEGEL, *ANXIOUS NATION*

USING THIS GUIDE

The Anxious Nation Discussion and Engagement Guide is a resource and invitation to participate in informed conversations in living rooms, schools, faith communities, and professional settings. The documentary, together with this guide, opens up a unique and meaningful opportunity to deepen understanding and compassion surrounding anxiety disorders, gain new insights on strategies to manage and treat anxiety, break down stigmas, and be empowered to work on behalf of systemic and cultural change.

While the historic rise in anxiety among teens and young adults preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, the social isolation, disconnection, and loneliness felt worldwide remain very present. This collective experience is important to keep in mind as you plan and frame your pre- and post-screening conversation and engagement.

Because background knowledge and goals for screenings may be as varied as the audiences themselves, this guide includes a wellspring of relevant information. It offers a range of possibilities to deepen engagement with *Anxious Nation*, including:

- 🔍 **Film background** (About the Film, Directors' Statements) to help prepare for screenings
- 🔍 **Tips for Planning and Facilitating** conversations
- 🔍 **discussion questions** for before and after screening
- 🔍 **Engagement topics** to encourage connection and learning
- 🔍 **Appendix, Resources, and supplemental links** throughout the guide for additional learning

Parents, educators, faith leaders, and professional audiences seeking to dive deeper into current research on anxiety can refer to and use *The Anxious Nation Research Handbook* as a companion resource. The documentary and the companion resources were developed for general conversations only and should not be used in place of professional mental health support.

ABOUT THE FILM

Anxious Nation explores and captures the many faces and facets of anxiety. This feature-length documentary deeply looks into the anxiety and the mental health crisis in America, especially its impact on young people (ages 10-26) and families. The film looks at the various ways anxiety shows up, the nurture/nature debate, situations in homes and society that are significantly adding to the problem, the mental health crisis on college campuses, and the impact of anxiety in lower socioeconomic communities, especially the Brown and Black communities. We discuss stigma, loneliness, isolation, disconnection, the alarming rise in suicide, the dangers of social media, incorrect diagnoses, and the horrific mental health ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic.

DIRECTORS' STATEMENTS

"It started in 2019 with a single post on Facebook: "Kids and anxiety, who is dealing with it?" While I received a few public responses from friends willing to be open and honest about their struggles on that very public forum, the private messages overwhelmed me. It was as if I gave everyone permission to talk about the 10,000-pound elephant in the room. Suddenly, people I thought I knew well began to share heartbreaking stories I'd never heard. While each was remarkable and unique, they were also commonplace...too commonplace. So many, like me, were confused about where to turn for help.

When we set out to make this film, we had no idea what was ahead for all of us. A few weeks before COVID-19 shut down our country, we sent out 14 cameras to our cast so they could document their lives and experiences learning to cope during the pandemic—in real time. This unexpected turn gave us an insight into anxiety through a whole new lens. The question of anxiety and who is dealing with it suddenly felt moot. Because we all were, and most of us still are. The statistics from when we started filming in 2019 to where we are today are downright frightening—and getting worse."

Laura Morton, Director

"This is not a film I wanted to make. As a mom of three kids, it was simply too close to home for me. I have witnessed my children grow up in an era that has heavily burdened them with the weight of the legacy of social, political, and environmental issues and the onslaught of new technology.

Mix those realities with the inherent challenges of growing up, whatever predisposition their genetic makeup gave them at birth, and the way they have been influenced by the rest of our family and me, and you have set the perfect table for anxiety to blossom and flourish. So, when Laura first approached me in 2019, I was thrilled that she wanted to make this film—but I just didn't have the emotional capacity to be the one to make it. Instead, I went on to make other films, and my kids kept moving along, carrying all they were carrying and coping the best they could.

And then it was 2020. Over the past two years, I have seen every one of their peers struggle with anxiety to a degree I had never seen before. And while journeying through my own life with my kids, Laura came back to me after production and asked if I'd turn the content she gathered with kids, parents, and experts around the country into a film that might reach into this moment and give some support to the families across the country who are at a loss for what to do to help their kids. This time I said yes, because as close to home as I thought anxiety was in 2019—now I felt it was seeping through the walls of the house, into our bones, and the best way through it would be to understand it more and to turn my own anxiety into doing something perhaps meaningful by creating this film that will hopefully be a touchpoint for kids, teens, and families, as well as a message and call to action directed at policymakers, mental health providers, and corporations who target young people.

We have collectively been hit by so much loss, sorrow, fear, and uncertainty, especially these past few years, and we, as adults, have not been able to assure our kids that there will be light at the end of this rough time. We have never navigated the world they are inheriting, so they are on their own to chart a path they can only lead. I do the best I can as a mom, knowing I don't have all the answers, but I hope that by contributing what I could to making this film that our kids feel seen, heard, and supported; and that we as a society make the urgent changes needed to give them all the resources to create community and meaning for themselves and their future."

Vanessa Roth, Director



HOSTING A SCREENING



TIPS FOR PLANNING



BE PREPARED by reading this guide and exploring all the resources curated at the [Anxious Nation website](#) before your screening.



WATCH THE FILM before your event to become familiar with the topics to help plan your goals for the event. You can request access to the film [here](#).



DECIDE ON THE FORMAT for your post-screening conversation (e.g., Q&A format, panel discussion, small group workshop).



CONSIDER PARTNERING with a local organization to co-host your community screening and help with outreach. Invite partners to actively participate in your screening, including facilitating questions and providing more in-depth context.



LOGISTICS: Set a time and date, and decide on a location. Confirm that your site is fully accessible to all. Test all equipment at least a day in advance to troubleshoot any issues. If hosting online, ensure all links are working, who will be behind the scenes to help if online problems arise, and if you are including a post-screening discussion.

REFLECT ON GOALS



- What do you wish to accomplish with this screening and conversation?
- What do you want to ensure your audience learns from the film and discussion?
- What does a successful screening look like?
- What concerns do you have, and what kinds of support can help alleviate these concerns?

TIPS FOR FACILITATING



SET THE TONE of your screening event by opening with a brief personal story about why this subject matters to you and why you felt motivated to organize this screening. You may also want to share why you believe this film and conversation are so essential right now (e.g., COVID, suicide in teens, lost wages/low productivity, etc.). Your words will set the tone for the dialogue and encourage others to share their points of view.



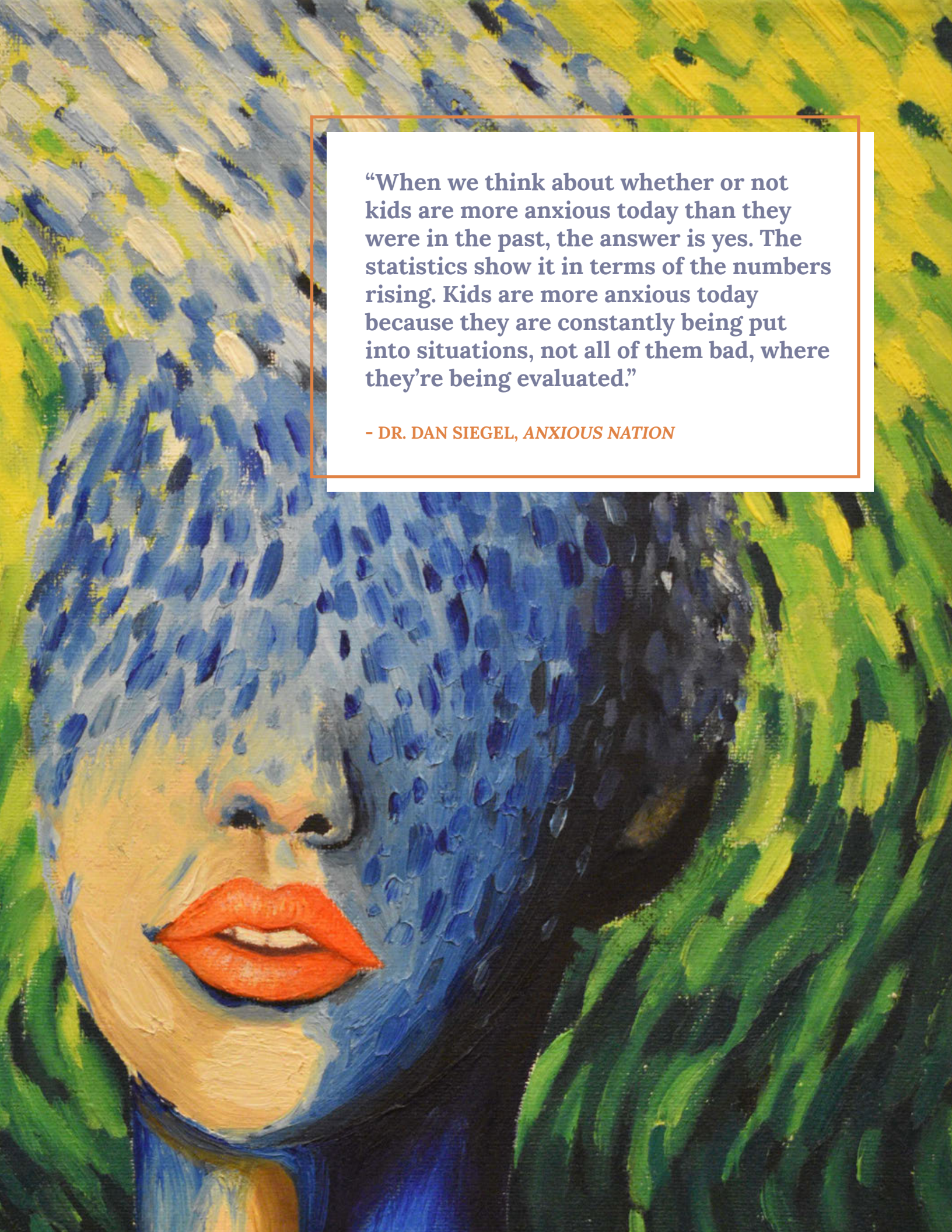
CLARIFY TERMINOLOGY *Anxious Nation* focuses on the stories of individuals with anxiety between the ages of 10 through 26. For the purpose of consistency, this resource guide will use the term teens when referring to the ages 10 through 18 and young adults when referring to anyone between the ages of 19 through 26. (The terms youth, teens, and adolescents are often used interchangeably.) Please refer to and consider sharing the FAQs in the Appendix to this guide with participants as a way of ensuring the use of mental health terms is consistent.



INVITE FULL GROUP PARTICIPATION by ensuring all feel welcome, including parents, students, teachers, coaches, and faith leaders. Acknowledge and welcome young people in the audience and offer them an explicit invitation to participate so they know their input is important. Community change occurs when a cross-section of stakeholders are included and heard.



ENCOURAGE CONSTRUCTIVE DIALOGUE by discussing and agreeing on broad guidelines of dialogue such as being aware of how much “airtime” each person is taking, allowing others to finish their thoughts before speaking, and listening with the intent to understand rather than to convince.



“When we think about whether or not kids are more anxious today than they were in the past, the answer is yes. The statistics show it in terms of the numbers rising. Kids are more anxious today because they are constantly being put into situations, not all of them bad, where they’re being evaluated.”

- DR. DAN SIEGEL, *ANXIOUS NATION*

BACKGROUND: THE CRISIS IN ADOLESCENT MENTAL HEALTH

Moderator Note: This section can serve as background information or can be drawn from as a way to introduce or frame the urgency of this work. We encourage you to refer to the FAQs in the Appendix and *The Anxious Nation Research Handbook* for additional reference.

The time of adolescence is often filled with turmoil and transition—this hasn't changed, but plenty more has. "Three decades ago," *The New York Times* reported that "the gravest public health threats to teenagers in the United States came from binge drinking, teenage pregnancy, and smoking. These have since fallen sharply, replaced by a new public health concern: soaring rates of mental health disorders."¹

There is a robust body of evidence sounding an alarm about the state of mental health in teens today. Here is what we currently know:

According to CDC data, **100% of all teens report increasing mental health challenges.** This rate has risen steadily since 2010.²

Nearly 3 in 5 or (57%) of US teen girls feel persistently sad or hopeless, a 60% increase and the highest level reported over the past decade.³

Both boys and girls are reaching puberty at a younger age. Researchers believe that brain changes in adolescence increase a teen's vulnerability to anxiety and depression.⁴ These physical changes can also affect how emotions are managed.

While the internet and social media do help forge some connections, recent research has found that **loneliness has risen to epidemic proportions** among teens. This is suggested as a key factor in the increase in reported mental health challenges.

More than **40% of high school students report feeling so sad or hopeless** that they could not engage in their regular activities for at least two weeks during the previous year—a possible indication of the experience of depressive symptoms.⁵

The **teen suicide rate over the past decade has surged more than 40%**, with 1 in 5 high school students saying they have considered killing themselves.⁶ The CDC report even more alarming numbers: nearly 1 in 3 seriously considered attempting suicide in 2021.

A 2018 report found that **suicide was the second leading cause of death for youth** ages 10-24.⁷

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/23/health/mental-health-crisis-teens.html>

We also know the crisis in adolescent mental health in the United States accelerated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸ Social isolation and the instability of family life compounded existing fault lines across America, with youth of color being disproportionately impacted.⁹

1 in 3 teen girls and 1 in 5 teen boys have experienced new or worsening anxiety since March 2020¹⁰

More than **140,000** children in the United States lost a primary or secondary caregiver

While researchers had been sounding the alarm, and families had been experiencing an adolescent mental health crisis years before the pandemic, as director Laura Morton shared, **“COVID was an accelerant to an existing inferno.”**

² <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/03/190315110908.htm>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchstp/newsroom/2023/increased-sadness-and-violence-press-release.html>

⁴ <https://childmind.org/awareness-campaigns/childrens-mental-health-report/2017-childrens-mental-health-report/anxiety-depression-in-adolescence/>

⁵ https://www.cdc.gov/healthyouth/data/yrbbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf

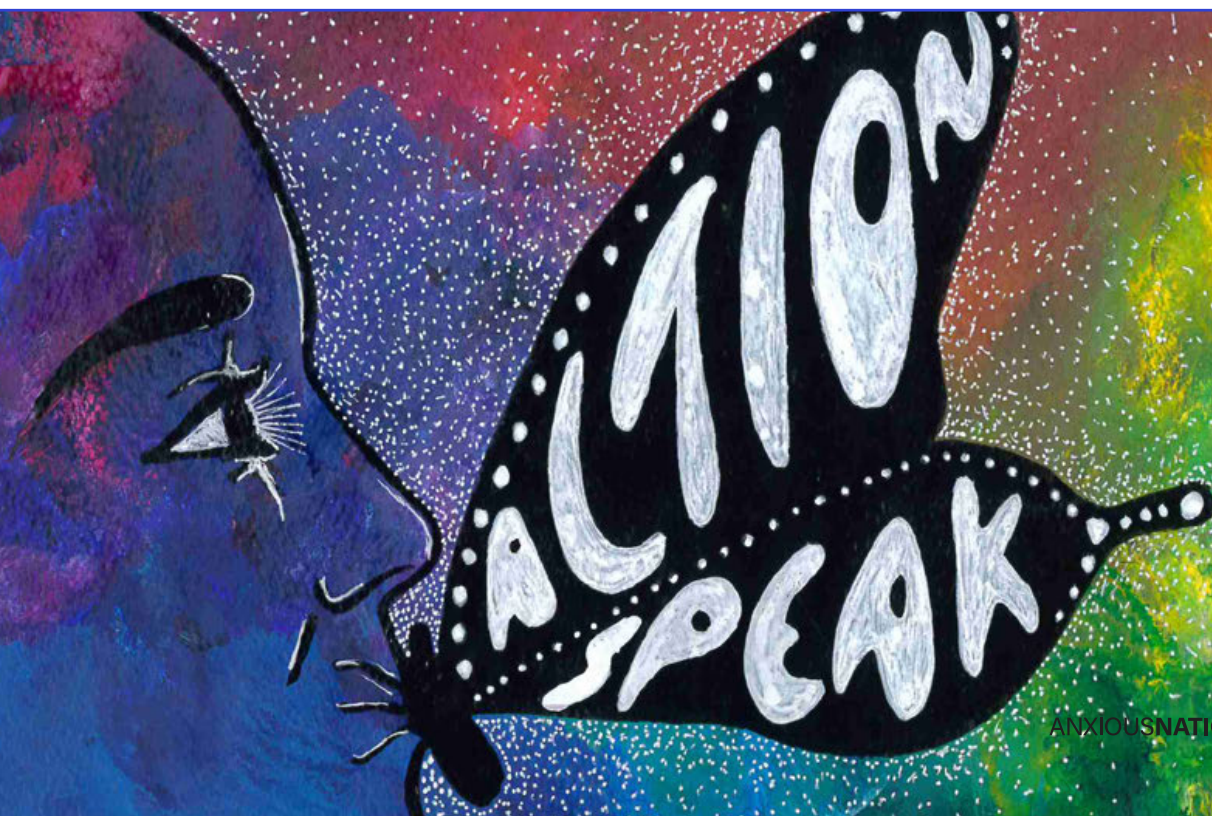
⁶ “Worried Sick: A Journey Into the Anxious Teen Mind,” The New York Times, April 23, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/23/health/mental-health-crisis-teens.html>

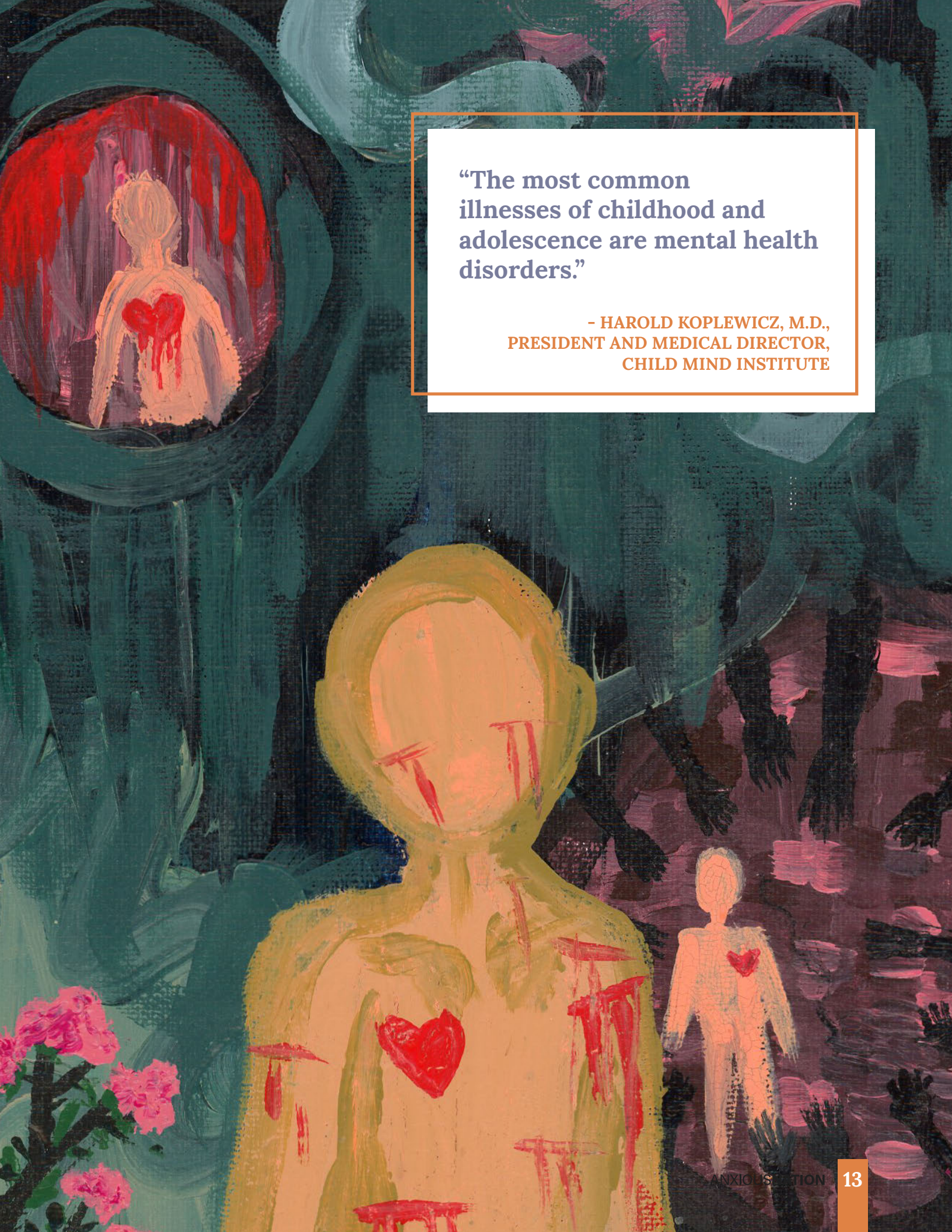
⁷ <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide>

⁸ <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/child-and-adolescent-healthy-mental-development/aap-aacap-cha-declaration-of-a-national-emergency-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ “How the pandemic has impacted teen mental health,” Mott Poll Report, University of Michigan C.S. Mott Children’s Hospital, March 15, 2021.





“The most common illnesses of childhood and adolescence are mental health disorders.”

**- HAROLD KOPEWICZ, M.D.,
PRESIDENT AND MEDICAL DIRECTOR,
CHILD MIND INSTITUTE**

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pre-Screening

To build community and set the tone for your post-screening conversation, consider discussing a few of these questions with your group before watching:

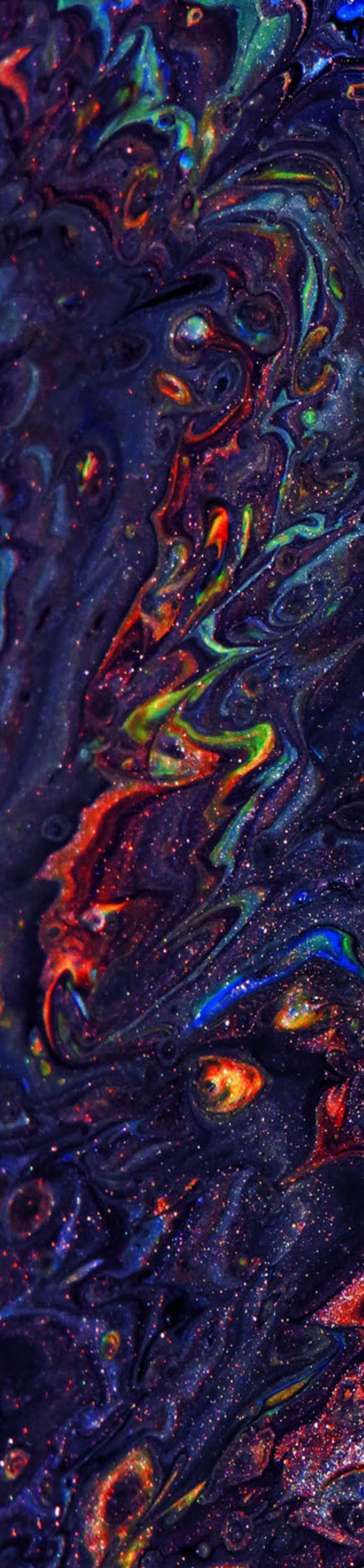
- 🔍 How do you take care of your mental health?
- 🔍 How would you describe a meaningful connection in your life?
- 🔍 When mental health challenges arise, what strategies do you rely on?
- 🔍 What can you identify as existing barriers that get in the way of someone accessing mental health support? (e.g., gender, age, race, etc.)
- 🔍 Think about a recent time in your life when you were anxious. How did you feel? What triggered those feelings? How did you manage your feelings? What support did you lean on to help you through this experience?

Post-Screening

After watching *Anxious Nation*, audiences may need a chance to collect their thoughts before diving into discussion. One way to transition is to ask participants to think of a memorable scene or individual from the documentary and then invite them to share their thoughts with someone sitting nearby.

Once everyone who wants to share has finished, consider opening up the conversation using these questions as a starting point:

- 🔍 What general reactions or feelings do you have after watching *Anxious Nation*?
 - 🔍 What questions surfaced for you after hearing these stories?
 - 🔍 What new information or insights did you learn about anxiety?
 - 🔍 To what do you attribute the increase in anxiety in teens and young adults today?
 - 🔍 What did you find most troubling, and what did you find most encouraging from these stories?
 - 🔍 Meredith Burns, the mother of Jonah, shared the following: "I've observed anxiety in my parents. Definitely. It's not something that everyone's really comfortable talking about. It's a different generation. There's not as much willingness to talk about that it's okay and that we shouldn't have it stigmatized. So it's kind of a little embarrassing."
 - 🔍 What do you think can explain this generational shift in addressing mental health issues?
 - 🔍 What steps can we take to help remove the stigma surrounding mental health disorders and anxiety?



A WARM-UP: ART AS AN ENTRY POINT

Moderator Note: Throughout *Anxious Nation*, visual art made by young people ages 8 - 24 from around the world punctuates emotions and experiences and expresses the artists' real experiences with anxiety. Before your screening, consider projecting or displaying several pieces of art used in the documentary and engage your group in a visual analysis exercise.

Note: The artwork used in the documentary is licensed and cannot be used for commercial purposes.

For this exercise, access a sampling of the artwork used in *Anxious Nation* [here](#).

Describe: Begin by simply describing what you see occurring in the artwork. Focusing on describing details is an important first step.

- 🔍 What do you wish to accomplish with this screening and conversation?

Analyze: Begin to analyze the artist's choices. For example:

- 🔍 How is the painting composed?
- 🔍 How did the artist use light, shadow, perspective, or framing?
- 🔍 What role does the title or caption play?
- 🔍 Why do you think the artist chose this subject for his/her/their piece?

Interpret: As a final step, interpret the artwork. For example:

- 🔍 Why did the artist create this particular image?
- 🔍 What story do you think is being told?
- 🔍 What details support your interpretation?
- 🔍 How do these works of art inform our understanding of anxiety?



OVERVIEW

Moderator Note: This section includes relevant engagement topics with suggested exercises. Depending upon the age of your audience, discussion format, and desired outcomes, adapt this content to fit your needs.

One of the most powerful aspects of documentary films is how they can enrich and inform our lives and open up new avenues of learning like no other form of storytelling or content. A documentary such as *Anxious Nation* invites us to shift understanding, change behaviors, and engage in transforming the support and management of anxiety.

We encourage educators, parents, faith leaders, and health and medical professional audiences working on the prevention and management of anxiety disorders to explore *The Anxious Nation Research Handbook* as a companion resource to this Discussion Guide. It contains curated research organized by audience and suggestions for additional reading materials.

Suggested Exercise

Suggestion One: Review the Engagement Topics and select one to focus your conversation on following your post-screening discussion on *Anxious Nation*.

Suggestion Two: Consider introducing the Engagement Topic with this prompt:

“When you think of (insert engagement topic here), what words, ideas, or questions come to mind?”

From this opening question, transition to sharing or discussing the content (e.g., film quotes, policy summary, or visual art) by using the focused discussion questions or other recommended exercises.

“My mission is not to be the perfect parent. My mission is to be an awakened parent. And part of being awakened is looking in that mirror and seeing that shadow aspect. And parents don’t want to look, but we have to look. We have to be a brake for our children. This is not about being perfect parents. This is about being awakened. You know, parents feel shame and guilt, and I say, ‘But that’s your opportunity. Look at it as the turning point. Look at it as the invitation, and then let’s course correct.’”

- DR. SHEFALI,
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST,
AUTHOR, *ANXIOUS NATION*



An abstract painting on the left side of the page. It features several dark, silhouetted hands reaching upwards from the bottom left towards the top right. The background is a mix of soft, blended colors including light green, yellow, and white, with some darker, more textured areas at the bottom. The overall style is expressive and somewhat ethereal.

PARENTING AN ANXIOUS CHILD

Talking openly about anxiety with your own children and with one another can be a sensitive topic. One priority of *Anxious Nation* conversations is to push ourselves as parents to engage in respectful and open dialogue about the challenges and the triumphs of raising children today. As Heather Cummings, mother of Noah, shared, “I felt this need to be the perfect parent. And what I’ve learned through it all is I’m perfectly imperfect and still figuring things out. And I think that’s important. I think as parents, we can put a lot of pressure on ourselves, and it doesn’t help our kids.”

Reserving judgment and being open to learning from one another can go a long way toward destigmatizing conversations about mental health.

Suggested Engagement Exercises: Thinking About Parenting

Suggestion One: Refer to the reading in the Appendix “Are You Doing the Disorder?,” a reflection about the power of anxiety from Lynn Lyons, an expert featured in *Anxious Nation*. Read aloud or independently and discuss reactions.

Suggestion Two: Begin with a group discussion using these questions:

- 🔍 What general reactions do you have to these reflections?
- 🔍 Jackie Ramsey, the mother of Cooper, shares an important insight: the anxiety our child feels and experiences is not about “assigning fault to any one place or person.”
- 🔍 What other lessons about parenting do you hear from the stories shared?

Next, choose a quote from this curated selection or another you recall that reflects your feelings or point of view after watching *Anxious Nation*. Ask participants to turn to someone sitting nearby and share and discuss their choice and the feelings it evoked. You can also open up the conversation by inviting participants to share in a large group discussion format.

Alternatively, you may have participants choose a quote and spend some time reflecting in writing. Suggest choosing a word or phrase that caught their attention and expand on their connections or feelings. This can remain as a private reflection or, depending on the size and familiarity of your group, invite participants to share their written reflections.

Curated Quotes on Parenting from *Anxious Nation*

"In our family, there is no magic ending to Sevey's anxiety. She still struggles, and I still find it challenging as her mom. And I see that it's a really scary world for these kids. They're walking a path that we've never walked. But it doesn't have to be debilitating. It's our job as parents, as friends, and as a family to walk alongside them and give them all the resources they need so they know they're not alone."

- **LAURA MORTON, MOTHER OF SEVEY, ANXIOUS NATION**

"A lesson for me has been sort of understanding that these things don't just come out of thin air. You know, I am the product of who my parents were and who my family is. And the way Cooper reacts to a situation and exists in the world is, it's not blaming, but it's about recognizing yourself in them so that you can be better, and you can help them be better."


-**JACKIE RAMSEY, MOTHER OF COOPER, ANXIOUS NATION**

"Nobody comes into my office and says, 'You know, I really wanted to make my kid a worrier like I am.' But what we know about kids that are anxious, that are raised in worried environments, is that they perceive the world as a more dangerous place. Anxiety is generally fueled by thoughts about things that haven't happened yet. It's called catastrophic thinking. Anxious parents talk a lot about the dangers of the world."

- **LYNN LYONS, ANXIOUS NATION**

"If we don't pay attention to how our caring for our children is really a mask of our own anxiety, then we'll keep doing it and keep blaming and fixing and contouring our children, puppeteering them into greater and greater inner disconnection and not even realize that we are [doing so]. The child grows up kind of feeling disconnected from who it is they are. They have to meet the needs of the parent versus meeting their own needs."

- **DR. SHEFALI, ANXIOUS NATION**



"On average, depending on the diagnosis, parents wait anywhere from 2 to 8 years from the onset of symptoms until they go to a mental health professional. The reason I find that so chilling is that we treat everything else with more seriousness, with more respect. If someone gets a rash, by the time I'm done speaking, they've gone to the drugstore to get some cortisone. And if it's not gone in two days, within two weeks, they're at the dermatologist's office. And yet we do not give the same concern to our children's mental health."

- HAROLD KOPLEWICZ, M.D. *ANXIOUS NATION*

"The advice that I would give to parents who have anxious kids... Sometimes the kids just need your healing, and you really just need to be there and just give them a big hug or ask what's wrong. You just need to be there for them if they're really upset about something."

-JONAH BURNS, TEEN, *ANXIOUS NATION*

ANXIETY AND THE BODY

Introduce this topic by having participants read aloud these quotes from *Anxious Nation*.

"Anxiety doesn't have a lot of tools in its toolbox. It does the same thing over and over and over again. It shows up and says, 'What if?' and you start imagining bad things happening. Your body responds to this narrative as if you are in danger. It fires up the system through your adrenal glands and fills you with all of the chemicals—the norepinephrine, the epinephrine—that are designed to get your body ready for a fight or flight and sometimes freeze. If, at that moment, you say, 'What's going on? Oh my God, it's happening again. I've got to get out of here. I've got to get rid of these feelings and thoughts. I can't stand this,' you are doing the disorder."

- LYNN LYONS, *ANXIOUS NATION*

"Anxiety is also something that you can't physically see, like a broken bone, there on display—everyone can see it. Because it's something that not everybody is experiencing, it's very easy to chalk it up to just kind of being weak. What we've learned is that anxiety is just energy. And what's most important is how we use it. And we know just from a biological standpoint how beneficial exercise can be with respect to lowering stress hormones and boosting mood."

- KENYA HAMEED, CLINICAL NEUROPSYCHOLOGIST, CHILD MIND INSTITUTE, *ANXIOUS NATION*

"We need a more serene approach to life where you go inward rather than outward, where you connect more to the heart rather than to the mind. Because as much as we want our children to succeed, we also want to teach them that they don't have to do anything other than be who they are to be successful."

- DR. SHEFALI, *ANXIOUS NATION*

Suggested Engagement Exercise: The Five-Five Rule

Following the lead of GC Corris, young adult in *Anxious Nation*, take several deep breaths and do his five-five rules.

- 🔍 Name five things I can see
- 🔍 Name five things I can smell
- 🔍 Five things I can hear
- 🔍 Five things I can taste

Then remind yourself, as he does, that this is just a moment, and it will pass, and you will get through this. It is okay to experience anxiety, and it is okay to sit in that state. Just remember to show love for yourself and just offer nothing but positive energy.



MANAGING ANXIETY AND SELF-CARE

Throughout *Anxious Nation*, we listen to teens, young adults, and their parents discover different outlets, strategies, and, most importantly, skills for managing their anxiety. Introduce this topic by reading and discussing these quotes from the documentary.

"I worry most about my overthinking. It is what kills me, not being able to figure out what I want to do with myself or the future, what I want to do in this life. I see the stars, and I don't see just the moon. What I do with anxiety now is just try to stay positive because anxiety is part of your mental health, and so good mental health can try to decrease that. And as to my stress — eating right, exercising.

- KAMERON JOHNSON, *ANXIOUS NATION*

"Recently, I've been hearing a lot about the state of our nation, and there's been a lot going on when it comes to racial injustice and stuff. I worry a lot because of my racial background because you can tell I'm not exactly white. There are definitely a lot of certain systemic issues that I face. I pretty much worry every time I go to the street, every time a cop car passes me, and — it's just things where I fear for my life, and I just worry, I get worried that I'd never see my parents or friends again because if something were to happen to me. I don't know."

- GC CORRIS, *ANXIOUS NATION*

"We have to be able to make sure that insurance companies treat mental health the way they treat physical health. That they don't discount it, and they don't limit the number of sessions. They don't do things that they would never consider doing when a kid has a seizure or a child has a series of headaches that they can't figure out what's going on. They don't say that you only have five sessions or you only have ten sessions. They decide on the relief that the child gets, and when the kid is better, that's when treatment ends."

- HAROLD KAPLEWICZ, M.D., *ANXIOUS NATION*

Suggested Engagement Exercise: Writing Ideas

- 🔍 If you could imagine writing a letter to your teen self who was feeling anxious, what would you say? Or, if you were to write to your future self, what hopes would you express?
- 🔍 Make a list of the things you do to manage your emotions when feeling anxious or depressed and explore why you feel or think these strategies are effective.





PREVENTION

While the stigma surrounding mental health issues has declined as awareness and visibility has increased, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP), and Children's Hospital Association (CHA) jointly declared a [national state of emergency in children's mental health](#) in May 2021. The declaration calls all policymakers from all levels of government to advocate on behalf of children and adolescents.

The introduction states:

As health professionals dedicated to the care of children and adolescents, we have witnessed soaring rates of mental health challenges among children, adolescents, and their families over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating the situation that existed prior to the pandemic. Children and families across our country have experienced enormous adversity and disruption. The inequities that result from structural racism have contributed to disproportionate impacts on children from communities of color.


To begin to remedy this crisis, these organizations call for the following:

Increase federal funding dedicated to ensuring all families and children, from infancy through adolescence, can access evidence-based mental health screening, diagnosis, and treatment to appropriately address their mental health needs.

Address regulatory challenges and improve access to technology to assure the continued availability of telemedicine to provide mental health care to all populations.

Increase implementation and sustainable funding of effective models of school-based mental health care, including clinical strategies and models for payment.

Accelerate the adoption of effective and financially sustainable models of integrated mental health care in primary care pediatrics, including clinical strategies and models for payment.



Strengthen emerging efforts to reduce the risk of suicide in children and adolescents through prevention programs in schools, primary care, and community settings.

Fully fund comprehensive, community-based systems of care that connect families in need of behavioral health services and support for their child with evidence-based interventions in their home, community, or school.

Accelerate strategies to address longstanding workforce challenges in child mental health, including innovative training programs, loan repayment, and intensified efforts to recruit underrepresented populations into mental health professions as well as attention to the

Address the ongoing challenges of the acute care needs of children and adolescents, including shortage of beds and emergency room boarding, by expanding access to step-down programs from inpatient units, short-stay stabilization units, and community-based response teams.

Promote and pay for trauma-informed care services that support relational health and family resilience.

Suggested Engagement Exercise: Discussion on Policy

- 🔍 Read the recommendations listed in the declaration.
 - 🔍 **What questions do you have about these recommendations?**
 - 🔍 **What or who do you think is missing from this list?**
- 🔍 Discuss as a group the policies, strategies, and recommendations made by these organizations and what you think it would take to accomplish these steps.

¹¹ <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/child-and-adolescent-healthy-mental-development/aap-aacap-cha-declaration-of-a-national-emergency-in-child-and-adolescent-mental-health/>



APPENDIX

FAQS

Moderator Note: A quick reminder — this information is for general conversations with viewers of *Anxious Nation*. It is not a substitute for a medical diagnosis and should not be used in the place of seeking the counsel of a mental health professional.

WHAT IS MENTAL HEALTH?

According to the [WHO](#), mental health is not merely the absence of illness but rather, in a broader sense, a state of well-being in which individuals develop their abilities, face the stress of daily life, perform productive and fruitful work, and contribute to the betterment of their community.

WHAT IS A MENTAL DISORDER?

The WHO explains that a [mental disorder](#) is characterized by a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognition, emotional regulation, or behavior. It is usually associated with distress or impairment in important areas of functioning. There are many different types of mental disorders.

WHAT ARE ANXIETY DISORDERS?

There are times in all of our lives when we feel and experience anxiety, such as before a big decision, an exam in school, or a presentation for work. The anxiety ends when the experience is over. This is what we can call normal anxiety. Then there is anxiety that does not go away easily. This is an anxiety disorder.

In addition, anxiety disorders are characterized by excessive fear and worry and related behavioral disturbances. Symptoms are severe enough to result in significant distress or significant impairment in functioning. There are several different kinds of anxiety disorders, such as [generalized anxiety disorder](#) (characterized by excessive worry), obsessive-compulsive [disorder](#) (characterized by the need to control), [panic disorder](#) (characterized by panic attacks), [social anxiety disorder](#) (characterized by excessive fear and worry in social situations), [separation anxiety disorder](#) (characterized by excessive fear or anxiety about separation from those individuals to whom the person has a deep emotional bond), and others. We hear throughout *Anxious Nation* that anxiety manifests in many different ways. It is as unique as the individuals who live with it.

We hear throughout *Anxious Nation* that anxiety manifests in many different ways. It is as unique as the individuals who live with it.

WHO HAS ANXIETY?

[The Anxiety & Depression Association of America](#) reports that general anxiety disorder (GAD) affects 6.8 million adults, or 3.1% of the US population, in any given year. Women are twice as likely to be affected. The disorder comes on gradually and can begin across the life cycle, though the risk is highest between childhood and middle age. Although the exact cause of GAD is unknown, there is evidence that biological factors, family background, and life experiences, particularly stressful ones, play a role.

People with anxiety disorders struggle with intense and uncontrollable feelings of fear, worry, and panic and have both physical and mental symptoms. While normal anxiety can offer some benefits, such as healthy caution or honoring uncomfortable feelings, an anxiety disorder is of a different level of intensity. According to [Dr. Daniel Pine](#), medical professionals look at three things to distinguish between normal and abnormal anxiety: (1) if the feelings of anxiety impair a person's ability to function, (2) if there is extreme distress, and (3) if it goes on for many weeks or months.¹²

WHAT ARE THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAYS TO TREAT CHILDREN AND TEENS WITH ANXIETY DISORDERS?

First, it is critical to get a proper diagnosis. If you are a parent, this may start with a visit to your pediatrician before being referred to a mental health specialist. Once diagnosed, there are generally two types of treatments for anxiety disorders, psychological counseling and medications. Most people benefit from a combination of the two with some time needed for trial and error, finding a good fit for a therapist, and the right kinds and dosage of medications.



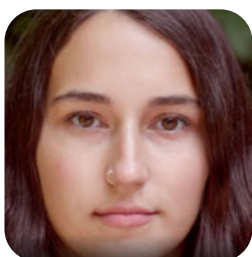
WHO'S WHO IN THE FILM: THE CAST



Cooper



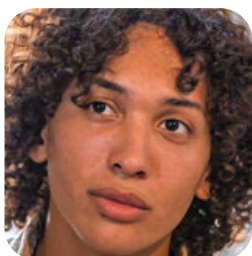
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Jessica



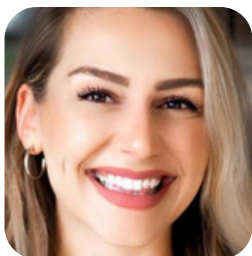
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Kameron



Karl



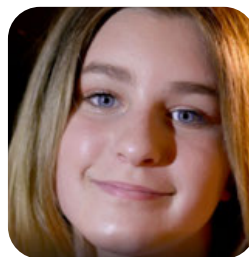
Nicole



Noah



Nora



Sevey

WHO'S WHO IN THE FILM: THE EXPERTS



Kenya Hameed, PsyD

Clinical Neuropsychologist, Child Mind Institute



Harold S. Koplewicz, MD

President; Medical Director
Child Mind Institute



Lynn Lyons, LICSW

Psychotherapist, Author and Speaker



Dr. Dan Siegel

Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at the UCLA School of Medicine, Executive Director of the Mindsight Institute, Bestselling Author



Tim Storey

Acclaimed author, speaker and life coach, Pastor Tim Storey is well known for inspiring and motivating people of all walks of life.



Dr. Shefali

Clinical Psychologist, Author



Jeffrey Zeig, Ph.D

Founder and Director of the Milton H Erickson Foundation, Author

RESOURCES

Community



988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States.



Anxiety & Depression Association of America - ADAA

ADAA works to prevent, treat, and cure anxiety disorders and depression.



Active Minds

Active Minds is the nation's premier nonprofit organization supporting mental health awareness and education for young adults.



Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective - BEAM

National training, movement building, and grant making institution that is dedicated to the healing, wellness, and liberation of Black and marginalized communities.



Black Mental Health Alliance

Black Mental Health Alliance

develop, promote and sponsor trusted culturally-relevant educational forums, trainings and referral services that support the health and well-being of Black people and their communities.



Mental Health America

Nonprofit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness and promoting the overall mental health of all.



Midnight Institute

Cutting edge science made accessible for mental health practitioners, parents, educators, coaches and leaders, mindfulness practitioners, or anyone interested in professional or personal growth.



NAMI

Nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness.



The National Association for Rural Mental Health - NARMH

The National Association for Rural Mental Health seeks to promote the linkage of the diverse voices of rural mental health, through its activities as a membership organization.



Project Healthy Minds

Introducing a new nonprofit for a new era of mental wellness



Psych Hub

Developed to help people overcome mental health challenges through multimedia education for every learning style.



SAMHSA - Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation.

Families



American Foundation for Suicide Prevention - AFSP

AFSP is dedicated to saving lives and bringing hope to those affected by suicide, including those who have experienced a loss.



Military One Source

Military OneSource is your 24/7 connection to information, answers and support to help you reach your goals, overcome challenges and thrive.



National Federation of Families

The National Federation of Families, a national family-run organization, serves as the national voice for families of children who experience emotional, behavioral, and mental health and/or substance use challenges - across the lifespan.



Family Connections - Managing Suicidality & Trauma Recovery

Family Connections_ - Managing Suicidality & Trauma Recovery is a FREE program that helps parents manage the stress and trauma from their child's self-harm or suicidal behavior. This evidence-based, free course provides education, skills and support for parents and is offered in two formats, once a week for 12 weeks or as a 2-day weekend intensive.



Peace at Home

Peace at Home connects parents with proven solutions and compassionate support to take some of the stress out of parenting and make room for more fun. We are the only digital parenting education program that is designed and delivered by 20+ diverse, advanced degree specialists with whom parents have direct contact.

LGBTQ+



GLSEN

Our mission is to ensure that every member of every school community is valued and respected regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.



It Gets Better Project

The It Gets Better Project envisions a world where all LGBTQ+ youth are free to live equally and know their worthiness and power as individuals.



The Trevor Project

The Trevor Project's mission is to end suicide among LGBTQ young people.

Youth



Born This Way Foundation

Supports the mental health of young people and works with them to build a kinder and braver world.



Child Mind Institute

Dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders by giving them the help they need.



The Jed Foundation

The Jed Foundation (JED) is a nonprofit that protects emotional health and prevents suicide for our nation's teens and young adults.

Lynn Lyons offers an instructive and constructive explanation in *Anxious Nation* of the power that anxiety can hold in our lives.

- 🔍 **Parents:** we have turned this into a reading that you can return to again and again as a reminder of boundaries for anxiety.
- 🔍 **Teens and young adults:** ditto.
- 🔍 **Community members who are not parents or do not manage anxiety in their life on a regular basis:** pass this on to someone you feel may need it.

"I talk a lot about anxiety as the cult leader. The cult leader says, 'These are the rules we're going to follow.' Families listen because they've just got to get through the day. So you've got to get to your job. You want your kid to sleep in his own bed. You want them to go to school. You don't want the chaos that happens when you disobey the cult leader. So you start listening to the cult leader. And the problem is, is that the more you listen to the cult leader, the stronger the thing gets. That's how cult leaders work. So people become beholden, and they will say, 'Oh, everything's going great.' So people will come to see me, and I'll say, 'Well, what have you learned about managing anxiety in your family?' 'Well, as long as we_' Fill in the blank.

As long as we put the cult leader in charge, as long as everybody falls in line, things will go great. The problem is, how do you pull that off? Worlds get smaller. I've had kids where the child determines what restaurant the family is allowed to eat at, and the child determines that the parents have to go to bed at the same time as the child. Nobody's allowed to be in certain rooms of the house, and they're not doing it on purpose, and they're not trying to be controlling. But the cult leaders say, 'Listen to what I'm saying, or there's going to be a price to pay.' And they don't want to pay the price, understandably. And it gets stronger and stronger. And you start avoiding more. You start changing your routines. You start demanding of other people that they follow the cult leader, too. And pretty soon, the anxiety is determining what everybody does and what everybody experiences. And it happens fast.

Are you working to create certainty and to create comfort in the absence of skill building? So an example of that may be you've got a child who's having difficulty going to school, and the parents work together, and they come up with a plan that everything goes in a certain order. So everybody works really hard to make sure that everything goes as planned. The anxiety disorder says, 'This is exactly what I need.' The more you do the disorder, the stronger it gets, the more that everybody steps in to make sure that anxiety gets what it wants, the stronger the thing gets.

So I use that phrase all the time.. 'Are you doing the disorder?'"



ANXIOUSNATION

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