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A Life Filled with Worry and Fear

What if there are spiders outside that are poisonous and one bites me? What if I accidentally swallow a battery and die? My legs feel funny, does that mean that I have a disease and won't be able to walk anymore? What if something I put in my mouth is toxic? These are all questions that my little sister has asked me since the doctor told us that she has an anxiety disorder. My little sister only talks about what she is worried about with certain people, me being one of them. When she comes up and asks me to help her talk her out of a worry she has, I've learned that I have to be patient. The doctor told us that to us the worry may be silly and irrational, but to my little sister they are real. She can't control what she worries about.

Though it's very hard to be patient at times because when I give her multiple reasons why she shouldn't be worried she comes up with another scenario. One example being she was worried she was going to swallow a battery and die. I asked her why would she swallow a battery. she responded with maybe she would be sleep walking and would swallow one. I told her she didn't sleep walk, but she said "what if I do," but you don't, but *what if*. It is that *what if* that is hard talking her out of because she shouldn't worry about the *what if*, but she doesn't comprehend that. Conversation like this made me start asking myself, how do anxiety disorders affect the children that have them and how is it treated?

There were two parts of my question that were partially answered by what I already knew. One being that one way anxiety disorders affect children that have them is that it causes

them to constantly worry about something and that in some cases is so bad that it prevents them from doing things that would be normal for children. For example for a while my sister wouldn't go out for recess because she was afraid that a poisonous spider would bite her. I also knew that there are different types of anxiety disorders, the doctor told us this while explaining to my mom that my sister has two types of them.

In order to answer the rest of my question I had to do research, and learn by observing and helping my younger sister. I decided to get books from the library that talked about anxiety disorders as well as finding articles on the topic. It was a bit of a challenge to find the right books and articles that discussed what my question asked. I also found some things just by watching how my sister behaves and asking her questions about the topic. I also found what works to calm her down and what can make it worse.

The first step I took to answer my question was to learn what exactly anxiety was. Psychologist Dr. Allen R. Miller defines anxiety as a fear that is triggered by no real danger but comes from anticipating future danger in his book *Living with Anxiety Disorders*. An anxiety disorder is diagnosed when the anxiety gets bad enough that it cause significant distress and interferes with the child's everyday life according to Dr. John Piacentini, a psychology and biobehavioral sciences professor at UCLA, and Dr. Tami Roblek who is certified as a clinical psychologist. People with anxiety disorders are affected in many different ways. Dr. Dennis A. Nutter Jr, who specializes in child and adolescent psychiatry, says that anxiety can get bad enough that it can keep them from going to school in the article "Pediatric Generalized Anxiety Disorders." It can also lead to withdrawal from participating from activities that they would normally participate in. (Nutter). Children who have anxiety disorders are also more likely to

abuse substances, have depression as well as suicidal tendencies as they get older, this can all lead to psychiatric hospitalization (Piacentini and Robleck).

If the child who is diagnosed early and is properly treated these predictive actions are less likely to happen. The treatments for anxiety disorders, though there are different types of anxiety disorders, are all relatively the same. Medication and therapy are the common types of treatment for anxiety disorders. The best treatment is talk therapy like cognitive therapy and behavioral therapy (Miller 8). Behavioral therapy focuses on changing a person's specific actions and using a variety of methods to stop the unwanted behavior and learn new ones (Miller 8). While cognitive therapy teaches the patient how to understand and change how he or she thinks things. That way in the future they can react differently to the situations that make them anxious (Miller 8). Because you can't constantly be with a therapist one way children with anxiety disorders can get better is to talk to someone about their worries (Miller 9).

The process of my search wasn't as difficult as I first thought it was going to be, nor as time consuming. This was probably a result of being interested in the topic of anxiety disorder as well as having a personal need to understand it. I believe my search went well in getting the question answered but I wanted to get some interviews that I wasn't able to get in. All in all I liked the I-search project as well as learning about something I was curious to learn about.

Work Cited

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