



40,000 local kids suffer from anxiety disorder; Most kids won't grow out of it, says local psychologist

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Anxiety disorders in children are so prevalent it's estimated there are over 40,000 sufferers in Metro Vancouver alone.

But more than 80 per cent of the children suffer in silence, making it more likely their condition will continue into adulthood, when treatment can be more difficult.

"It's a pretty serious problem," Dr. Melissa Robichaud said Friday. "Most kids won't 'grow out of it.' They'll grow into it."

A psychologist at the Anxiety Disorders Clinic at the University of B.C. and a spokeswoman for the advocacy group Anxiety B.C., Robichaud said "just relax, it will go away" is the last thing an anxiety sufferer wants to hear.

An anxiety disorder "used to be thought of as a sign of weakness," Robichaud continued, "but it's actually a sign of strength to go about your daily routine. It takes a lot of work to be anxious. It's physically exhausting."

A recent New Zealand study in the journal Psychological Medicine found anxiety disorders may be a risk factor for adolescent suicides, with the more types an individual has, the higher that risk.

"Sometimes you just develop a feeling of hopelessness," she said.

But Robichaud said those suffering from anxiety disorders need not slide inexorably into depression.

"We have success with treatment," she added. Unfortunately "people rarely present [to doctors] for anxiety disorders."

Some of the signs of anxiety that indicate treatment may be needed include inappropriate behaviour if something familiar, such as home or a parent, is removed; intense fear toward social things like parties, job reviews or exams; and panic or phobias.

Anxiety B.C. is holding a Family Skills Building seminar in North Vancouver Thursday at 7 p.m. at St. Stephen's Hall, 1360 E. 24 St.

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