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Attention: Health/Food/Lifestyle Section Editors

ADABC seminar helps parents manage anxious kids

Almost 40,000 Vancouver children held hostage by anxiety disorders

Vancouver - Raising children in a volatile world is challenging enough, but it's especially difficult for parents of children suffering from anxiety disorders.

Children with anxiety disorders are among the best and the brightest, but are afraid to engage in life. An anxiety disorder may first present as an unwillingness to participate in normal activities most kids enjoy such as sports, sleepovers and even attending school, as well as in somatic symptoms such as chronic stomachaches and headaches.

However, it soon starts to permeate every area of life, says Keli Anderson, a Vancouver mother of two children with anxiety disorders. "These kids become unable to play sports or socialize with friends. Soon they're staying home from school, staying in pajamas three-days-in-a-row, or afraid to even ride in a car," said Anderson.

Anxiety disorders in children are more common than one would think and can get in the way of any kind of future or hope for a normal life. Approximately 10 per cent of children suffer from one or more anxiety disorders, and 80 per cent go untreated. That amounts to almost 40,000 children in the Greater Vancouver area.

Anderson knows all too well how this complex malady can rob children and families of a quality of life most take for granted. Her son was diagnosed with separation anxiety at the age of nine, and her daughter with generalized anxiety disorder at the age of 10. Her son was so disabled by his anxiety disorder that he was unable to attend school for two years.

"They know they aren't like other kids. They will do anything not to be noticed as they don't want to do or say anything wrong. For the longest time, my daughter couldn't talk to her classmates in the hall or go out with friends on Friday night," added Anderson.

Thankfully, help is available. Anderson has been able to manage her children's anxiety with a combination of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), medication, and the skills she has learned. However, Anderson points out that a lot of parents aren't sure what is wrong with their children and don't know how to ask for help.

The Anxiety Disorders Association of BC (ADABC), in cooperation with the F.O.R.C.E. Society for Kids Mental Health, is offering a free and helpful seminar in Vancouver on Jan. 23 on parenting children with anxiety disorders. The seminar will teach parents how to identify if a child has an anxiety disorder, and how to manage the problem at home.

"Parents can't easily get the kind of information that will be offered at the ADABC seminar. If they have a child or children with an anxiety disorder, they can't afford help or simply won't seek it," said Dr. Lynn Miller, a Vancouver psychologist who treats children with anxiety disorders.

Miller says the most common anxiety disorder in young children is separation anxiety while older children gravitate towards social anxiety disorder. However, kids rarely come neatly packaged in one disorder subtype. Miller attributes the following factors in the development of an anxiety disorder in a child: biological; temperament; environment; and how one is parented.

"Good parenting is crucial to a child with an anxiety disorder. Unfortunately, lots of parents are reluctant to see their kids as having any kind of disability " or may not realize they have one - and hope they will grow out of it. But sadly, it only gets worse if left untreated", added Miller.

The ADABC-sponsored Family Skill Building Seminar takes place Jan. 23 at 7 p.m. at the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre, 1100 Chestnut Street in Vancouver. ADABC will also be hosting seminars in the Tri-Cities area, Abbotsford, Victoria, and Richmond. For more information, call 604.525.7597, email info@anxietybc.com, or visit www.anxietybc.com.

Funding for ADABC programs is provided by Fraser Health, the Provincial Health Services Authority, the Ministry for Children and Family Development, and other regional health authorities and foundations. ADABC members play a key role in supporting the ongoing dissemination of resources and advocacy with their membership fees and donations, while the public and corporate sponsors assist ADABC during its fund-raising campaigns. ADABC is very grateful to all its supporters and well-wishers.

ADABC is one of seven provincial agencies that make up the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. These agencies are working together to provide high quality, evidence-based information on mental health and substance use to help individuals and families living with mental health and substance use problems live productive, fulfilling lives. Funding is provided by the Provincial Health Services Authority with additional support from the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

The Anxiety Disorders Association of BC, a non-profit organization, was established in 1999 by a group of concerned consumers, family members and professionals. Its mission is to increase awareness and promote education of anxiety disorders, increase access to evidence-based treatment, and encourage and develop new treatments and delivery.

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