

Outline

Use Neuroscience in the Treatment of Anxiety

**Positives:** We know more about anxiety-based disorders than any other disorders  
Science gives explanations, evidence, authority, destigmatizes difficulties  
**Concerns:** It can be difficult to explain, answer questions  
Clients may feel a lack of responsibility  
Oversimplification is inevitable

Enhancing Engagement in Treatment

Don't neglect the therapeutic relationship!  
Address the challenges of anxious clients  
Remember that strategies are effortful  
Guide the process using client's goals  
Maintain motivation

Neuroplasticity

Define Neuroplasticity in everyday language  
Therapy is about creating a new self  
"Rewiring" as an accessible concept for change  
Re-consolidation: the modification of emotional memories

Identify Two Neural Pathways to Anxiety

Amygdala – bottom-up triggering of emotion, physicality of anxiety  
Cortex – top-down emotion generation based in cognition  
Explain the two pathways to clients  
How anxiety is initiated in each pathway and how pathways influence each other

Client Friendly Explanations

Use illustrations to create concrete understanding  
Fight/flight/freeze responses  
The "language of the amygdala"  
Anxiety and the cortex  
Help clients recognize the two pathways to anxiety

Neuroplasticity in the Amygdala (Essential for all Anxiety Disorders, PTSD, OCD, Depression)

Sleep and the amygdala  
The influence of exercise  
Breathing techniques to reduce activation  
Relaxation, meditation, and yoga to modify responses  
Exposure as opportunities for the amygdala to learn

Combatting avoidance  
When anxiety indicates that the amygdala can learn new responses  
Push through anxiety to change the amygdala

Neuroplasticity in the Cortex (Essential for GAD, SAD, OCD, PTSD, Depression)

"Survival of the busiest" principle—strengthen or weaken specific circuitry  
The healthy (adaptive) use of worry in the cortex  
"You can't erase: You must replace."  
Recognize and modify the impact of uncertainty  
Training correct uses of distraction  
Left hemisphere techniques- cognitive defusion, coping thoughts, fighting anticipation  
Right hemisphere techniques – imagery, music  
Mindfulness and anxiety resistances

Neuroplasticity and Medications for Anxiety Disorders, OCD, PTSD, Depression

Medication's effects in the rewiring process  
The myth of the chemical imbalance  
The danger of sedating the brain with benzodiazepines  
Promoting neuroplasticity with SSRIs, SNRIs  
The effectiveness of CBT and meds

Move Beyond Diagnostic Categories to Focus on Anxiety Pathways

Anxiety is a component of many diagnoses (depression, substance abuse, etc.)  
Amygdala- and cortex-based techniques helpin other disorders  
Targeting brain-based symptoms rather than disorders  
Worry, obsessions, rumination respond to similar cortex-based techniques  
Panic, phobic responses, and compulsions respond to amygdala-based techniques

Research, Risks and Limitations

- Empirical versus clinical and anecdotal evidence
- Clinical considerations for specific clients and settings
- Efficacy of particular interventions may vary

Objectives

1. Ascertain the underlying neurological processes that impact anxious symptoms for clients.
2. Develop client engagement in treatment using personalized goals and attending to the therapeutic relationship.
3. Evaluate the differences between amygdala-based and cortex-based anxiety symptoms and identify how these symptoms inform treatment interventions.
4. Communicate strategies for calming and training the amygdala in order to alleviate symptoms of anxiety.
5. Implement methods for teaching clients to retrain the cortex so that anxiety is resisted rather than exacerbated.
6. Analyze how psychotropic medication impacts neuroplasticity in the brain; identify related treatment implications.

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Rewire the  
Anxious Brain

Neuroscience-Informed Treatment  
of Anxiety, Panic and Worry

Santa Clarita, CA

Ventura, CA

Santa Barbara, CA

Friday  
October 4, 2019

Friday  
October 11, 2019

Friday  
October 18, 2019

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Rewire the  
Anxious Brain

Neuroscience-Informed Treatment  
of Anxiety, Panic and Worry

Featuring neuroscience and anxiety expert,  
Marwa Azab, Ph.D.

- Apply brain-based strategies for Panic, Social Anxiety, OCD, GAD and PTSD
- Understand the difference between cortex-based and amygdala-based anxiety
- Motivate clients and calm the anxious brain using the power of neuroplasticity
- Increase client engagement by focusing on changing the brain - not simply decreasing anxiety

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