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Unraveling the Cause of Childhood Anxiety

The escalating prevalence of childhood anxiety poses a detrimental impact on society, affecting the well-being of children. The source of childhood anxiety has been argued and researchers and psychologists have debated on what has contributed to the cause of childhood anxiety. Parent's behavior and cell phones have become the primary arguments for the cause of the spike in recent childhood anxiety rates. Those who believe parents' behavior to be the cause believe it is a result of over-accommodating parents. In opposition, many argue that cell phone and screen time inhibit symptoms of depression. In addition, there is an argument that parents have decreased a child's self-competence, the ability for a child to self-regulate without a parent. Parents are likely the cause of childhood anxiety as evidence shows a stronger correlation between children's anxiety and parents' behavior and showcases positive effects resulting from reducing parental accommodation rather than from limiting smartphone or social media use.

Parent's behaviors in recent years appear to have a correlation to childhood anxiety. Notably, parents have increasingly been characterized by over-accommodation. Parental over-accommodation means there is an excessive amount of involvement in a child's daily activities and emotional experience—in essence, “an encouragement of dependence” (Affrunti 103). A study conducted by the Division of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University writes that children who have been over accommodated believe “there is an excessive amount of threat that the child will not be able to cope” on their own (Affrunti 103). This all

means that the over-protection from parents' are causing children to believe there is an excessive threat and that their parents are needed at every step. This is problematic to childhood development if those children continue to grow up without developing skills to grow their anxiety. The same could be said for cell phones which have also played a role in limiting child development and social skills (Twenge). In the article, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation," Jean Twenge explains that because a teen's social life is lived on their phone, "they don't need to leave home to spend time with their friends" (Twenge). Smartphones appear to hinder physical social interactions, and it is apparent throughout the article that less teens are talking with each other face-to-face. In response to this, parents should take the responsibility to limit social media and smartphone use to increase interactions between their children's peers.

As evidenced with many studies and evaluations, parents are evermore accommodating for their children. It is increasingly important that parents reduce their behavior and diminish a child's reliance on parental regulation. Childhood anxiety seems to be caused by the communication that "there is an excessive amount of threat" the child cannot handle on their own (Affrunti 103). A study conducted at Yale University finds that the reduction of parental accommodation increases the development of coping skills for anxiety in children (Lebowitz et al. 466). Increasing a child's ability to cope seems like the best ability for reducing childhood anxiety—you let them face their anxiety instead of protecting them. Those in opposition believe that additional studies are necessary to prove that programs, such as SPACE, are effective for most families (Lebowitz et al. 466). In addition, childhood anxiety that does not originate at home or where the anxiety does not involve their parents are less likely to be benefited by programs such as SPACE or through reducing parental accommodation (McLeod et al. 164).

Smartphones have become a heated debate as teen's have become more vulnerable than ever before. Since 2011, rates of depression and suicide in teens have "skyrocketed," much to the result of their smartphones (Twenge). According to the article, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation," every screen-related activity is linked to less happiness, whereas non-screen activities correlate with increased happiness (Twenge). It seems that the devices in front of almost every teen is what is causing depression, but what specifically about them? Some evidence points to the age-old concern of the fear of missing is the cause here, except instead of showing up to the party, it is all online (Twenge). Although it seems like every teen with a smartphone is depressed, it simply is not true. However, using logic, teens who are already unhappy spend more time online, therefore it would appear that all the reports of high screentime use resulting in unhappiness may just be teens who are already unhappy.

It is important to note that in either situation, whether anxiety is caused by parents' behavior or smartphones, parents have decreased children's self-competence. Despite the ambiguity in the origin of childhood anxiety, over controlling parents reduce "the opportunity for [children] to develop competence, or mastery over things in their environment, particularly ... [in] threatening situations" (Affrunti 103). It is this decrease in child-competence that has led to an increased level of anxiety in children (McLeod et al. 161). With this knowledge, it is understood that granting children "autonomy" to their own environment reduces their level of anxiety (Affrunti 103).

Childhood anxiety is becoming ever more prevalent and rates of suicide and depression are soaring. The cause of anxiety is a contentious topic holding intense debate. Identified arguments, however, point to parents' behavior heightening their children's levels of anxiety. Parents have over-protected their children to a state where they rely on them to cope with their

lack of self-competence. In addition, although not an immediate cause of depression, findings see that smartphones influence depression, increasing screen time for teenagers who are already unhappy. Finding a cause of anxiety and helping children cope with it is critical in helping reduce anxiety and levels of depression within childhood and in teenagers.

Works Cited

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