

Bringing Research to LIFE

Upcoming Events

Café Scientifique:

Helping parents understand & help their anxious child or teenager

September 17, 7:00 p.m.
McNally Robinson Booksellers
1120 Grant Ave.

Experts:

Dr. Leanne Mak
 Clinical Health Psychology,
 University of Manitoba & Manitoba
 Adolescent Treatment Centre

Dr. John Walker
 Clinical Health Psychology,
 University of Manitoba &
 St-Boniface Hospital

Dr. Roberta Woodgate
 CIHR Applied Chair in Reproductive,
 Child & Youth Health Services & Policy
 Research,

University of Manitoba,
 Manitoba Institute of Child Health &
 St-Boniface Hospital Research

Moderator:

Dr. Carolyn Peters
 Director of Alternative Solutions,
 Therapy Services, Agency Training and
 Evaluation, New Directions

To assist in planning seating RSVP
 to: Research_Communications@umanitoba.ca or 204-474-6689

Visit: umanitoba.ca/cafescientifique

Visionary Conversations

Welcome to Winnipeg:
 Population One Million

Join our panelists to discuss how Winnipeg will reach a population of one million, when it will happen and what it will mean for economic and community development, health and safety.

Wednesday, September 25

6:30 - 7 p.m. Reception

7 - 8:30 p.m. Panel discussion

Robert B. Schultz Theatre,
St. John's College

Featured Speakers:

Brent Bellamy [BES/91, March/97] -
 Senior Design Architect, Number TEN
 Architectural Group, Winnipeg Free
 Press Columnist

Jim Carr - President and CEO, Business
 Council of Manitoba

Rick Linden - Professor, Sociology,
 Faculty of Arts

Wanda Wuttunee - Professor, Native
 Studies, Faculty of Arts; Director,
 Aboriginal Business Education Partners,
 Asper School of Business

Visit: umanitoba.ca/visionaryconversations

Where anxiety ends and solutions begin

New web tool designed for parents to help their kids cope

BY KATIE CHALMERS-BROOKS
 For The Bulletin

Clinical health psychologist John Walker and his research team will soon launch an interactive, web-based treatment program to alleviate anxiety in kids. The new online tool is believed to be the first of its kind to target the parents of kids as young as four years old and up to 12.

"The earlier you can provide help for parents the better results you get," Walker says. "There are so many children that could use help like this."

Children in Winnipeg struggling with anxiety issues spend at least a year on a waiting list before getting in to see a therapist. It's important to equip parents right away with practical strategies to help their children, Walker says. A few years in the works, his web program is expected to launch later this fall and will help the one in 10 kids living with heightened anxiety.

The U of M psychology professor, who also heads the Anxiety Disorder Program at St-Boniface Hospital, is a featured expert at the upcoming *Café Scientifique: Helping parents understand and help their anxious child or teenager* Sept. 17 at McNally Robinson Booksellers. He and his colleagues (see event info on the left) will discuss the latest research into anxiety and young people at this free, public event.

An anxious child is more likely to have anxiety as an adult and is at greater risk of developing depression and abusing drugs or alcohol later in life. Research also shows a link between anxiety during childhood and reduced academic performance. "We're really trying to get to early intervention to prevent children from getting well-established problems," says Walker.

Treating anxiety early requires parents be able to recognize the signs, which look different depending on the child's age, says Walker, who has met with two-year-olds at his clinic.

At toddler age, anxiety shows itself most often during interactions with caregivers other than their parents. "These children have trouble settling into a daycare situation or a playgroup with other children. They have trouble having a babysitter over, sleeping over with grandparents," he says. "They really have challenges with unfamiliar people and situations."

In extreme cases, children go to kindergarten, daycare or preschool but refuse to speak or say very little. Another form of anxiety to watch for—typically at around age seven to nine—is worrying. An anxious child grows concerned about being away from their mom or dad, or that something bad is going to happen to their parents.

Fast-forward to age 10, 11 and 12, and the worries turn inward to concerns about what people think of them,



Submitted photo

Clinical health psychology Prof. John Walker

whether they're popular enough and whether they're doing well or not in school.

Treatment includes helping parents better understand the problems anxiety creates and coming up with solutions that will make their children feel safe in new and unfamiliar situations. "The approach involves helping the child face fears and helping the child to develop problem-solving in situations they find difficult," Walker says.

For example, if a child is anxious that a tornado will hit their house, the parents could work through the steps the family would take to stay safe.

It's better to be honest than to tell a child untruths—like mom or dad could never die unexpectedly (a worry particularly common among kids age five to seven). If they were to hear of another child's parent dying young your credibility is lost, notes Walker. It's better, he says, to be practical and talk them through what it would mean to them if the worst-case scenario happened: where they would live and go to school,

and who would care for them. The program emphasizes how important it is to acknowledge that many good things—and some bad things—happen in life, but no matter what the child will be cared for and loved by someone.

"It's very interesting, in our research, when parents take this different approach often children's anxiety reduces very quickly," Walker says.

The program also emphasizes developing friendships and social skills, which are increasingly threatened by the abundance of computer devices available to young people today, Walker says.

Anxiety runs in families but its transmission is more genetic than it is through nurture, he notes. Either way, it can create much stress in a household. At Walker's program at St-Boniface Hospital, they offer advice over the phone, and through group programs and face-to-face consults. To reach a greater number of kids and parents with the new web-based tool, Walker plans on partnering with daycares and schools.

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Published by the Office of the Vice-President (Research and International)
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