

Nancy Cooper: Hi. Welcome to Wednesday with Dr. Nancy at lunch. This is another beautiful snowy day. For those of you that know me, you know I like the winter. I like the snow. I have not got out and snowmobiled yet. Michigan's not getting the snow that we're getting, so as soon as they get some, I'm headed north.

Nancy Cooper: Before we get started, just want to remind everybody we sent out an email this morning to remind you about our workshop on Saturday. Speaking of snow, I hear from everybody that we're expecting some. We're planning to meet at 10:00 Saturday morning for our tapping workshop. If, for some reason, we have too much snow and Colette can't make it here, we're going to do a Zoom call instead. We ask that you just email us your email and let us know you're interested. That way, we'll put you on our email list to let you know if we do do a Zoom call, but otherwise, we're having it in our office this Saturday at 10:00. The cost is \$25. It's a tapping workshop, which will kind of correlate to what we're going to talk about today with our special guest.

Nancy Cooper: We have Megan Peck. Megan's from a really ... I love pediatric business names. She's from a business called Mini Minds. We have Mini Minds and we have Little Eyes over here. I love the name. Megan's going to talk to us a little bit about anxiety today with our kids and hopefully give you some tips and solutions to help with your children. Welcome, Megan.

Megan Peck: Hello. Thank you so much for having me.

Nancy Cooper: You're welcome. Tell me a little bit about Mini Minds, what you do there, what your practice is like.

Megan Peck: Sure. Mini Minds is a multidisciplinary practice here in Carmel. We specialize in taking the world's latest brain research and placing it in the hands of the families that we work with.

Nancy Cooper: When you say multidisciplinary, what kind of practitioners do you have there?

Megan Peck: Myself, I'm a licensed clinician. I have my master's in clinical social work, and I also have my master's in early childhood special and general education. Besides mental health clinicians, we also have speech therapists, occupational therapists, and we even have a registered dietician on staff to help with those nutrition and wellness concerns that so many of our families have.

Nancy Cooper: When you're dealing with the whole wellness thing, you're dealing with nutrition and some ... Are you doing some exercises with them, body stuff, as well as talking through things?

Megan Peck: Yep. Multidisciplinary practice means full mind-body. Actually, one of our favorite things to do here at Mini Minds is yoga. We love to use yoga to teach children about their brains.

Nancy Cooper: Great. We'll get some more information about specific things you do, if you do any classes or anything, that'd be great to know, but let's dive into what you're seeing as far as the anxiety in your practice with children.

Megan Peck: Sounds good, sounds good. Okay. Like I said, Mini Minds is a multidisciplinary practice. I don't know why I can't say that word today. On a side note, I told Dr. Nancy earlier, this is my first Facebook Live interview of any sort, so I'm feeling a little nervous, but I thought that was somewhat appropriate considering we're talking about anxiety today. I'm also really excited because we're really passionate about taking, again, the world's latest brain research and placing it in the hands of our local families. The reason that we like to do that is because the research shows us that increasing our understanding of how the brain works actually plays a very critical role in our social and emotional development. In teaching children and parents about the connections between their thoughts and their feelings and their behaviors, we're able to empower them to raise children who thrive, and cope with overwhelming emotions, like anger and anxiety, which is what we're here to talk about today.

Megan Peck: Again, we like to teach people about their brain. One of my favorite books that I use to teach people about their brain is called "My Fantastic Elastic Brain". I am just going to show you one page from it, but it's a wealth of knowledge. If you can see this page right here, it gives a pretty detailed but simple view of the brain. We have the prefrontal cortex and the cerebrum up here. Those are the thinking parts of the brain. Right here in the middle, we have the amygdala and the hippocampus. That's the feeling part of the brain. Down here, we have the cerebellum, and that's the doing part of the brain. We always start off my reading this book with kiddos. I highly, highly, highly recommend it for all families.

Megan Peck: Once we've kind of given a general overview of the brain, we're able to dig a little bit deeper with kiddos and actually do like a personalized brain drawing. It usually looks a little something like this. We're going to go into more detail, kind of exploring what's happening inside each child's thinking, feeling, and doing parts of their brain. Again, this is an example. This is actually a real example. This was completed by a fourth grader right here in Fishers.

Nancy Cooper: Wow!

Megan Peck: And his parents initially reached out to me because this child was experiencing angry outbursts, so what some people might describe as rage. These behaviors were causing a conflict at home. It was really starting to disrupt the family's daily life. It was interfering with his ability to get along with peers, and he was starting to get in trouble at school.

Megan Peck: Aside from all of these challenges that the parents initially came with, they also pointed out a lot of his strengths. This child has been in a high ability class since first grade. When he's calm and in control, he's described as sweet and loving

and kind and creative and outgoing. We sit here and say, "What's going on here?" This is fairly common at our practice. Parents often come in expressing concerns about anger or rage and describe behaviors such as their child is argumentative or their child is defiant, and sometimes their child is aggressive.

Megan Peck: The very first thing I say to any parent that I work with, no matter what the overwhelming feeling is, but when we look at the behaviors, we have to use the lens, view the behavior as a distress signal, so a signal that something deeper is going on inside the mind. A behavior is an outward signal that something deeper is going on inside the mind and the body, and it's our job to figure it out. Angry and aggressive behaviors are often a symptom of overwhelming thoughts and feelings inside a child's mind. We'll often see anger as what we call a secondary emotion to anxiety, anxiety being the primary emotion. If we just treat anxiety ... Sorry. If we just treat that anger, we just treat those behaviors, we're not digging deeper into the true meaning behind those behaviors, which is often anxiety. Anxiety is such a complex emotion that a lot of us, children and adults, aren't really good at recognizing it, let alone knowing what to do with it. If we can't even identify that there's a problem, we're certainly not going to be that effective in coping with that problem.

Megan Peck: The first thing that we'll do in moving on from the brain education and doing some more therapeutic work is helping the child grow their feelings vocabulary because, again, if they're just screaming anger, anger, anger, but they're not talking about the anxiety, we're not going to do any good problem solving because we're on two different pages. We spend some time growing the feelings language surrounding anxiety. We'll talk about feelings like anxious, so we always want to encourage kids to use the sentence structure like, "I feel blank when blank", or, "I feel blank because. I feel anxious. I feel nervous." "I feel worried" is another big one we'll get. Scared. This is my favorite one because it can apply to so many situations. Overwhelmed.

Megan Peck: Then if we have older kiddos and we have concerns about anxiety at school or in other social situations, we may find that we're dealing with feeling embarrassed, feeling insecure, or even feeling rejected. We take a look at the ... The feelings wheel is like 100, 150 words for describing all these feelings. We take a look at all of that with kids and have them pull out what they themselves are experiencing and, again, give them the confidence to clearly articulate, "I feel nervous."

Megan Peck: If we take a look back at this kiddo's picture, we can see that some of the feelings that he identified were feeling mad, frustrated, nervous, anxious, sad, depressed, overwhelmed, and annoyed. We were really able to dig down, dig further from the actions, those behaviors that the parents came in with, and dig deep down further into the feelings behind them.

Megan Peck: Then once we've done this feelings work, we can go into the thought work. Most anxious thoughts start with, "What if?" "What if" is usually your first

indicator that an anxious thought is about to follow. This kiddo described, "What if I can't figure out this answer? What if I forget to do something? What if mom gets mad I don't finish my homework? What if I don't do my homework right? What if I don't do a good job?" A lot of performance anxiety in here that we didn't even know about because, again, initially we were only looking at the behaviors, which, again, are a distress signal for what's going on underneath. We were able to dig deeper and deeper and figure out the feelings and the thoughts behind the actions.

Megan Peck: Once we've done this, really explored how the mind is responding to the anger and anxiety, then we can say, "Hey, we've viewed the whole cognitive thought process behind this overwhelming emotion." Then we can move into, "Alright. That's great. What do we do about this?" We'll actually dig even deeper with families, and we'll go into ... Here's the little client, right here. Our little client might come to us because he's punching or kicking or screaming or just completely melting down. We'll dig deeper with that client.

Megan Peck: We talked about the brain, and we'll go on to explore the nervous system. The nervous system is the brain's connection to the rest of the body. When the brain identifies an overwhelming emotion and doesn't know what to do with it, it sends a message to the rest of the body to prepare for fight, flight, or freeze. Most of us have heard of that stress response. Along with that stress response comes the circulatory system. The circulatory system sends, rushes the blood to all of your muscles, which tighten up to prepare for fight or prepare for running away. Your heart rate increases and your breathing increases. We do all that psychoeducation, again, behind how the mind and body respond to an emotion because research shows us if we know what's going on inside our mind and our body, we feel more empowered to do something about it.

Megan Peck: We'll go even deeper into ... One of the most common strategies we teach here is deep breathing. Most people know what deep breathing is. A lot of people tell me, "Oh, it doesn't work with my kiddo", but often when we take the time to explain the science behind deep breathing ... So a quick overview. You have a vagus nerve that runs from your brain down to the rest of your body. Scientists say it's one of the most important nerves in your whole body. Just by taking a deep breath, a long, slow inhale and a long, slow exhale, your brain tells the vagus nerve to tell the rest of the body to calm down and stop freaking out. When the body does that, then the brain can start to think more clearly and problem solve more effectively.

Megan Peck: Then we can shift over to some cognitive restructuring. Here at Mini Minds, we like to talk about the power of positive affirmations. We've already taught kids about their cognitive thought process, and we can show them, "Hey, listen. When we have a negative thought, like, 'What if no one likes me?', we're going to feel worried and insecure, and we may cry or yell or hit. If we start with this thought and finish that thought process, this is what's going to happen. Those are behaviors that typically get us in trouble with peers, parents, teachers,

pretty much everyone, but if we can practice identifying that thought and changing it, then we can create more positive outcomes for ourselves."

Megan Peck: An example might be, "I am always surrounded by love." Once we're able to identify an affirmation that really resonates with us, we repeat it over and over and over and over and over again because that's how we build neural pathways in our brain. When we think this, we will feel more calm and confident and in control and feel more empowered to display some more prosocial behaviors, like saying hello to a friend or asking a friend to play with us.

Megan Peck: Again, one of the ways that we love to do this here at Mini Minds is through yoga. We love to teach kids about their brain and the rest of their body through yoga. If you go over to our Facebook page and scroll down like a week or two, you'll see a video of how one of our occupational therapists used yoga to explain how positive affirmations work in the brain.

Megan Peck: I'll give you a quick overview here before we wrap up, but she created a yoga flow that she called "catch it, check it, and change it". It starts with lizard pose. We chose lizard pose because that emotional center of your brain, the hippocampus and the amygdala, is often called the reptilian part of our brain, or the lizard brain, because it goes all the way back to cavemen when they really had to decide quickly if something was a threat. That's where that fight, flight, or freeze response came in. That's why your brain today still reacts the way it does.

Megan Peck: We start with lizard pose. Then the kiddos would jump into frog pose and practice catching, or identifying, that negative thought that was about to take over the rest of their body. After frog pose, we would move into rock the cradle pose, and that's where we do our change. That's where we repeat to ourselves over and over and over again that positive affirmation and try to find the negative, the untruths about that negative thought, and change it to a positive thought. Then we'll flip over and we'll end in cobra pose, which is a strength pose.

Megan Peck: That's just kind of a really quick overview about how we approach anxiety and other overwhelming emotions here at Mini Minds using brain psychoeducation and yoga.

Nancy Cooper: I love it, and I love that you have visuals. You can tell you work with kids.

Megan Peck: Yes. I'm also a visual learner.

Nancy Cooper: I love it. A couple questions that came up when you were talking. Do you teach them more one on one? Like the yoga, is it a one on one teaching? Is it a class?

Megan Peck: That's a great question. Here at Mini Minds, we really wanted to design services that would meet the needs of anyone here in the community. We have

individual therapies for kiddos who really need that one on one instruction and therapeutic work. We have classes, so our yoga classes are in groups. We have about 10 kiddos and one or two instructors per class. We also have some nutrition classes, some art classes. We have a ton of classes here at Mini Minds. Again, the goal of that is to do that psychoeducation in a group setting. Then we also have workshops for parents, where, for example, this 10 to 15 minute talk, we dig even deeper into the science behind overwhelming emotions and how specific tools and strategies that parents can use at home to help their children cope with those. We offer a wide range of services to help families.

Nancy Cooper: What ages do you start?

Megan Peck: We start with infancy. We have a licensed mental health clinician here who specializes in our zero to five population. Right from the start, we want to work on this social and emotional development with children. It's never too early to start. We specialize in children through elementary school. We do have a ton of junior high, high school, and young adult people here as well, but our niche is definitely zero to elementary school.

Nancy Cooper: Is there any signs of anxiety that we may not know is really a sign of anxiety, like a subtle sign?

Megan Peck: Yeah. I always tell parents that I work with that the only person who understands what is going on inside their body and mind is the child. We have to empower them, again, with that language so that they can clearly and confidently express what they're experiencing. Otherwise, we're left here guessing, like, "What is this a signal of? What is this a symptom of?" If we really spend the time and do this emotional work with kiddos, they're able to say, "I feel really nervous about going to that birthday party. What if no one plays with me?"

Megan Peck: Once we have that language from the child, then ourselves as parents are able to say, "Oh okay. I can help you solve that problem. Let's take some deep breaths, get ourselves in order, and come up with a few ways that we can solve this problem." I always tell families there's at least three ways to solve a problem, if not 300. You think of all the different ways that we can solve the problem, and then we pick the best one. If that works, great. If it doesn't, we go back to our list and we try again.

Nancy Cooper: Wonderful. Does someone have to be a client to attend your workshops and classes, or can they start in through that way?

Megan Peck: Nope. Our classes are welcome to the whole entire community. We really wanted to design services that would meet the needs of anyone in our community because, again, anyone and everyone can benefit from this knowledge.

Nancy Cooper: That is fantastic. I am so excited to hear about your practice. It's really needed. Kids today really need this. I appreciate what you're doing. I'm going to throw your website up here one more time, maybe.

Megan Peck: If you go on the workshops tab of our website, that's where you'll see we offer regularly, I think it's six, we might now have seven. We offer twice a quarter all of our workshops, and those workshops were created as like the foundation. Any family can benefit from that knowledge in those workshops.

Nancy Cooper: That's great. Thank you so much for joining us today. I really appreciate it. I think it's a great approach to dealing with this very common issue. If anybody has any questions or wants to get a hold of you, just go to their website, [miniminds.org](http://miniminds.org), and contact them through there. Megan, thank you again for coming on with us today. You did awesome for your first Facebook Live. I really appreciate it.

Megan Peck: Thank you. I was nervous, but again, if I thought about how nervous I was, I would probably start to hyperventilate, and then I would be all a mess talking. Instead, before this talk, I tried to change my thought process, and I said, "Wow. I am really excited for this new opportunity and to make more connections in this community", which led me to feel more confident and calm. I think we did a pretty good job.

Nancy Cooper: I think you did great, yeah. Thank you. Practicing what you preach. I appreciate it. Thank you again.

Megan Peck: Thank you.