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A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF PARENTING BEHAVIOURS EXHIBITED BY ANXIOUS PEOPLE

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Introduction: Research shows anxiety clustering within families: a greater proportion of children with anxious parents develop symptoms of anxiety than children with non-anxious parents. Anxious children often describe their parents as over-controlling and intrusive, lacking in affection and warmth, with reports of decreased parental support.

Objectives:

(1) to identify if parenting behaviors differ between anxious and non-anxious parents, (2) to discuss if these differences in behaviors can contribute to transgenerational transmission of anxiety.

Aims: Identifying whether behaviour modification could reduce familial transmission rates of anxiety.

Method: A search of OvidSP Medline, Google Scholar, and PubMed was performed, covering 1999 to 2010. Search terms used were: parenting, parents, maternal, paternal, or parental; and anxiety, PTSD, OCD, panic disorder, or phobia. 14 Papers were identified.

Results: While most papers identified differences in parenting between anxious and control parents, the conclusions were variable. Two observed increased amounts of controlling behaviour, 5 a decrease in sensitivity, 1 witnessed exaggeration of behaviours, and 5 a decrease in granting of autonomy or increased protectiveness.

Conclusion: The most supported differences in anxious parenting are less granting of autonomy, and lower levels of sensitivity. Whilst in isolation they cannot explain how anxiety is transmitted, and appear to be reciprocally related to child anxiety and temperament, they give grounds for further research. In particular this review identifies the need to study the above behavioral components in longitudinal studies, to observe causal effects between parent behavior and child anxiety.