

The Smartphone as a Barrier to Progress in Selective Mutism Anxiety Treatment: An Adolescent Case Example

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Background

- Selective mutism (SM), an anxiety disorder, is defined as the consistent failure to speak in specific situations, despite competent speech elsewhere (Lorenzo et al. 2021)
- There is little RCT research about SM treatment in adolescents
- Case example: 16 y.o. SM patient used a phone to text communications and avoid speaking. Phone use perpetuated their cycle of anxiety. School teachers reinforced avoidance by accepting the nonverbal communication

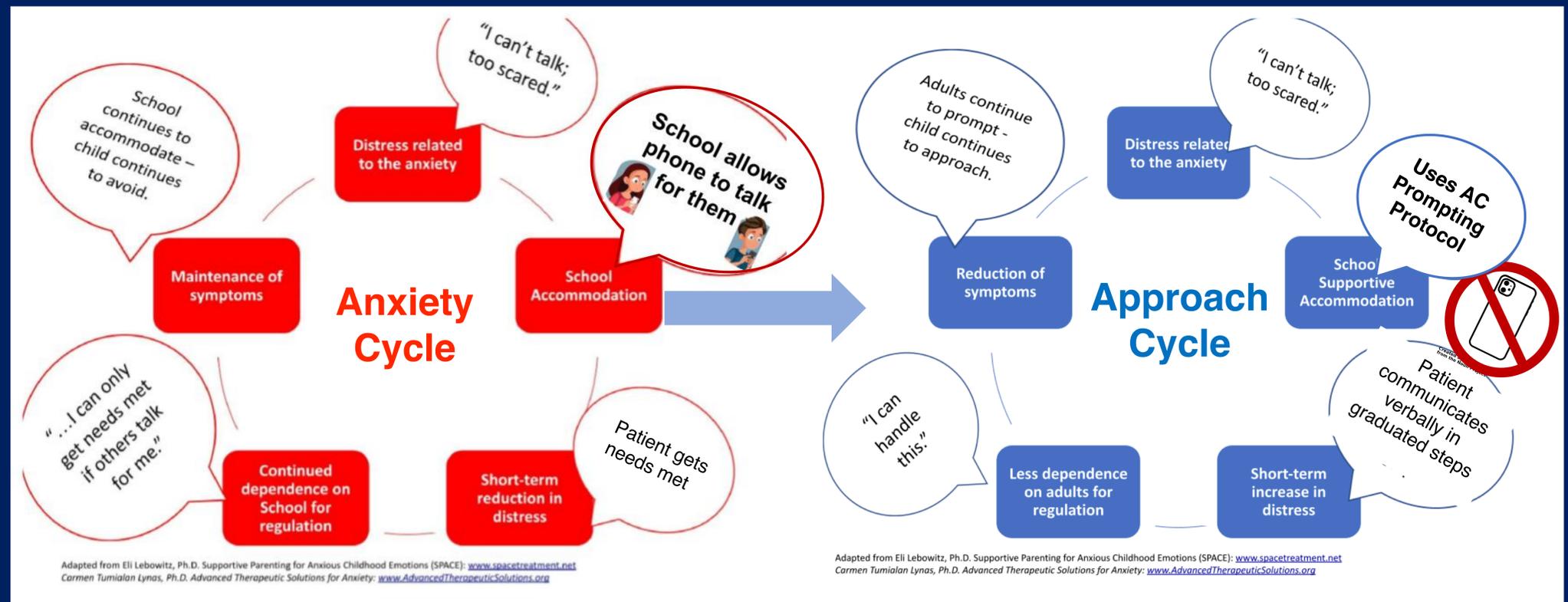
Steps taken to move from Anxiety to Approach Cycle

- On-site training with school staff & peers on reducing enabling accommodations
- Therapist modeled verbal prompting skills with peer, English, and math teachers. Therapist faded out, provided skills coaching (repeated 3x, for 2-hour sessions each)
- Removed safety behavior (i.e., iPhone)
- Met with school team to review accommodation grid, rationale for prompting protocol, and plan for school

Discussion & Considerations

- Working with both teen and school is key to managing anxiety
- Instead of enabling anxiety, schools need training on how to recognize anxiety early and how to implement supportive interventions
- Adventure Camp Prompting Protocol shows promise for use in school setting (Lynas et al., 2022)
- Prompting skills training should occur before staff implementation
- Brave Buddies (clinical setting) RCT showed treatment effect when using a similar prompting protocol (Cornacchio et al., 2019)

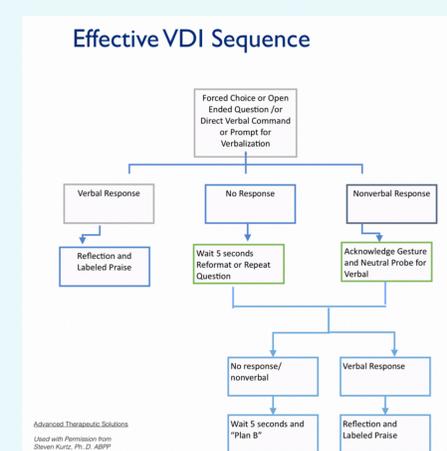
Working with both phobic Teen and their School is key to managing their anxiety



"You can do this, wait, no you can't"



Verbal Directed Interaction: Step-by-step towards verbal communication



AC Prompting Protocol

Adventure Camp Protocol for Prompting! (Level 1)

- 1.) Teacher poses a question.
- 2.) If Student does not respond, wait 5 seconds, then ask again. (If nonverbal response, acknowledge nonverbal ["You're shrugging your shoulders"] and prompt with the question again. Wait 5 seconds.
- 3.) If no response, provide a choice question (e.g. "Is the answer X or Y?"), wait 5 seconds.

(Level 2)

- 4.) If no response, prompt with, "Tell [SSW/SLP/Service Provider/Para]."
- 5.) Service Provider says nothing, just waits to see if Student can respond through Service Provider as an intermediary. Wait 5 seconds.
- 6.) If no response, Teacher says, "Go ahead and practice with [Service Provider], and I'll come back to you." The button is now with Service Provider still in the group, and Teacher moves on to the rest of the class, then comes back. Repeat the sequence.

If Student is still unable to respond, Service Provider uses scaffolding to help Student respond. Service Provider should aim to get a response as close to the goal as possible, moving back further and further from the group until a response is reached. The scaffolding provided, and the trial and error of the Service Provider's intervention, will determine where Student falls on their hierarchy of responding verbally (i.e., responding through intermediary, responding loud enough for teacher to reflect, responding directly responding in small group, large group, away from the group, etc.) for goal development and tracking progress.

Adventure Camp Prompting Protocol adapted for use in schools. Manuscript in preparation.
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References



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