

## How Parents Can Pass On Anxiety To Children

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There are many misunderstandings about mental health. One is that chemical imbalances in the brain are the cause of conditions like ADHD, anxiety, and depression. This is a story that was invented by the psychiatry profession to save itself from extinction many years ago when the reputation of psychiatrists had been damaged beyond repair due to their practices. Psychiatrists were the doctors in charge of mental institutions, in which patients were confined, drugged, placed in insulin comas, and even received lobotomies. Rosemary Kennedy became a victim of psychiatry when she was lobotomized at the age of 23 due to violent mood swings.

While many in the psychiatry profession continue to promote the chemical imbalance theory, some have fessed up. Ronald Pies, former editor of *Psychiatric Times* says now that "In truth, the "chemical imbalance" notion was always a kind of urban legend—never a theory seriously propounded by well-informed psychiatrists."<sup>1</sup> He also said that the chemical imbalance theory was a "little white lie."<sup>2</sup>

Another myth is that psychological disorders are hereditary. It can seem that way since often many members of the same family are depressed or anxious. But genetics is not the cause – learned behavior is. A new Canadian study certainly shows this to be true.

The study included 398 offspring from the general population in Canada, 108 of whom had received a diagnosis of one or more anxiety disorders. The rate of anxiety disorders increased with age:

14.1% of children younger than 9 years of age

51.8% of children older than 15 years of age

There was no significant difference between male and female children.

The rate of anxiety disorders was lowest among offspring of two parents who did not have an anxiety disorder; higher in offspring with one parent with an anxiety disorder; and highest if both parents had anxiety disorders. The risk was even higher when a same sex parent had anxiety.

The authors wrote: "The risk of anxiety disorders in offspring of parents with anxiety disorders is well established." In other words, this study is not an outlier. They noted that the same association holds true with offspring of parents with mood disorders

They also wrote: "It is likely that learning and modeling play a significant role. This theory has been suggested before by observational and experimental studies demonstrating that children model parents' fearful responses and that overprotective parenting increases the likelihood of anxiety in children. Our finding is also in line with a children-of-twins study, which concluded that transmission of anxiety from parents to

children is primarily environmental. Although the current study is the first to suggest that the transmission of anxiety is at least partially specific to the same-sex parent-offspring pairs, evidence exists that other complex features, including obesity, physical activity levels, and suicidal behavior, may be more often transmitted to the offspring from the same-sex parent than from the opposite-sex parent.<sup>3</sup>

**The bottom line:** We learn a lot of things from our parents while growing up - some good, some not so good. The good news is that we are not stuck with any of this. We can change our eating habits, our ideas about money and success, and even our mood states if we don't like them. We are not stuck.

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<sup>1</sup> Pies, R.W. "Psychiatry's new brainmind and the legend of "Chemical Imbalance." *Psychiatric Times* July 11, 2011

<sup>2</sup> Pies R.W. "Nuances, Narratives, and the 'Chemical Imbalance' Debate in Psychiatry." *Medscape* April 15, 2014

<sup>3</sup> Pavlova B, Bagnell A, Cumby J et al. "Sex-Specific Transmission of Anxiety Disorders From Parents to Offspring." *JAMA Netw Open* 2022 Jul;5(7):e2220919

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