

PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAINING AS A TECHNOLOGY FOR LEVERAGING ANXIETY LEVEL IN MODERN ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract: The relevance of the research is associated with the necessity of creating new technological solutions to ensure adolescents' mastering successful ways of action under various anxiety increasing conditions. The objective is to substantiate the particularities of psychological training as a technology for leveraging anxiety level in modern adolescents. In the paper, analysis of diagnosing materials is presented; the program of psychological training "Being in harmony with oneself" is characterized; and the essence of the training technology for leveraging anxiety in adolescents is detailed. The authors substantiate that adolescents with polar anxiety levels must be united into the same training group; they have to master both general and differentiated ways of action, proceeding from their anxiety kind, type, level features.

Keywords: anxiety, stress, fear, adolescence, psychological training, technology, leveraging.

1 Introduction

Modern trends in education are indicative of the growing proportion of anxious students who are characterized with high worry, emotional instability, lack of confidence of themselves and their forces. According to some authors' data (Zimina et al., 2021), the situation of the pandemic has not affected trait anxiety of students in any notable way, while state anxiety has increased in the majority of them.

Being a general indicator of an individual's emotional disadvantage, disorder of psychological health, anxiety has a clearly marked age-related specific nature. It is adolescents who are most susceptible to manifestations of anxiety. In them, high anxiety has a negative impact on their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral spheres frequently, reduces the effectiveness and success of academic activity, and eats away at the quantity and quality of social relations. Meanwhile, low anxiety in adolescents holds a number of risks, too, that are associated with their underestimating the impending dangers or obstacles and lack of mobilization efforts for preventing or overcoming them.

Under these conditions, the need of modern psychological technologies to promote teenagers' mastering ways of effective action, taking into account causes of anxiety, its characteristic manifestation kinds, and types, is even more urgent. An example of such a technology is the psychological training one which is used for solving various aspects of anxiety-related problems. Adolescents are expected to participate in the training sessions and gain their own experience of achieving positive change in cases of state or personal anxiety based on the available general and differentiated action resources; however, the scientific and methodological framework for that is not yet detailed sufficiently. Hence, studying the potential of psychological training as a technology for leveraging anxiety in adolescents becomes relevant.

2 Literature Review

One of the integral ways of analyzing the understanding of anxiety is to apply biological and ontogenetic, object-oriented, anthropocentric, and sociocentric approaches to this problem in sequence.

As viewed by the biological and ontogenetic approach, anxiety is an inseparable mental component forming at the early stages of

ontogenesis. Anxiety is manifested at two levels – the psychological and the physiological ones (Horney, 2000). Its manifestations are characterized by sex distinctions caused by different levels of testosterone (McHenry et al., 2014).

Within the object-oriented approach, the basis of anxiety is made up by a threatening situation which can be real or imaginary yet disrupting an individual's habitual functioning and development. Anxiety is a response to a dangerous, critical situation; it is depersonalized, and it depends on specific circumstances of the situation at hand. Anxiety is manifested as a separate phenomenon having its own pattern of establishment and development. It depends on external (general, integrative, and specific) factors resulting in an individual's internal differentiation (Prikhozhan, 2009).

The anthropocentric approach relies on viewing anxiety as a personal property. C. E. Izard (2006) characterizes manifestation of anxiety in levels, singling out the high, medium, and low levels. Absence of anxiety is not a normal state. The most appropriate level of anxiety is the medium one. High anxiety leads to panic, excessive worry, and success of activity is reduced considerably. Low anxiety slows activity down. Anxiety incorporates individual personality traits which are associated with other mental properties (Erofeeva et al., 2020).

The sociocentric approach is based on consideration of social factors triggering anxiety if skills of social interaction, relations with people, and knowledge of particularities of the way real-life or virtual communication is organized are not formed enough (Segrin et al., 2007; Bonetti et al., 2010; Buyanova et al., 2018 and others).

Psychological and pedagogical literature discusses various grounds for differentiating anxiety:

1. evidence grade of anxiety: objective (caused by an actual danger), neurotic (caused by an undefined danger), and moral anxiety ("anxiety of conscience") (Freud A. & Freud, S., 2018);
2. stability of manifestation in activity: state anxiety (generated by some worrying situation), trait anxiety (generated by feelings of worry which arise stably, regardless of the situation) (Karandyshev et al., 2004);
3. deliberateness of manifestation in activity: open (conscious, clearly manifested in the form of uneasiness), latent (unappreciated, manifested in calmness, insensibility or denial, via indirect behavior forms) (Prikhozhan, 2009);
4. its mobilization potential: mobilizing anxiety (as a boost for activity) and relaxing anxiety (as an inhibitor to its effectiveness) (Lyutova & Monina, 2010).

Yu. M. Edikhanova and E. N. Ufimtseva (2016) note that adolescence is considered a critical age in terms of psychological interactions and character manifestations producing a great influence on the extent of anxiety. I. V. Borisova (2018) emphasizes the necessity of preventing decrease of academic motivation in anxious teenagers at the point of their starting middle school. M. E. S. Loevaas et al. (2018) study parents' ability to detect symptoms of anxiety and depression in their children aged 8-12 and to help them regulate their emotions. The work by Y. V. Vardanyan et al. (2021) discusses ways of building parents' competencies to promote reduction of anxiety in their maturing children in adolescence. A number of studies present successful experience of medical work with anxious teenagers: the use of consistent desensitization when treating school phobia in boys (Houlihan & Jones, 1989), the use of capacities of interpersonal psychotherapy for teaching adolescents skills of coping with anxiety (Young et al., 2012). V. I. Dolgova et al. (2019) present consideration of individual and typological features at PT classes as an efficient way of curbing school anxiety.

There is a bulk of studies dealing with fundamentals of training work (Vachkov & Deryaba, 2004; Kondratyeva et al., 2018; Bobchenko, 2021 and others). Many authors suggest solving various psychological problems through preparing personnel for effectively promoting social changes (Nandan & London, 2013), through the use of training technology for introducing future psychologists to professional self-development (Vardanyan et al., 2014) and creative advance (Vardanyan et al., 2016), with a positive effect on anxiety included. However, psychological training as a technology for leveraging anxiety level in modern adolescents remains understudied, which enhances researcher interest in this topic.

3 Research Methodological Framework

The objective of this research is to provide theoretical substantiation for and design the program of psychological training as a technology for leveraging anxiety level in modern adolescents.

Tasks of the research are as follows:

- to evaluate and characterize the kinds and levels of anxiety in adolescents;
- to identify and compare the levels of state and trait anxiety in adolescents;
- to detail the developing potential of the training program;
- to substantiate the essence of the training technology for leveraging anxiety in adolescents;
- to single out particularities of the scientific and methodological framework of the training technology for leveraging anxiety in modern adolescents.

In the process of research, for the most part, the authors used theoretical methods (analysis and systematization of the material elaborated in the scientific literature) and empirical techniques (School Anxiety Scale by Beeman N. Phillips (Diagnosing technique, 2011), with the help of which indicators of anxiety kinds in teenagers have been measured; State-Trait Anxiety Inventory by Ch. D. Spielberger (Karandyshev et al., 2004) as adapted by Yu. L. Khanin aimed at studying manifestations of anxiety as a personality trait and a state in adolescents).

The research was conducted in 2020-2021 on the basis of several educational organizations of the Republic of Mordovia, among them: the Nadezhda Republican Social Shelter For Children and Adolescents, advanced-program school No. 19 of Saransk city, comprehensive secondary schools No. 8 and No. 27 of Saransk city, and comprehensive secondary school No. 2 of Chamzinka village. The experiment involved 156 teenagers – students of grade 8.

4 Results and Discussion

4.1 Kinds and Levels of Anxiety in the Adolescents

Findings of the summative experiment obtained using the School Anxiety Scale technique (Diagnosing technique, 2011) are given in Table 1.

Table 1 Measuring anxiety in the adolescents according to kinds and level

Kinds of anxiety	Levels of anxiety					
	high		increased		low	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
Social stress experience	60	38,5	66	42,3	30	19,2
Frustration of the need to succeed	60	38,5	78	50,0	18	11,5
Fear of self-expression	72	46,1	60	38,5	24	15,4
Knowledge check situation fear	78	50,0	54	34,6	24	15,4
Fear of failing to	96	61,5	42	27,0	18	11,5

Kinds of anxiety	Levels of anxiety					
	high		increased		low	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
meet expectations						
Low physiological resilience under stress	84	53,8	48	30,8	24	15,4
Teacher interaction problems	108	69,2	24	15,4	24	15,4
General anxiety	72	46,1	60	38,5	24	15,4

Source: authors' own processing

According to the findings, the high extent of social stress experience was demonstrated by 38,5% of the adolescents. They had problems in relations with other people, conflicts with those around them, including peers; they could not opt for the most appropriate behavior strategy, and they frequently had few friends. The increased social stress experience extent was found in 42,3% of the teenagers. For them, communication was difficult with some people, and they had difficulty setting up contacts. 19,2% of the adolescents had the low extent of social stress experience. For these teenagers, it was not difficult to communicate with others, set up new connections, and they built relations with people around them skillfully.

The high extent of frustration in their need to succeed was shown by 38,5% of the adolescents; in their own activity, they expected failures frequently. The increased extent of this parameter was registered in 50% of the teenagers; it was difficult for them to expect success. 11,5% of the research participants had low frustration in their need to succeed; they were positively-minded, confident of themselves, and their need of success was manifested clearly.

The high extent of the self-expression fear was observed in 46,1% of the adolescents. Their emotional state had a significant influence of their self-esteem; they expected failures and experienced negative emotions. 38,5% of the students demonstrated the increased extent of this fear; for them, it was difficult to expect positive self-expression. The low extent of the fear of self-expression was found in 15,4% of the teenagers. They expressed themselves and their qualities to people around them with peace of mind and experienced positive emotions.

50% of the adolescents scored high on the knowledge check situation fear. These students were highly worried at classes during knowledge check. They were not confident of themselves and their own knowledge; they were afraid of giving a wrong answer, too. They expected failures and experienced negative emotions. The increased extent of fear of knowledge check situations was demonstrated by 34,6% of the surveyed ones. Expectation of a positive knowledge check was difficult for them. The low extent of the knowledge check situation fear was found in 15,4% of the teenagers. They were confident of their knowledge and proactive during the check of knowledge.

61,5% of the students expressed the high extent of the fear of failing to meet expectations; they were concerned about their actions and results, and they jumped to improper conclusions about other people's likely expectations. 27% of the teenagers demonstrated the increased extent of the said fear. For these students, it was difficult to evaluate ideas about themselves and other people's views. The low extent of the fear of failing to meet expectations was found in 11,5% of the adolescents.

Low resilience under stress was registered in 53,8% of the surveyed ones. They perceived all situations as threatening. These teenagers could not distinguish between the real and the imaginary. Increased resilience under stress was observed in 30,8% of the adolescents. They could cope with a crisis situation if they had had an experience of responding to it, while new, unusual situations sent them into a distress state. 15,4% of the

research participants scored high on resilience under stress. They were resistant to stress and emotionally stable.

69,2% of the adolescents noted the high extent of problems and fears in relations with teachers, 15,4% – the increased one, and 15,4% – the low one.

On balance, general school anxiety was found to be high in 46,1% of the students, increased – in 38,5%, and low – in 15,4%.

Thus, a significant quantity of the surveyed teenagers (from 50% to 84,6%) had suboptimal (high or low) levels of various kinds of anxiety.

4.2 State and Trait Anxiety Levels in the Adolescents

The data obtained using the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory technique (Karandyshev et al., 2004) are given in Table 2.

Table 2 Measuring anxiety in the adolescents according to types and levels

Types of anxiety	Anxiety level indicators					
	high		medium		low	
	abs.	%	abs.	%	abs.	%
State anxiety	24	15,4	114	73,1	18	11,5
Trait anxiety	36	23,1	96	61,5	24	15,4

Source: authors' own processing

According to the findings, 15,4% of the adolescents scored high on the state anxiety level. They expressed worry, the feeling of overexcitement, continuous startle and groundless fear for various reasons, dissatisfaction with themselves, and they expected failure in all their undertakings. The medium level of state anxiety was found in 73,1% of the teenagers. These students had individual manifestations of anxiety. The low state anxiety level was registered in 11,5% of the adolescents. In many situations, they demonstrated the feeling of confidence and emotional stability.

The high level of trait anxiety was found in 23,1% of the surveyed ones. These school students demonstrated emotional instability, variability of mood, high concern about their state and results of activity, and disappointment of themselves and their failures. 61,5% of the teenagers had the medium trait anxiety level, with individual manifestations of anxiety noted. The low level of trait anxiety was demonstrated by 15,4% of the research participants. These students were emotionally stable; stress situations did not put them out of temper, and they could find a way out of such situations. They were characterized by optimism, self-confidence, and low worry.

Summing up the research conducted, it can be concluded that among the surveyed teenagers, 27% had suboptimal (high or low) level of state anxiety, and 38,5% – that of trait anxiety.

4.3 Developing Potential of the Training Program

Based on the data obtained during the summative stage of the research, the authors have designed the program of training sessions "Being in harmony with oneself" aimed at leveraging anxiety level in adolescents. It was assumed that psychological training for developing a favorable psychological climate among peers, building a positive self-concept, assertive behavior, and communicative competence will allow leveraging anxiety level in teenagers.

The training program has been designed to be conducted for a mixed group uniting adolescents with polar levels of anxiety (high or low) and to include 10 sessions held 1 time a week, each 45 minutes long. It consists of the following three units.

1. The orienting unit consists of sessions 1 and 2 (creation of a favorable psychological climate in the group, an atmosphere of trust; introduction of the participants of the group). The topics covered are "It all begins with communication", "I am not alone". This unit ensures adaptation of the participants to

the training group, their mastering ways of reducing anxiety at the early stages of establishing social and psychological contact, and mastering ways of mutual support while overcoming agitation and fears or indifference and recklessness of the social and psychological origin.

2. The formative unit incorporates sessions 3–9 (formation of a positive self-image, development of self-control, assertive behavior skills, and communicative competence). It covers the following topics: "On the way to the new self", "What worries us?", "What did I use to be like and what have I become like now?", "We are responsible for our actions", "Thinking positively", "Together we are power!", "Love for oneself is wonderful". These sessions ensure an understanding of expectations (one's own and those of other members of the group) as for participation in the training and accepting them, finding out one's own personality resources and mastering ways of using them in situations of increasing anxiety. They also ensure reinforcing the skills of emotional and volitional self-regulation and assertive behavior practice.
3. The reflective and evaluative unit is session 10 (realization of one's changes, completion of the training). Its topic is "I leave it to remind you of me". This unit provides an understanding of existence of some personal markers to signal possible destabilization of one's state. Here, the experience of positive changes is reinforced under the modeled conditions of experiencing anxiety and overcoming it or of the absence of uneasiness and timely actuation of predicting likely risks. Realization of the possibility of transferring the experience gained into real-life conditions of manifestation of various kinds and types of anxiety is ensured at this session, too.

4.4 Essence of the Training Technology for Leveraging Anxiety in Adolescents

When carrying out the psychological training, the authors suggest using the technology for leveraging anxiety in adolescents under which special attention is paid to differentiation of work proceeding from their anxiety kind, type, and level features, alongside mastering general ways of action. The theme content of exercises, games, situations, and debates is selected taking into account the extent of manifestation of the kinds of anxiety. Let rating of the kinds of anxiety be viewed (see Table 1) based on which the theme content for training sessions in the surveyed sample was selected. With regard to this, for the teenagers having the high level of anxiety, their problematical character is reduced when building the descending rating, and for the low anxiety level ones – the ascending rating. So, when the descending rating is compiled for the high anxiety adolescents, it is the topic of problems in relations with teachers (69,2%) that stands out at the first place. Resolution of these is the most attractive for the said participants of the training. Meanwhile, the last place is occupied by social stress experience (38,5%). For the teenagers having the low level of anxiety, the ascending rating lists the topics of frustrated need of succeeding and the fear of failure to meet expectations at the first position (11,5% each). They are ignored by these participants of the training most of all, and work on these topics ensures prevention of subsequent psychological problems arising in the said adolescents. The last place of this rating belongs to social stress experience, too (19,2%).

The type of anxiety (see Table 2) is also taken into account in the training process when performing differentiated assignments. Pairs, trios, or micro-groups in which the high state anxiety adolescents interact model typical situations causing stress or fear. Parallel with them, teenagers having the low state anxiety model situations which are not perceived in a threatening context initially but which can lead to late decisions and a negative turn of events further on in case of an indifferent attitude to them. After that, the adolescents perform joint search of causes behind such situations, work on ways of their prevention and overcoming, and evaluate the effectiveness of suggested ways in terms of their own, individual experience features.

Similarly, pairs, trios, or micro-groups in which the high trait anxiety adolescents interact model motivation and value-related, individual and typological, emotional and volitional, and some other personality features causing stress and fear or aggravating their effect. At the same time, the low trait anxiety adolescents discuss features associated with excessive self-confidence and tranquility – under which one fails to timely predict unfavorable scenarios and to act, so one lands with omissions and non-fulfilled personal opportunities. Further on, teenagers perform joint search of personal resources for self-regulation and overcoming any psychological problems emerging.

Structure and details of the training sessions ensure focused work with adolescents on their realizing their concealed opportunities of acting in situations of increasing anxiety at various stages (when it is necessary to prevent emergence of anxiety, to reduce the risk of losing control over its manifestation, to prevent possible negative course of events, to mobilize self-regulation potential at the final anxiety curbing phase, etc.).

4.5 Features of Scientific and Methodological Framework of the Training Technology for Leveraging Anxiety in Modern Adolescents

Leveraging anxiety level in modern adolescents is facilitated by psychological training aimed at developing a favorable psychological climate among peers and building a positive self-concept, assertive behavior, and communicative competence in teenagers. However, in the majority of cases, such training sessions are offered for the following purposes: prevention (with universal anxiety prevention ways to be mastered), and correction and development (targeted at teenagers having the high or increased anxiety level, with anxiety curbing ways to be learned).

Meanwhile, adolescents having a low level of anxiety are largely overlooked, and non-involvement of their predictive potential deprives them of the opportunity to timely solve any psychological problems stemming from that. Moreover, the experience of simultaneous work on anxiety with teenagers featuring its opposite levels (high and low) is not used sufficiently, and therefore, the complementarity channel, as the material on the topics expanding the idea about various facets of this problem, is missed out.

Scientific and methodological framework of the technology ensuring high-quality performance of the psychological training for leveraging anxiety manifested in adolescents at the high or low levels is made up by two leading ideas. The first one is to include participants having polar anxiety formation levels on the same training group. As for the second one, general and differentiated ways of action to be mastered by teenagers have to be combined at the training sessions, with their anxiety kind, type, and level features taken into account.

5 Conclusion

In psychology, anxiety is viewed as an integral mental component forming at the early stages of ontogenesis, a human mechanism of responding to situations of impeding danger. Adolescence is considered to be the most susceptible age in terms of anxiety manifestations. The state of such teenagers is characterized as tense, distracted, and watchful. It affects their activities, interpersonal relations, and behavior.

According to their concept, the authors have tested out ideas concerning substantiation of the cycle of ten training sessions "Being in harmony with oneself". Topics of the sessions are brought together in three units (the orienting one, the formative one, the reflective and evaluative one). They ensure scientific and methodological provision of the process of adolescents' realizing causes of their anxiety and ways for preventing or overcoming it, taking into account state and trait resources, both general and differentiated ones.

The technology for leveraging anxiety in adolescents which is carried out in the process of psychological training suggested relies on two leading ideas:

- the training group unites participants with polar levels of anxiety (high and low ones) under the complementarity principle, enriching the teenagers' ideas about various manifestations of the problem in question;
- theme content of sessions takes into account anxiety diagnosing results; it allows combining organization of mastering the general ways of action with differentiated work, proceeding from anxiety kind, type, and level features of the actual students in the training group.

The designed technology is promising; the ideas underlying it can be used in applied research and in professional activity of teachers and psychologists.

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