

The emotion detectives uncover new ways to fight off youth anxiety and depression

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Emotional problems in childhood are common. Approximately 8 to 22 percent of children suffer from anxiety, often combined with other conditions such as depression. However, most existing therapies are not designed to treat co-existing psychological problems and are therefore not very successful in helping children with complex emotional issues.

To develop a more effective treatment for co-occurring youth [anxiety and depression](#), University of Miami (UM) psychologist Jill Ehrenreich-May and her collaborator Emily L. Bilek analyzed the efficacy and feasibility of a novel intervention created by the researchers, called Emotion Detectives [Treatment Protocol](#) (EDTP). Preliminary findings show a significant reduction in the severity of anxiety and depression after treatment, as reported by the children and their parents.

"We are very excited about the potential of EDTP," says Ehrenreich-May, assistant professor of psychology in the College of Arts and Sciences at UM and principal investigator of the study. "Not only could the protocol better address the needs of youth with commonly co-occurring disorders and symptoms, it may also provide additional benefits to [mental health professionals](#)," she says. "EDTP offers a more unified approach to treatment which, we hope, will allow for an efficient and cost-effective treatment option for clinicians and clients alike."

Emotion Detectives Treatment Program is an adaptation of two treatment protocols developed for adults and adolescents, the Unified Protocols. The program implements age-appropriate techniques that

deliver education about emotions and how to manage them, strategies for evaluating situations, [problem solving skills](#), behavior activation (a technique to reduce depression) and parent training.

In the study, 22 children ages 7 to 12 with a principal diagnosis of anxiety disorder and secondary issues of depression participated in a 15-session weekly [group therapy](#) of EDTP. Among participants who completed the protocol (18 out of 22), 14 no longer met criteria for anxiety disorder at post-treatment. Additionally, among participants who were assigned a depressive disorder before treatment, (5 out of 22), only one participant continued to meet such criteria at post-treatment.

Unlike results from previous studies, the presence of depressive symptoms did not predict poorer treatment response. The results also show a high percentage of attendance. The findings imply that EDTP may offer a better [treatment option](#) for children experiencing anxiety and depression.

"Previous research has shown that depressive symptoms tend to weaken treatment response for [anxiety disorders](#). We were hopeful that a broader, more generalized approach would better address this common co-occurrence," says Bilek, doctoral candidate in clinical psychology, at UM and co-author of the study. "We were not surprised to find that the EDTP had equivalent outcomes for individuals with and without elevated depressive symptoms, but we were certainly pleased to find that this protocol may address this important issue."

The study, titled "The Development of a Transdiagnostic, Cognitive Behavioral Group Intervention for Childhood Anxiety Disorders and Co-Occurring Depression Symptoms," is published online ahead of print in the journal of *Cognitive and Behavioral Practice*. The next step is for the team to conduct a randomized controlled trial comparing the EDTP to another group treatment protocol for anxiety disorder.

Provided by University of Miami

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