



## Experiences & Insight From Our Founders

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Anxiety has gone global, infecting not just those predisposed to be sensitive, but those born highly resilient as well. This “virus” is most rampant during the teenage years, where adolescent traits of fearlessness and invincibility have been infected by worry, fear, and the safety of avoidance.

Most scientists agree it takes a millennium to notice an evolutionary change; however, we have seen a significant shift in the prevalence and impact of anxiety in less than a decade. Recent studies show that anxiety disorders have become the most common mental health condition in the United States and Europe across all age groups. Despite this unprecedented rise, most countries and communities have yet to respond in the way they need to.

While there has been an increase in the recognition of anxiety disorders, many professionals rely on conventional talk therapy at the expense of exposure therapy, an indispensable form of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). Granted, processing the origin, experience, and impact of anxiety is an important educational step. But until the patient learns to increase anxiety by imagining and experiencing their fears, traditional therapy and medication are avoidant strategies themselves.

The real tragedy: anxiety is a highly treatable condition, yet the majority of child sufferers either receive no treatment, or get prescribed a litany of medications to provide short term relief, instead of long term recovery and transformation.



## OUR PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

# Linda Geiger

CEO & Founder



When I embarked on the wondrous journey of having children, I was full of hopes and dreams of happiness, fulfillment, and “success” for my children. Like many parents, I had a script on how my children’s lives would unfold, like a screenplay of the various waypoints in life: loving (and exhausting) infancy, joyous preschool up through the challenging, yet manageable high school and entry to a name-brand college.

Yet, the course of my family has tacked in a different, arduous, and uncharted direction. I have multiple children that suffer from anxiety disorders. At times, care for my anxious children has taken over our family. We’ve had to rewrite the script, making the storyline so unfamiliar that we’re improvising like no family or friends could ever conceive. No matter how well-meaning the advice, parenting your anxious child is a lonely, frustrating, and heartbreaking endeavor.

My child had such debilitating anxiety by 9th grade, that his world became increasingly small. He dropped off his travel baseball team and stopped playing his beloved sport altogether. His social life in the “real world” crumbled; and instead he sought refuge and success in online gaming. Eventually, my funny, smart, beautiful 15-year-old stopped going to school. Alternatively, we cajoled, threatened, bribed, and yelled, but nothing would pry him from his room or our home. My husband and I were crushed by our inadequacy to help our son tap into his potential, and more importantly, live a happy and fulfilling life.

After exhausting all our options for local treatment (1:1 therapy, tutors, small private schools), I embarked on a journey to find specific, anxiety-focused treatment geared for adolescents. My ideal solution was a short-term “out-patient” program. I desperately wanted to keep my family intact so I could enjoy the last few remaining years before my son embarked on his college adventure.

Despite my persistence over many weeks of searching, I could not find a single, anxiety-specific private intensive day program anywhere in the United States. While there are some excellent options offered by psychiatric hospitals, I just didn’t want to burden my son with the experience of getting treatment in a psychiatric setting.

Fortunately, during this journey, I met Dr. Daniel Villiers. He was instrumental in assessing, intervening, and guiding us through the process of obtaining top-notch residential treatment for our son (who is doing quite well, mercifully.)

My experience in researching adolescent anxiety treatment and my incredulity at the dearth of outpatient options, led me to partner with Dr. Villiers to found the Anxiety Institute. Together, we’ve created the services and programs that I so desperately wanted to treat my son.

Recently, I was asked by a potential investor my rationale for founding the Anxiety Institute. I paused, knowing that she wanted to hear about the opportunity of finding an unserved market and maximizing returns for investors. Instead, I told her what really drives me: I want to prevent other parents from experiencing the frustration and anguish I went through when trying to find high-quality, specialized anxiety treatment for their adolescent and young adult children.

Our mission is to transform the lives of anxiety sufferers and their families by reducing the duration and impact of anxiety and related disorders. Our dream is that your child can live-up to their full potential and be the happy, loving child you remember from their childhood.

Take heart. There is hope

Warmly,

*Linda*

*p.s. We didn’t get money from that investor!*

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## OUR PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

# Daniel P. Villiers, Ph.D.

*EVP Clinical Strategy & Founder*



Many people ask me about the motivations behind The Anxiety Institute. I usually start with the data: from nearly 10 million children diagnosed with an anxiety disorder in the United States (NIMH, 2012) to a 700% increase in anxiety rates over last forty years. This reality then leads to questions of why Generation Y (those of us born between 1980 and 2000) are more anxious, fearful, and avoidant than any generation before. In response, I share the harsh realities of our culture: the impact of ever-present technology, over-protective parenting, exam-factory schooling, college acceptance pressures, and post-graduation unemployment. I tell them about the concerning shortage of anxiety treatment programs, how we're facing a true epidemic, and, how we could be doing so much more for our children.

But I also get to tell the brighter-side of anxiety: that there is hope. Hope for recovery using the scientifically-proven power of exposure therapy. And hope for effective, enduring treatment using new technology like biofeedback, virtual reality and smart phone-assisted therapy.

My life as a teenager was circumscribed by anxiety and the decisions it made for me. I came to America for high school at 14 years old, seeking change and opportunity, only to leave a few years later. I didn't believe my anxiety was worse than what other students faced, but I definitely thought I wasn't as mentally strong as others. While I tried to convince family, friends, and teachers that my anxiety wasn't shyness, apathy, or laziness, my therapy was limited to "relax," "cheer up," and "tough it out."

I remember praying for a medical diagnosis that would somehow explain why ambition, potential, and opportunity failed to result in movement, growth, and gratitude; but a litany of tests revealed that I had social anxiety, panic disorder, and agoraphobia. I became ashamed and retreated from school and social activities. Adjusting my medication and talking about anxiety and despair did little to change my world.

It wasn't until I met my fourth therapist, Paul, that things started to change. Paul had also experienced anxiety, conquered it, and became a therapist to help others. He helped me understand the learning theories behind anxiety, and that through exposure therapy I could change my physical and psychological response to real or imagined fear and threat. We did this procedure in the office and on the streets of London; together and over the phone. This process was at the heart of my recovery.

My personal experience with anxiety has radically shaped my expertise and commitment to provide compassionate, effective treatment to adolescents and young adults. This includes helping clients with a massive shift in their thinking: anxiety and fear are not signs of weakness, but, rather, opportunities to nurture courage and confidence. There is no philosophy that's more powerful than this when helping anxiety sufferers reach the fulfilled life they truly deserve.

*DAN*