

Understanding anxiety

- Everyone feels anxious from time to time but for most of us it does not affect day to day life
- All children experience fears at different points in their lives and this is a normal part of development
- All fears are 'normal' – some are simply more intense or more extensive. Consider the effect the anxiety is having on your child's life
- Anxiety can be mild and short lived or all pervasive and intense, causing a great deal of distress and placing very real restrictions on life

Typical fears commonly reported

INFANTS/TODDLERS (up to 2 years)

loud noises, strangers, separation from parents, large objects

PRE-SCHOOLERS (3-6 years)

imaginary figures (eg ghosts, monsters, supernatural beings), the dark, noises, sleeping alone, thunder, floods

SCHOOL AGED CHILDREN/ADOLESCENTS (7-16 years)

more realistic fears eg physical injury, health, school performance, death, thunderstorms, earthquakes, floods

Factors affecting anxiety

Genetic factors

- Can inherit anxiety ie can run in families - 1/3 genes and 2/3 environment
- Temperament/personality

Environmental factors

- What we learn from others around us and from our experiences
- Influence from behaviour of others (Social modeling: seeing someone else who is afraid)
- Reaction from others –reassurance ‘proves’ there is something to be scared of, also may reinforce anxious behaviour through attention
- Opportunities to learn how to cope, ie opportunity to experience some anxiety and learn how to tolerate it

Difficult life events

- Not clear if difficult these events cause anxiety or anxious children do not cope well with them (and become more anxious)

ASD

- Triad of impairment means children have difficulty making sense of the world and coping with change. This can cause anxiety and decrease coping/resilience
- Negative social experiences eg loneliness and bullying compound difficulties
- Sensory sensitivities

WHEN IT'S A PROBLEM

When anxiety affects your child's day to day life, such as:-

- Not sleeping
- Avoiding situations
- Affecting family life
- Affecting academic progress

What helps? Top tips for managing anxiety

- Be Aware of your own anxiety, seek support yourself how to manage this if needed. You are the role model.
- Do not over reassure – can be counter productive and child thinks there must be something to worry about. Work on problem solving instead.
- Be matter of fact and a can do attitude.
- Show the child how you cope with problems by rationalising.

Key messages

- I know how it feels
- You are not alone
- There is a reason you feel this way
- I want to help you get rid of that feeling
- This is how we do it – tiny steps
- We only move on when you are ready
- If you feel uncomfortable we can stop
- It won't always be like this

Being positive

Instead of ...	Try saying ...
You don't have to do anything too hard	You won't have to do it until you feel ready.
I know it's hard	I know it's hard but it won't always be like this
You don't have to go	It's very hard for you at the moment, but we will carry on helping you until you can join in the fun too
I know you really wanted to go to that party, but don't worry about it, it doesn't matter	I know you feel disappointed you could not go, but you will get a point where you are ready to go to a party
Ben is feeling shy and doesn't want to read in assembly/be in the play etc	Ben just needs a bit more time to get used to the idea – anyway he has another very important job to do

Helping

- Remember empathise but do not reassure
- If your child seeks reassurance or help, resist the temptation to provide this and prompt detective thinking instead
- It is easy to step in and take over but this just makes the child avoid the things they fear and they learn they can't do it without you. Painful as it is it is better in the long run to allow some learning through being allowed to make their own mistakes

CBT and Anxiety

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is based on the idea that how we feel and what we do are due to the way we think.

- ❑ Anxious thoughts
- ❑ Physical symptoms
- ❑ Anxious behaviours

Anxious thinking

- Overestimate likelihood (e.g. people will laugh)
- Underestimate ability to cope (e.g. I will be sick)

Children need to learn nothing bad happened and they can cope.

The importance of thinking

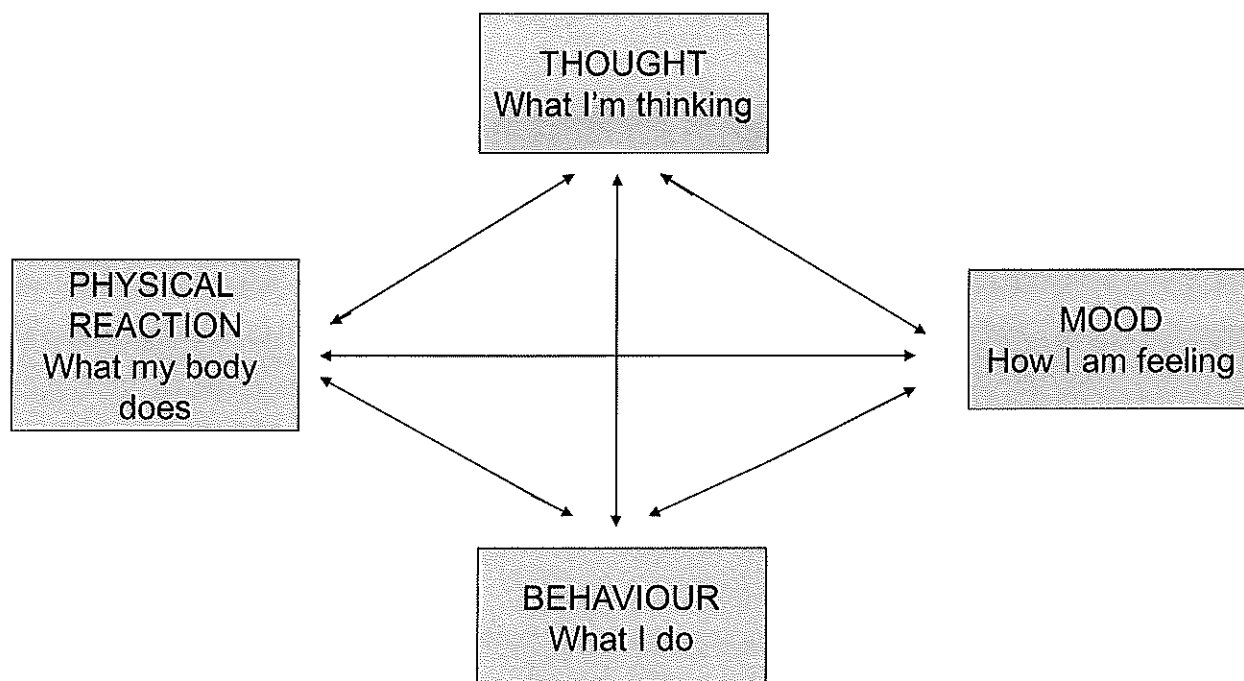
It is not just events that make us anxious – it is how we interpret these events ie our thoughts and beliefs about them.

Event	Mum is late home	Mum is late home
Thought	Something bad must have happened. What if she has been in a serious accident?	The traffic is pretty bad this time of day. I expect she will be here soon
Feeling	Anxious	OK
Behaviour	Keep checking the window, pace, cry	Wait calmly, get on with other things

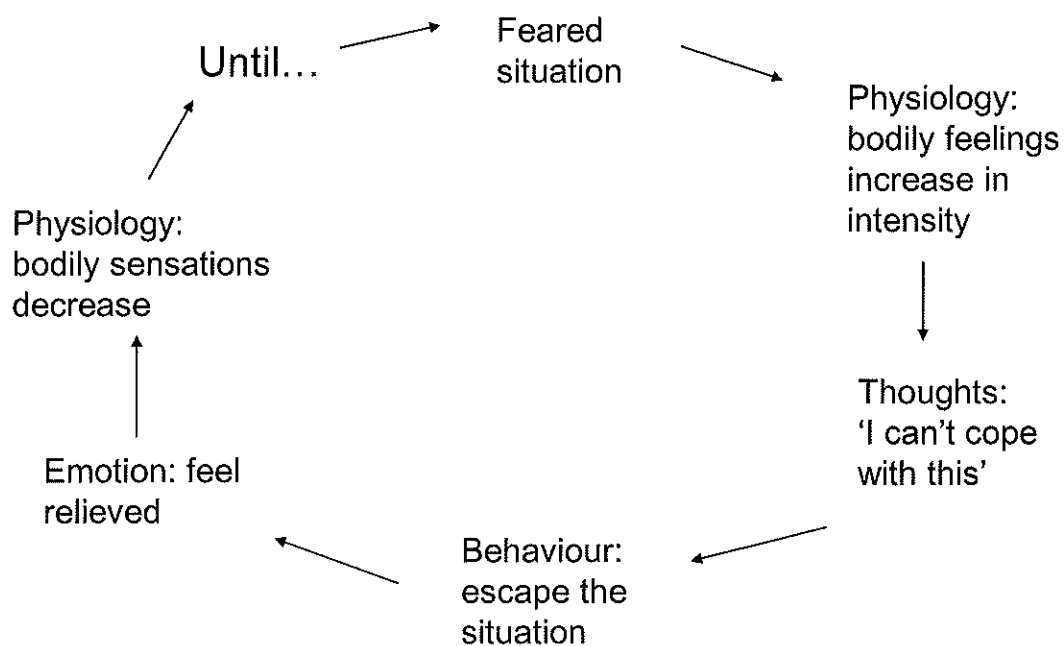
Physical symptoms

- Fight or flight – body prepares to deal with a perceived danger by fighting it head on or by running away
- Can include shaking, sweating, rapid breathing, racing heartbeat, butterflies in stomach, feeling sick or dizzy
- Physical sensations can be unpleasant especially for children who may not understand what is happening
- Tend to disappear once have changed anxious thoughts and behaviour. If very distressing teach relaxation or on the spot stress relievers (stress ball, cognitive distraction, deep breathing, shoulder roll etc)
- Teach about anxiety so they understand what is happening – try using books, stories, visual thermometers to show levels of anxieties and so on

How I feel is connected to what I think and do



Illustrating the vicious circle of anxiety ...



Step 1: Spotting the anxious thoughts

- Why are you worried?
- What do you think might happen?
- What is it about that situation that is making you frightened?
- What would be the worst thing that could happen?
- Why does that worry you?
- I suppose if I had to I might worry that
- Write it down, draw, use toys as needed to help child express thoughts

Use open questions ie '*what*' or '*why*' instead of '*do you...*'

Be neutral, curious, sympathetic and avoid offering reassurances

Step 2: How to do Detective Thinking

4 Steps for detectives to follow:

1. Write down the event and then the thought behind the feeling. Use the worry scale to rate how worried you are when you think this thought
2. Look for the evidence. Ask what are the facts? What is likely to happen? What has happened to me and to others before?
3. List all the other things that might happen instead.
4. Using the evidence you found, write down a realistic thought to replace the worried thought. Give a new worry rating.

Realistic Thinking - Detective's Evidence Sheet

Event What is happening?	I have to give a talk at school
Thoughts What am I thinking?	I will do a bad job and kids will talk about me behind my back. Worry Rating: 8
What is the evidence? What are the facts? What else could happen? What happened when I worried before? What is likely to happen? What has happened to other people? What would I say to my best friend if they were worried about this?	I've given talks before and only did a bad job once. I have seen some other kids get embarrassed a couple of times, so I'm not the only one who feels like this. I've heard other people say that they gave really bad talks but I didn't notice that they did anything wrong. Most people look a bit nervous or embarrassed when they are speaking in front of a crowd - so I won't look different to most other people. I have been practicing and learning my talk, so I should be ok. I've given talks before and been embarrassed - but no-one said anything much about it. Even if I make some mistakes, most kids will forget about it very quickly.
What is my realistic thought?	I will probably do a good job and even if I make some mistakes, the kids probably won't even notice Worry Rating: 3

Step 2 cont: Experiments to test out fears

Anxious thought	Experiment to test it out
Everyone will make fun of me when I go to Beavers tonight	When you get home write down the names of everyone who did not tease me
If I make a mistake in my maths homework I will be in big trouble	Ask the teacher what happens if someone makes a mistake in their homework Make one deliberate mistake and see what happens
I can't go to my friend's house because her mum will think I am weird	Mini survey: ask 5 people what they would think if a friend came to play but did not chat to their friend's mother
I can't put my hand up in class because it would be terrible if I got the answer wrong	Record what happens in school this week. Does everyone get the right answer? What happens if they don't?

Positive Self Talk

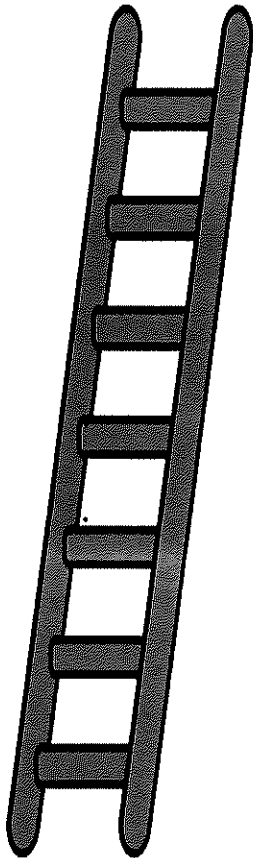
- **Preparatory thoughts:**
It's going to be ok. I will give it a try.
- **Coping thoughts:**
I will concentrate, I'm anxious but I will be ok. I have done it before so I can do it again.
- **Self Praise after the event:**
I did it, I coped!
I'm getting good!
That was tough, but I got through it. It will be easier next time.

Step 3 cont: Rewards

- Make sure anxious behaviour is not rewarded with attention
- Use distraction where possible
- Praise and reward non anxious behaviour
- Small, medium, larger rewards
- Meaningful to create incentive
- Incentives not pressure
- Instant reward or something to work towards, depending on your child
- Make sure you are happy to withhold the reward if necessary

Adam's step plan

Adam's Goal:









- Step 10
- Reward
- Step 9
- Reward
- Step 8
- Reward
- Step 7
- Reward
- Step 6
- Reward
- Step 5
- Reward
- Step 4
- Reward
- Step 3
- Reward
- Step 2
- Reward
- Step 1
- Reward

Problem solving

What is the problem?	Why is it a problem?	What can I try to do?	Who can help me?

I can calm down. I'll try:

-  take 5 deep breaths
-  put my head on my desk
-  close my eyes
-  say, "I need a break"
-  sit in my chair and rub my legs

 then I can get back to work.

Relax

Take 5 deep breaths

Take a walk

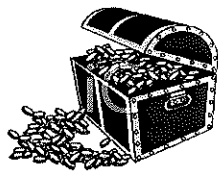
Take a break

Sit in the bean bag chair

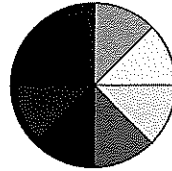
Talk to Someone



Think about the reward



I can play the colour game

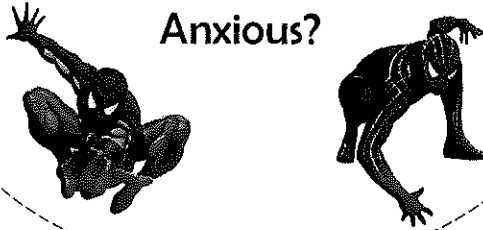


I can do the breathing thing

I can do a pyramid



What Can I do If I Get Anxious?



I can pretend to be someone brave



I can turn monsters into funny things

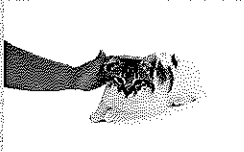


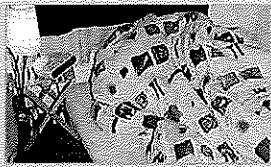






I can do an experiment



I can be a detective



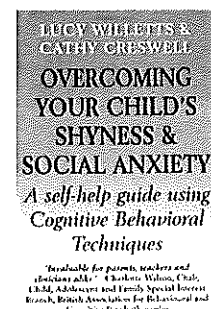
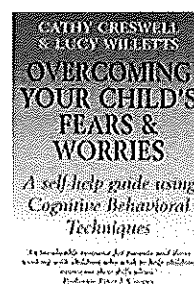
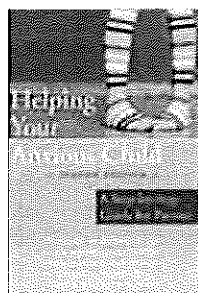
Calm Things	Happy Things	Brave things I can say
<p>Stroke the cat</p> 	<p>Play on my x-box</p> 	<p>Mum will be back at 5.30 and it's not that long</p> 
<p>Go under my duvet</p> 	<p>Read joke books</p> 	<p>I have done it before and it was OK</p>
<p>Trampoline</p> 	<p>Think about Mr Bean</p> 	<p>Mum has been out thousands of times before and has never been hurt. It is not likely to happen now.</p> 

A summary of helpful strategies

- Structure, routine, plenty of preparation for changes
- Visual supports
- Social stories
- Avoid too much reassurance
- Avoid the avoidance trap
- Model coping responses
- Teach about anxiety including thermometer
- Use problem solving
- Use detective thinking
- Use step plans
- Teach social and communication skills

Resources

- *Exploring Anxiety* by Tony Attwood
- *Overcoming your Child's Fears and Worries* by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts
- *Overcoming your Child's Shyness and Social Anxiety* by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts
- *Helping Your Anxious Child* by Ron Rapee (internet linked resource)
- *Think Good Feel Good* by Paul Stallard
- *Anxiety* by Paul Stallard (internet linked resources)
- www.embracethefuture.org.au
- moodgym.anu.edu.au



Sources of help

- **Anxiety and Depression**
- **Recommended Books:**
- 'What to Do When You Worry Too Much' by Dawn Huebner (Ages 6-12)
- 'Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step-by-step Guide for Parents' by Ronald Rapee
- 'Talking Back to OCD' by John March and Christine Benton
- 'Breaking Free from OCD: A CBT Guide for Young People and Their Families' by Jo Derisley
- 'Think Good - Feel Good' by Paul Stallard
- 'What To Do When Your Brain Gets Stuck: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming OCD' by Dawn Huebner
- **Services Available:**
- School Health Nurse
- Contact details from child's school and locality Hubs:
- Patchway 01454 862442 / Kingswood 01454 862441
- The Kingswood Bourne Family project: Play therapist works with children with many different needs. Charges apply. 0117 9478441 bfp@bournechristiancentre.org
- www.bournechristiancentre.org
- **Useful Websites / Telephone Numbers**
- Anxiety UK – Provides information and support for those living with anxiety
www.anxietyuk.org.uk
- Helpline 08444 775 774 Monday-Friday 09.30-5.30

Quick relaxation exercises

Feeling stressed in class or in the exam hall? Here are some quick exercises you can do to relax without drawing unwanted attention to yourself!

Quick tense and relax workout

- Pull in stomach muscles tightly, hold for a count of 5 and then release and relax
- Clench fist tightly; hold; relax
- Extend fingers; hold; relax
- Grasp below seat of chair, pull up; hold; relax
- Press elbows tightly into side of body; hold; relax Push foot hard into floor; hold; relax
- Relax briefly with dangling arms, or resting head in arms, on desk

Controlled breathing:

- Slowly draw in a deep breath, hold it for 5 seconds, and then very slowly let it out. As you breathe, say to yourself *relax*. Try and breathe from deep in your stomach, not higher up in your chest.

Go to your happy place

- Do the breathing exercise as above. As you breathe, imagine a place where you feel calm and relaxed. Try and make the picture as real as you can (we'll practice this in session 2)

Racing heart:

- If you feel uncomfortable because it seems like your heart is racing uncontrollably, focus on trying to speed up your heart-rate. It sounds bonkers, but doing this can actually help get your heart-rate back to normal more quickly.

Remember that the physical feelings of stress will soon pass – your body is always working to get back to a relaxed state