

What do we want to achieve?

- **Recognise** and **understand** childhood anxiety better
- Equip you with some **basic skills to help support** children/young people
- These techniques may be useful for **mildly** anxious children,

Anxiety Statistics

- Anxiety is one of the most common psychological disorders in childhood. Studies estimate figures between 8 & 27% of the population meeting diagnostic criteria at some point during youth.
- 1 in 6 young people will experience an anxiety problem at some point in their lives, so 5 pupils in an average class (Anxiety UK)
 - Affect up to 9% of pre-school children
 - 12% primary & adolescents
- 3.3% or about 290,000 children and young people have an anxiety disorder

(http://www.youngminds.org.uk/training_services/policy/mental_health_statistics)

Causes

- Environmental
- Trauma / Adverse Life Events
- Medical Factors
- Substance Misuse
- Genetics
- Brain Chemistry
- Other Factors – temperament, attachment, parenting style etc

What Is Anxiety?

- We all experience anxiety from time-to-time
 - Overestimation of threat and danger:
 - Underestimate ability to cope



What Is Anxiety?

- **All** children and young people (& adults) have changes in mood, and ups and downs.
- Being fearful is very common during childhood.
- **Context Matters**

What Is Anxiety?

- When **does** it become a problem?
 - Prevents children from enjoying normal life experiences
 - Impacts on school, friendships, family life and normal development
 - Difficulty to return to a relaxed, normal state.

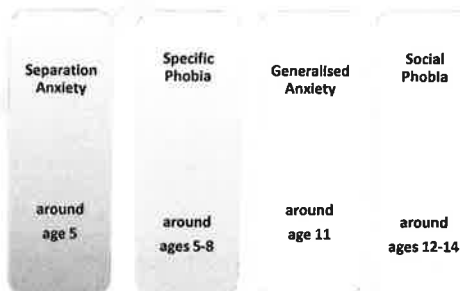
Some anxiety might be developmentally appropriate. To help you decide, consider the following questions:

Is the fear completely out of proportion to the actual level of threat?

Is there fear in the absence of actual threat?

Is it difficult to settle the child or young person back to a normal state?

Anxiety Disorders



Separation Anxiety

Excessive Concern about separating from caregiver(s) – commonly expressed by difficulties attending school/social events, bedtime difficulties (e.g. sleeping alone).

Essentially this revolves around beliefs of what will happen when the child is separated from their caregiver

- *Worry about losing a parent*
- *Worry about an untoward event that may lead to separation*
- *Persistent avoidance to go out*
- *Reluctance to stay alone*
- *Reluctance to sleep alone*
- *Nightmares about separation*

Social Phobia

Excessive fear of negative evaluation- also commonly expressed by school and social difficulties, e.g. speaking up in class, attending school, attending social events.

So this is not a fear of others per se, it's a fear of being rejected by others/performance-based worries. Children may report being constantly scared unless they are alone.

- *Scared of doing things with other people, like talking, eating, going to parties, or other activities (at school) or with friends,*
- *Difficulty talking to people that they don't know*
- *Difficulty to do things when other people are watching, like playing sport, being in plays or concerts, asking or answering questions, reading aloud, or giving talks or presentations.*

Specific Phobia

Marked and persistent fear that is excessive or unreasonable, cued by the presence or anticipation of a specific object or situation e.g. dogs, snakes, dark, blood, lightning, clowns

Exposure to the object/situation provokes an immediate anxiety response.

- *Feel scared of certain specific things, for example, particular animals, lifts, vomiting, heights or injections.*

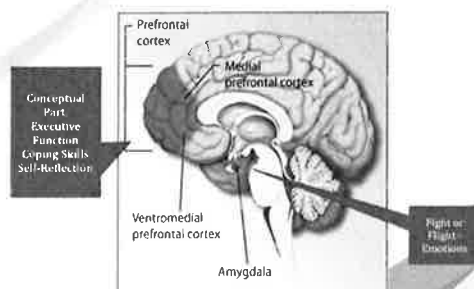
Generalised Anxiety Disorder

Excessive and uncontrollable worry. Often accompanied by marked physical symptoms.

Often children presenting with GAD will complain of headaches, stomach aches, restlessness, poor sleeping, irritability, muscle tension, easily tired.

- *Some young people always seem to be worrying.*
- *They might worry about (school/work) and how well they are doing;*
- *They may worry about things that can happen in the future; they may worry about the health of family/friends or other things.*

What is Anxiety? Fight or Flight Response



Signs & Symptoms

★ SIGNS

► Physical

- Stomach aches, headaches, fatigue, heart racing, shaking, sweaty palms, difficulty breathing etc.

► Emotions

- Worry, panic, irritability, scared, angry

► Behaviour

- Pessimism, self-critical/over-exaggerating, avoidance, escape, sleep difficulties, poor memory & concentration, restlessness, irritability, fearful of change, crying, clinginess, eating difficulties.



Behaviour = communication

“Children and invariably trying to solve a problem rather than be one. Their solutions are often misguided because their conception of the problem is faulty or because their skills leave much to be desired”

You've just arrived at a house party. As you go in the front room a small group of people turn around and look at you.



Anxious young people make more negative interpretations.

They see themselves as less capable and the world as more frightening

-ve

'They are staring at me – I look really stupid and they're going to make fun of me'

'I think I'm just going to go home.'


+ve

'What a great party – and Sarah's over there – it's ages since I've had a chance to chat to her'

'I'm going to go over and say hi to Sarah.'

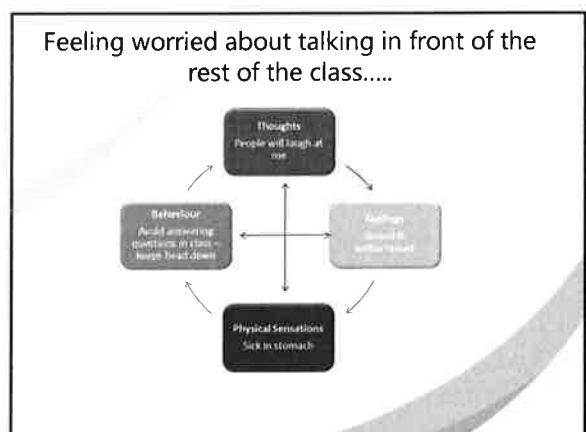
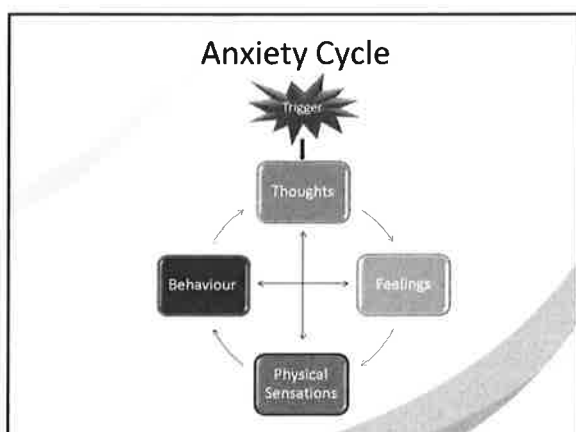
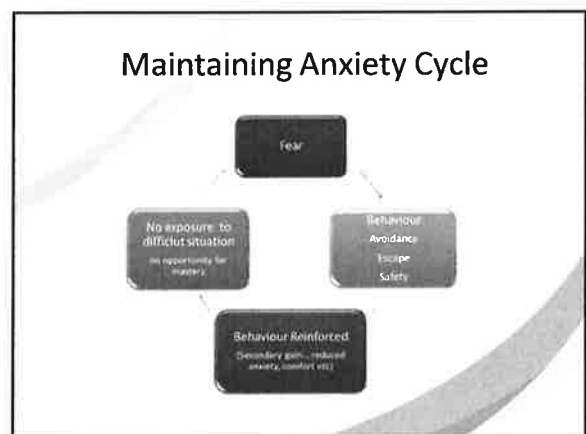
Thoughts affect how they behave. Behaviours that can make you feel better immediately (e.g. relief because of avoidance) can actually make you feel worse in the long run (e.g. you never disprove the thoughts)

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

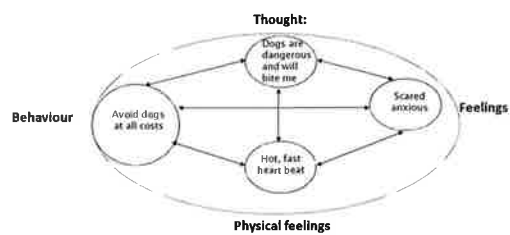


- How an event is interpreted determines how someone reacts to it
- The 'same' event can result in different emotions (depending on the interpretation)
- We may be able to reduce distress by helping children to change their interpretations/ thoughts and behaviours

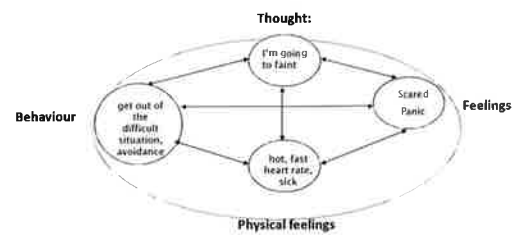
Activity



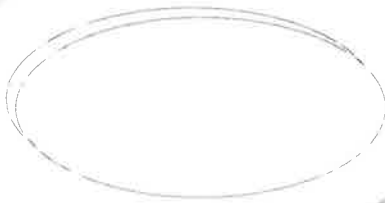
Feeling worried about being near dogs



Feelings of panic when playing football.....



Can you think of a vicious cycle that could apply to you or someone else?



How To Help: General points

- Let your child know it is safe to talk to you and that you won't judge
- Don't judge them for having the thoughts and feelings they have
- Normalise feelings of anxiety in general
- Listen to what your child is saying
- Try not to minimise their experience
- Give them the space to offload
- Ask them if they want help in finding a solution

Remember: you're only human!

How can we help?



KEY STRATEGY 1: Challenging Thoughts



- Children who are anxious tend to see danger and have fearful thoughts about (neutral) situations
- Thought challenging helps them to weigh up the evidence for and against their thoughts (thinking like a judge in court)
- The trick is to ask questions not give answers (this helps child to think for themselves)

What to think about when helping a child with unhelpful thoughts

E.g. "I can't go to PE because everyone will laugh at me"

- What is happening?
- What is s/he thinking?
- Evidence and alternatives?
- What actually happened in the end?

Handouts

KEY STRATEGY 2: Understanding and Modifying Response to Anxiety



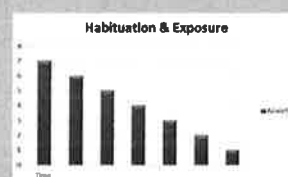
What might adults do to maintain the vicious cycles associated with anxiety?

KEY STRATEGY 2: Understanding and Modifying Responses to Anxiety

- Cutting out reassurance (gradually)
- Encouraging independence and having a go:
 - Attention and praise
 - On the lookout for 'have a go' behaviour
 - Rewards
 - Observing others' behaviours and feelings
 - Allowing independence

KEY STRATEGY 3: Exposure (facing fears)

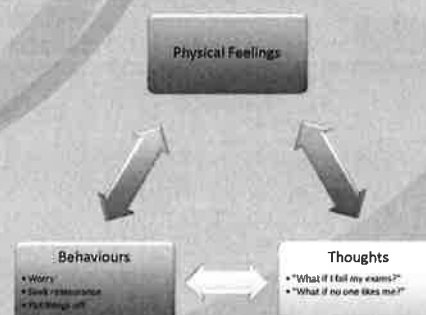
- Exposure & Habituation works by breaking cycle of anxiety.
- Gradually exposing yourself to the fearful event.
- Habituation – Staying with the anxious feelings until they naturally come down.



KEY STRATEGY 3: Facing fears

- Talking about why we are doing this
- Breaking it down into steps
- Devising a step by step plan together
- Remembering/writing down helpful thoughts
- Putting it into practice

KEY STRATEGY 4: Managing Worries



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Managing Worries

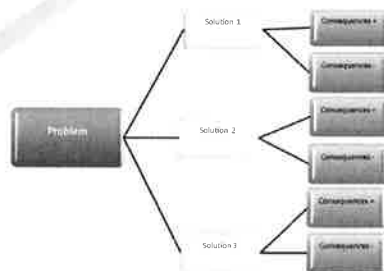


Worry Diary/Worry Box/Worry Monster

1. Write the worry down. This can be in a "worry diary", post-it's, apps. This should be done throughout the day, as the worry occurs.
2. Re-visit the list of worries at a specified time, take the time to talk about each worry with your child. Give a set amount of time
3. Put the worry in the worry box

KEY STRATEGY 4: Problem Solving

- Problem solving for more realistic worries



KEY STRATEGY 5: Relaxation



How breathing calms the "Alarm Brain"

Scientists have recently discovered the neural circuit that links the "arousal centre" of the brain with the "breathing centre". When the arousal centre is too active this leads to feelings of stress, anxiety or "alarm brain". We can directly act on arousal by breathing calmly. When we are breathing slowly the breathing centre sends a direct signal to the arousal centre to slow down. Slowing down of the arousal centre reduces the feeling of "alarm brain".

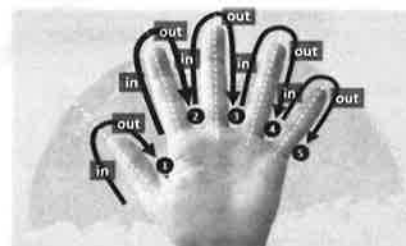


The "breathing pacemaker" (Pre-botzinger complex)

The Locus Coeruleus – Responsible for attention, arousal and panic

Yackle, K., Schwartz, L.A., Kamei, K., Sorokin, J.M., Huguenard, J.R., Feldman, J.L., Luo, L., Kravtsov, M.A. (2017). Breathing control centre that promotes arousal in mice. *Science*, 355 (6333), 1411-1415. DOI: 10.1126/science.1257984

KEY STRATEGY 5: Relaxation



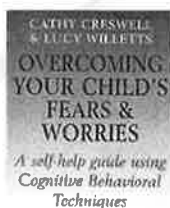
Key messages

- Anxiety is normal
- Particular thoughts can keep anxiety going and make it worse
- Particular behaviours carried out to 'stay safe' can keep anxiety going
- These thoughts and behaviours make anxiety worse by creating a vicious cycle
- An important way to deal with anxiety is to challenge anxious thoughts and develop more realistic ways of thinking
- An part of getting over anxiety is to face fears (*in a gradual and 'safe' way*)
- For real life problems; problem solving strategies can be useful

Summary - How can we help

- **Listening** to young person and showing empathy
- Asking questions rather than giving answers
- Understanding that their fears are very real for them and cause very real feelings
- Encouraging independence
- Encouraging to face fears in small steps
- Giving attention to 'brave behaviours'
- Encouraging family members to do the same

Overcoming Your Child's Fear and Worries: A self-help guide using CBT Techniques' (Creswell & Willetts, 2006)



- Skills based book for parents of anxious children (aged 7-12 but also helpful ideas for younger children)
- Includes general information regarding anxiety, ways of helping children challenge their anxious thoughts, facing fears gradually and problem solving.

Apps



E-learning



MindEd

e-learning to support young healthy minds

Useful Resources

- www.youngminds.org.uk
- www.mind.org.uk
- www.barnados.org.uk
- www.andyresearchclinic.com
- www.minded.org.uk
- www.anxietyuk.org.uk