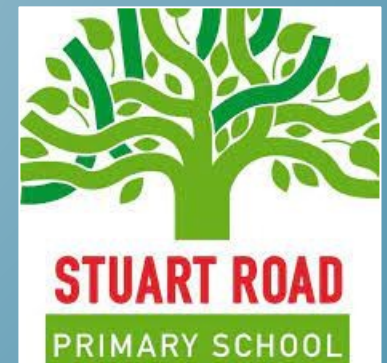




UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

A workshop to help parents & carers to understand anxiety and consider how we can support children & young people with their anxiety



Objectives

- Learn what is anxiety and how does it appear
- Understand why does it occur and how can we manage it effectively
- Consider how can we support our children when they are anxious
- Examine practical ideas & interventions to use when children are suffering
- Gain resources & support for parents/carers
- Gain resources & support to use with children with anxiety



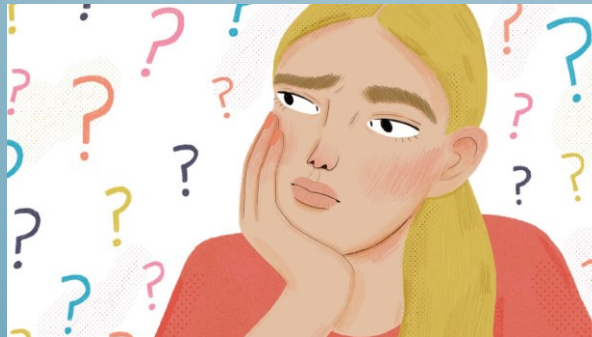
What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid – particularly about things that are about to happen, or which we think could happen in the future. Anxiety is a **natural human response** when we perceive that we are under threat. It can be experienced through our thoughts, feelings and physical sensations.

‘For me, anxiety feels as if everyone in the world is waiting for me to trip up, so that they can laugh at me. It makes me feel nervous and unsure whether the next step I take is the best way forward.’

Most people feel anxious at times.

It's particularly common to experience some anxiety while coping with stressful events or changes, especially if they could have a big impact on your life.



When do we feel anxious?

- Consider some real life examples of when we might feel anxious?



- Why is this?
- Why are we anxious about different things?
- Nature vs Nurture?

Why do we feel anxious?

Threat to things that are important to us – our self-esteem, how we think about ourselves, sense of belonging, status, our family, friends, community, finances, our belongings, our futures...

Everyone's experience of life, how we have been brought up and our experiences are different.

Therefore, there are things of differing importance/value to each of us.

Each person's resilience is different too. This isn't fixed and can explain why anxieties can come and go.



What is the 'fight, flight or freeze' response?

Like all animals, human beings have evolved ways to help us protect ourselves from danger. When we feel under threat our bodies react by releasing certain hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones:

- make us feel more alert, so we can act faster
- make our hearts beat faster, quickly sending blood to where it's needed most.

After we feel the threat has passed, our bodies release other hormones to help our muscles relax. This can sometimes cause us to shake.

This is commonly called the 'fight, flight or freeze' response. It's something that happens automatically in our bodies. We have no control over it.



When is anxiety a mental health problem?

Anxiety can become a mental health problem if it impacts on your ability to live your life as fully as you want to. For example, it may be a problem for you if:

- your feelings of anxiety are very strong or last for a long time
- your fears or worries are out of proportion to the situation
- you avoid situations that might cause you to feel anxious
- your worries feel very distressing or are hard to control
- you regularly experience symptoms of anxiety, which could include panic attacks
- you find it hard to go about your everyday life or do things you enjoy.

If your symptoms fit a particular set of medical criteria then you might be diagnosed with a particular anxiety disorder. But it's also possible to experience problems with anxiety without having a specific diagnosis.



When is anxiety a mental health problem?

'You know that feeling when you're rocking on the back legs of your chair and suddenly for just a split second you think you're about to fall; that feeling in your chest? Imagine that split second feeling being frozen in time and lodged in your chest for minutes/hours/days, and imagine with it that sense of impending doom and dread sticking around too, but sometimes you don't even know why.'



Which is it?

Everyday Anxiety

Anxiety Disorder

Worry about paying bills, landing a job, a romantic breakup, or other important life events	Constant and unsubstantiated worry that causes significant distress and interferes with daily life
Embarrassment or self-consciousness in an uncomfortable or awkward social situation	Avoiding social situations for fear of being judged, embarrassed, or humiliated
A case of nerves or sweating before a big test, business presentation, stage performance, or other significant event	Seemingly out-of-the-blue panic attacks and the preoccupation with the fear of having another one
Realistic fear of a dangerous object, place, or situation	Irrational fear or avoidance of an object, place, or situation that poses little or no threat of danger
Anxiety, sadness, or difficulty sleeping immediately after a traumatic event.	Recurring nightmares, flashbacks, or emotional numbing related to a traumatic event that occurred several months or years before

Things to consider

- Any source of stress?
- Age and stage of child
- Intensity & length – normal anxiety is fleeting
- Physical symptoms
- How much is it effecting everyday life?

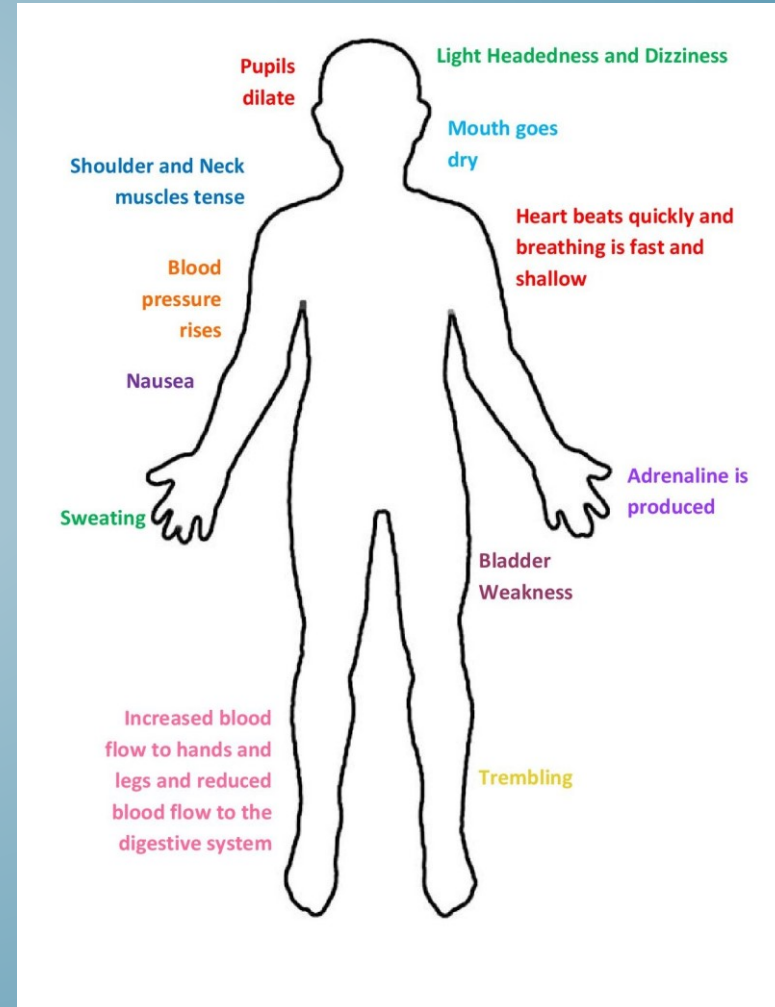


What does anxiety feel like?

Anxiety feels different for everyone. You might experience some of the things listed below, and you might also have other experiences or difficulties that aren't listed here.

Effects on your body

- a churning feeling in your stomach
- feeling light-headed or dizzy
- pins and needles
- feeling restless or unable to sit still
- headaches, backache or other aches and pains
- faster breathing
- a fast, thumping or irregular heartbeat
- sweating or hot flushes
- problems sleeping
- grinding your teeth, especially at night
- nausea (feeling sick)
- needing the toilet more or less often
- having panic attacks.



What does anxiety feel like?

Effects on your mind

- feeling tense, nervous or unable to relax
- having a sense of dread, or fearing the worst
- feeling like the world is speeding up or slowing down
- feeling like other people can see you're anxious and are looking at you
- feeling like you can't stop worrying, or that bad things will happen if you stop worrying
- worrying about anxiety itself, for example worrying about when panic attacks might happen
- wanting lots of reassurance from other people or worrying that people are angry or upset with you
- worrying that you're losing touch with reality
- rumination – thinking a lot about bad experiences, or thinking over a situation again and again
- depersonalisation – feeling disconnected from your mind or body, or like you're watching someone else (this is a type of dissociation)
- derealisation – feeling disconnected from the world around you, or like the world isn't real (this is a type of dissociation)
- worrying a lot about things that might happen in the future

How else might anxiety affect my life?

Anxiety symptoms can last for a long time, or come and go. You might find you have difficulty with day-to-day aspects of your life, including:

- looking after yourself
- holding down a job
- forming or maintaining relationships
- trying new things
- simply enjoying your leisure time

Some suggestion about the effects of anxiety on our physical health over time but not enough research yet...

How do we as adults manage our anxieties? Effective? Always?

Do our children see this?



What makes children & young people anxious?

Children tend to feel anxious about different things at different ages. Many of these worries are a **normal part of growing up**.

From about eight months to three years, for example, it's very common for young children to have something called separation anxiety. They may become clingy and cry when separated from their parents or carers. This is a normal stage in children's development and tends to ease off at around age two to three.

It's also common for pre-school children to develop specific fears or phobias. Common fears in early childhood include animals, insects, storms, heights, water, blood, and the dark. These fears usually go away gradually on their own. Throughout a child's life there will be other times when they feel anxiety. Lots of children feel anxious when going to a new school, for example, or before tests and exams. Some children feel shy in social situations and may need support with this.



What are the signs of anxiety in children?

When young children feel anxious, they cannot always understand or express what they are feeling. You may notice that they:

- become irritable, tearful or clingy
- have difficulty sleeping
- wake in the night
- start wetting the bed
- have bad dreams

In older children you may notice that they:

- lack the confidence to try new things or seem unable to face simple, everyday challenges
- find it hard to concentrate
- have problems with sleeping or eating
- are prone to angry outbursts
- have negative thoughts going round and round their head, or keep thinking that bad things are going to happen
- start avoiding everyday activities, such as seeing friends, going out in public or attending school

Why is my child anxious?

Some children are more prone to worries and anxiety than others.

Children often find change difficult and may become anxious following a house move or when starting a new school.

Children who have had a distressing or traumatic experience, such as a car accident or house fire, may suffer with anxiety afterwards.

Family arguments and conflict can also leave children feeling insecure and anxious.

Teenagers are more likely to suffer with social anxiety than other age groups, avoiding social gatherings or making excuses to get out of them.

Think of a time a child was anxious.

What did you see?

How did you/they manage?



Anxious parents, anxious children?

Nature & nurture?

Some research suggests there may be a link between parental anxieties (through the environment created) and the effect on children.

Is not a foregone conclusion that a parent/carer with anxieties will create a child with anxieties

Do children worry because they sense their parents are worried, or do parents worry because they see their children are worried about something?

What we know:

Parenting is hard!

We just have to be 'good enough'

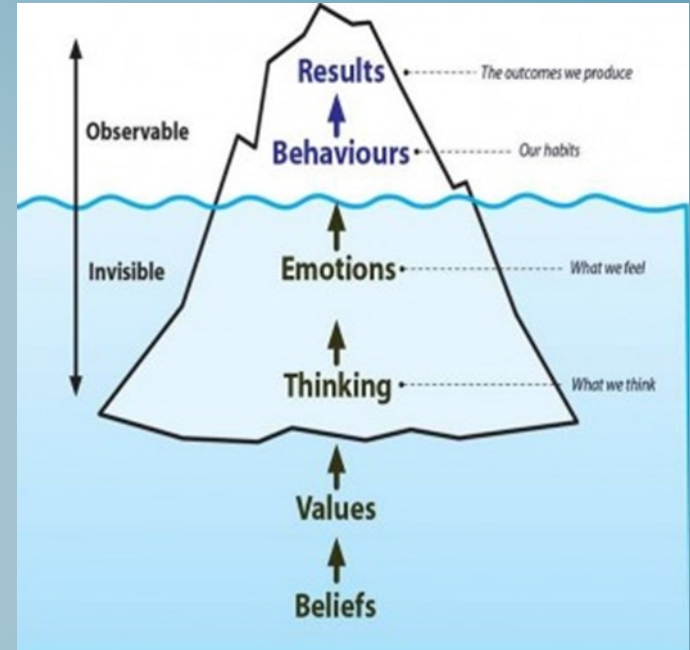
Social media creates an illusion of everyone doing so well – unrealistic pressures on us and our children



Anxiety – what we see?



Anxiety – what doesn't help....



If we focus on solely on the behaviour, the likelihood of change is reduced...

We must consider the emotions, thoughts & physical sensations that are also involved

Unhelpful Anxiety Beliefs/Strategies

1. If I do nothing, my anxiety continues going up...
2. Delaying doesn't really sort/solve anything
3. Shifting our attention to the symptoms & not the task
4. Confusing fear and danger
5. Berating yourself because anxiety effects you
6. Trying to get rid of anxiety completely
7. A 'gain without pain' expectation



Anxiety – what doesn't always help....

Trying to completely protect children from worrying/difficult events

Accommodation or enabling techniques:

One last kiss

Stay and watch

'I will be just right here'

'Come and sleep in my bed'

'It's ok, you don't have to'

Simply telling them:

'Don't worry...'

'It will ok'

'Stop being silly'

'Cheer up'

'It will be fine'

'It's no big deal'

'I'll do it'

'There's nothing to be afraid of'

'Hurry up'

'Stop thinking about it'

'It's all in your head'



The demand for accommodation can grow.
E.g. Can get to the point where a child won't go anywhere or do certain things without you/an adult there.

Accommodating Anxiety

Recognising that accommodation is in effect is the first step.

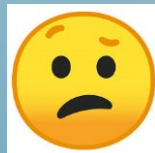
However, you are soon confronted with a dilemma.....



Do you push your child to manage their anxiety without accommodating them?
'But I can't do that, my child won't be able to cope!'

Or do you hold and keep accommodating?
'But I don't want to do that either, it doesn't work!'

What do we do?!



Accommodating Anxiety - what can we do?

Remind your child, “I know this will probably be really frustrating, but I don’t want to feed your anxiety and help it grow. Is there another way I can support you or help you face this?”

Encouraging them to use tools/strategies will help them feel supported, as well as using points or small rewards to motivate.

If you must offer accommodation, consider following these steps to reduce the negative impact:

1. State clearly to your child this is an exception because of the unusual situation (e.g. your child is sick; your car broke down; etc.)
2. If you can give partial accommodation, do so and encourage your child to use some tools such as a coping card or breathing to assist.
3. Consider making a deal with your child that in exchange for the current accommodation your child will do 2, rather than the 1 exposures the following day, or they will use another tool to show anxiety they are still in charge despite the need for some accommodation.
4. After the event and accommodation has passed, ask your child how they could handle it without accommodation if it happens again. Make a plan for the future.



What helps?

Like adults, anxious children and teenagers prefer to have a sense of control in their lives. They do not cope well with a disorganised, "spontaneous" family style. They feel calmer when:

1. Life is predictable
2. Expectations are clear
3. Consequences/Praise are immediate and consistent

Setting limits and creating routines are 2 ways to help make life more predictable for everyone in the family.

In pairs/small groups –

Considering the above, how are you helping your child by ensuring 1-3 in your family?

Is there from anything from 1-3:

- a) Going well?
- b) Could be better?



Routines and limits

Limits

We all feel comfortable knowing what the limits/boundaries are and what we can and cannot do. Although children may not seem like they like boundaries they are important and create a sense of safety.

Routines

Simple routines from day to day are helpful (for children & adults)

They can be for:

Getting up

Getting ready for school

Dinner times

Homework

Getting ready for bed

In pairs/small groups

1. How do children know the rules, rewards & boundaries in your family?
2. How are they supported to follow simple routines?

How to help an anxious child

First and foremost, it's important to talk to your child about their anxiety or worries. Reassure them and show them you understand how they feel.

If your child is old enough, it may help to explain what anxiety is and the physical effects it has on our bodies. It may be helpful to describe anxiety as being like a wave that builds up and then ebbs away again.

Is important if we can to help children to find their own solutions

"The tendency is to say, if you're worried about that sleepover, don't go," he says. "But what you're doing is saying, if you get anxious about something, it means you can't do it."

"It's more helpful to say, 'I hear that you're worried about this. What can you do that's going to help?' Focus on exploring solutions with your child, instead of just talking about all the things that could go wrong."



Paul Stallard, Professor of Child and Family Mental Health at the University of Bath.

Helpful ways to respond to our children...

Consider **PACE** (Dan Hughes)

PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, communicating and behaving that aims to make the child feel safe. It is based upon how parents connect with their very young infants. As with young toddlers, with safety the child can begin to explore.

Playfulness - This is about creating an atmosphere of lightness and interest when you communicate. It means learning how to use a light tone with your voice, like you might use when story telling, rather than an irritated or lecturing tone. It's about having fun, and expressing a sense of joy.

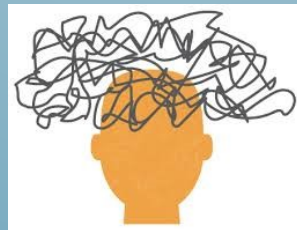
Acceptance - is about actively communicating to the child that you accept the wishes, feelings, thoughts, urges, motives and perceptions that are underneath the outward behaviour. It is about accepting, without judgment or evaluation. NB – it does not mean accepting the bad behaviour

Curiosity - Curiosity, without judgment, is how we help children become aware of their inner life, reflect upon the reasons for their behaviour, and then communicate it to their parents/carer. Curiosity is wondering about the meaning behind the behaviour for the child. Curiosity lets the child know that the adults understand.

Empathy - lets the child feel the parent's compassion for them. Being empathic means the adult actively showing the child that the child's emotions/thoughts are important to the adult and he or she wants to be with the child in her hard times. This shows to the child that the adult will stay with them and they will get through it together.

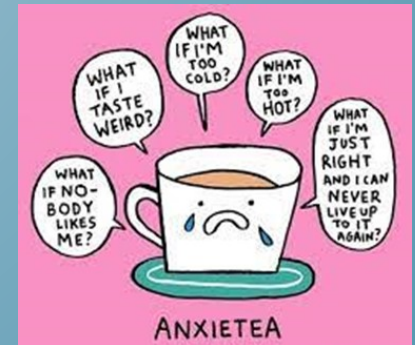
Ways to ease anxiety in children

- Keep talking and listening to your child - empathy
- Teach your child to recognise signs of anxiety in themselves and to ask for help when it strikes.
- Children of all ages find routines reassuring so try to stick to regular daily routines where possible.
- Use pictures to explain and reinforce routines
- Sharing and explaining **expectations** in advance
- Create (jointly) an 'emergency' plan that could be used if things do go 'wrong/unexpected'
- If your child is anxious because of distressing events, such as a bereavement or separation, see if you can find books or films that will help them understand their feelings and normalise things.
- If you know a change, such as a house move is coming up, prepare your child by talking to them about what is going to happen and why.
- Try not to become anxious yourself or overprotective – rather than doing things for your child or helping them to avoid anxiety-provoking situations, encourage your child to find ways to manage them.



Ways to ease anxiety in children

- Practice simple relaxation techniques with your child, such as taking three deep, slow breaths, breathing in for a count of three and out for three.
- Distraction can be helpful for young children. For example, if they are anxious about going to nursery, play games on the way there, such as seeing who can spot the most red cars.
- Make a "worry" box. Get your child to write down or draw their worries and post them into the box. Then you can sort through the box together at the end of the day or week.
- Keep a diary – 3 positive things at end of each day
- Work on positive-thinking. Name their worst case scenarios and think through together how to sort out the situation if it happens, e.g. 'I'm worried that we'll miss the bus.' 'What do you think we could do if that happens?' 'We could get the next bus'.
- Don't forget the physical things – sleeping well/enough, sport/activities, mindfulness, good diet, breathing exercises, yoga
- Help children to make their own decisions/make simple choices
- Look for the successes, the exceptions that you can use as evidence to discuss with children. "Remember when..."
Record success in photos – celebrate them.



GRATITUDE QUESTIONS/STATEMENTS

Completed on a regular basis in a book decorated by the child.

Completed with adult support if needed?

Adults can also write for the child.

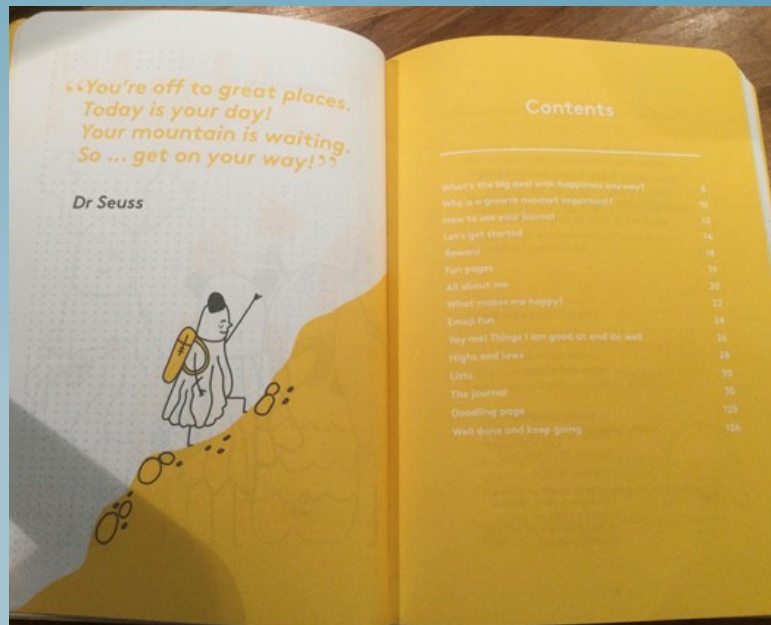
E.g.

- What have I done today to make someone else happy?
- What has someone else done to make me happy?
- What have I learnt today?
- 3 simple things you like about yourself?
- 3 things you are grateful for?



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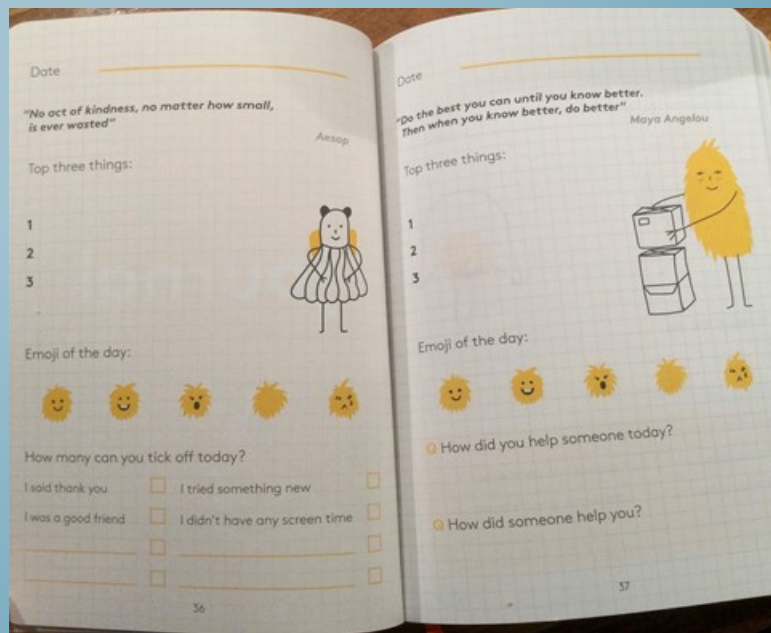
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Questions to consider when a child/young person is anxious about an upcoming event?

1. One thing I am anxious about today?
2. What is one practical thing I can do to prevent it?
3. One reason it's not going to be as bad as I fear?
4. What is one reason I know of which shows that I can handle it?
5. What is one upside to the situation?



Panic Attacks

Panic attacks are a type of fear response. They're an exaggeration of your body's normal response to danger, stress or excitement.

During a panic attack, physical symptoms can build up very quickly. These can include:

- a pounding or racing heartbeat
- feeling faint, dizzy or light-headed
- feeling very hot or very cold
- sweating, trembling or shaking
- nausea (feeling sick)
- pain in your chest or abdomen
- struggling to breathe or feeling like you're choking
- feeling like your legs are shaky or are turning to jelly
- feeling disconnected from your mind, body or surroundings

During a panic attack you might feel very afraid that you're:

- losing control
- going to faint
- having a heart attack
- going to die.



Managing Panic Attacks

Panic attacks can be frightening, but there are things you can do to help yourself cope. It could help to keep print these tips out and keep them somewhere easy to find.

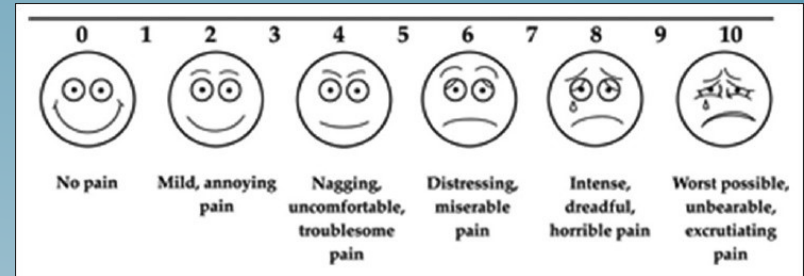
During a panic attack:

- Focus on your breathing. It can help to concentrate on breathing slowly in and out while counting to five.
- Stamp on the spot. Some people find this helps control their breathing.
- Focus on your senses. For example, taste mint-flavoured sweets or gum, or touch or cuddle something soft.
- Try grounding techniques. Grounding techniques can help you feel more in control. These focus on things around you in detail – using all the senses.

After a panic attack:

- Think about self-care. It's important to pay attention to what your body needs after you've had a panic attack. For example, you might need to rest somewhere quietly, or eat or drink something.
- Tell someone you trust. If you feel able to, it could help to let someone know you've had a panic attack. It could be particularly helpful to mention how they might notice if you're having another one, and how you'd like them to help you.

Using scaling to help manage anxiety



<p>Anxiety Level 0 "Life is good. Nothing to stress about. I can handle anything life throws my way." How average people start their day.</p>	<p>Anxiety Level 5 "What the hell am I going to do?" Imagine totalling your car, messing up your big presentation at work or failing your final exams at school.</p>
<p>Anxiety Level 1 "Just a little hiccup. Nothing I can't handle." Akin to misplacing your sunglasses or the remote. Easily resolved.</p>	<p>Anxiety Level 6 "This is all too much to handle!" Imagine losing your job, failing the big test AND totalling your car all in the same day.</p>
<p>Anxiety Level 2 "Oh c'mon.. where the heck are they? This is NOT a good time!" Similar to misplacing your keys when you're running late for work.</p>	<p>Anxiety Level 7 "I can't take anymore.." Imagine having all of that happen, then coming home to discover your basement flooded and your family pet died.</p>
<p>Anxiety Level 3 "Where did that scratch come from?" Imagine finding a scratch or small ding on your new car.</p>	<p>Anxiety Level 8 "Could anything else freakin go wrong?!" Imagine adding to that your identity was stolen, your bank account closed AND your spouse left, taking the kids.</p>
<p>Anxiety Level 4 "What am I going to tell them?" Imagine being the cause of a scratch or ding on your parents' new car.</p>	<p>Anxiety Level 9 *Silently rocking back and forth* Imagine not being able to take anything else and just wrapping in a blanket and shutting down completely.</p>

1. What number are you?
2. How does that feel?
3. What number would you like to be? (check realistic)
4. How could we get there? (making a plan)

Exposure

Experiencing a difficult situation in a planned (jointly if possible) and supported manner. Sometimes happens naturally. Building confidence & gaining rewards.

Laddering: - E.g.

- Go to pet store and interact with many dogs
- Go to park with mum and pet “safe” dog while owner has dog on leash
- Pet and play with Rover off leash with owner for 5-10 minutes
- Pet Rover and stay next to him while he is on a leash for 5 minutes
- Let Rover sniff my hand and, when I am ready, pet him while he is on a leash
- Go to neighbour’s house and look at Rover while he is on a leash, 2 feet away for 5 minutes
- Go to neighbour’s house and look at Rover while he is on a leash, 6 feet away for 5 minutes
- Watch a video clip of a big dog for 10 minutes
- Watch a video clip of a small dog for 10 minutes
- Look at real pictures of dogs for 10 minutes
- Look at animated pictures of dogs for 10 minutes



Exposure

- Focus on one step of the ladder at a time and ensure success and confidence before moving up
- Always end a 'practice' session on success
- Exposure practices are better spaced apart, close in time, will result in faster progress – little and often – momentum
- Some exposure situations are hard to generate - e.g. fear of flying.
Work with your child to create a story or script of the "worst case scenario" that anxiety tells your child in his/her imagination. Use all 5 senses to capture as much detail as possible. When the story is complete, develop an audio recording and have your child listen to this over and over again just like you would with a traditional exposure situation.
- Some children will do better if you or another trusted adult show them how to do the exposure practice first. For example, you pet the dog before your child does.
- Record your child's progress. Use a piece of paper to record your child's fear rating before, during and after each practice (see chart below). This will help your child to know when s/he is ready to move up the ladder. When scaling is at a low level for several days, your child is probably ready to move. Photos of success really help.
- Don't rush. It can be hard to start facing the things you have avoided for so long. Be encouraging and recognise that your child needs to go at his/her own pace.
For some youth this process can take weeks, for others months.



Exposure Planning Practice

Consider how you are going to plan with/for:

1. A young child (aged 4) that is frightened of fireworks.
You have all been invited for a big significant family birthday party on 8 November. Firework night is 5 November and you know there will be a firework display at the party on the 8th.
2. Your child is 8. Their best friend is having a swimming party at the Life Centre in a 4 weeks time.
Your child wants to go but is anxious as going will involve leaving you, coping with crowds and the noise.
3. You have a 13 year old teenager.
They have been off school for the 6 weeks summer holiday and are anxious about returning to school in September.



Naming the bully

Consider characters from stories, movies, or even people you might know to inspire a name for your child's anxiety.

Encourage your child to choose a name and character identity that can be defeated. Characters that are invincible may leave your child feeling defeated on days when anxiety is being particularly mean.

For young children, they can draw or paint a picture and hang it somewhere central in the home so the whole family knows whom you are fighting against. Your child might want to create trading cards, or make a clay sculpture/junk model that depicts the anxiety. Let his or her creativity flow.

Most children are good about taking responsibility for their own actions and putting the blame on anxiety only when it really belongs there.

Once the anxiety has a name and identity, encourage your child and the whole family, to start using it.

E.g.

...I can't believe X is scaring you into missing the sleepover. What a bully!

...It looks like X has really trying to boss you about today and now it's telling me what to do!

...X is at it again! Telling lies about germs and disease. What can you say back?



Sleep and Anxiety

Sleep & poor mental health are linked.

Poor sleep and tiredness ensures we are not so resilient or positive



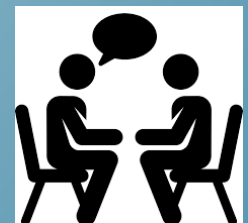
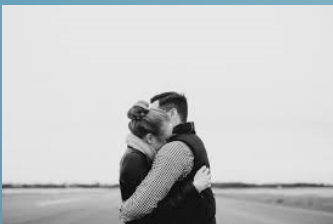
What can help...

- Establish a routine
- Daily exercise
- Being outdoors
- No napping in day
- Ensure relaxation time
- Talk about any worries
- Consider diet – caffeine/chocolate...
- Dimmed light/no technology at bedtime
- Blackout curtains/cool room/comfy bed
- Bath before bed
- Keep stimulation low
- Breathing techniques
- Quiet/relaxing music

Look after yourself

It can sometimes be really challenging to support someone with an anxiety problem – you are not alone if you feel overwhelmed at times. It is important to remember to look after your own mental health too, so you have the energy, time and distance you need to be able to help.

- Set boundaries and don't take too much on. If you become unwell yourself you won't be able to offer as much support. It is also important to decide what your limits are and how much you feel able to help
- Share your caring role with others, if you can. It's often easier to support someone if you're not doing it alone
- Talk to others about how you're feeling. You may want to be careful about how much information you share about the person you're supporting, but talking about your own feelings with someone you trust can help you feel supported too.
- Find support for yourself. Look for organisations to provide support. It could also help to explore peer support and talking treatments.



Summary

Listen

Make sure you take the time to listen to your child's thoughts and feelings. Simply feeling heard can be very helpful to your child.

Normalise

It is important to let your child know that he or she is not alone. Lots of children have problems with anxiety, with upwards of 20% of children being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder during their lifetime.

Educate

Let your child know that anxiety is normal, harmless, and temporary. Become an expert on anxiety.

Model it

Model facing fears by doing some of the feared challenges yourself, or even tackling your own fears. This can help to provide support and encouragement. Motivate your child through supportive coaching. However, be careful not to push your child too far too fast. Let your child work at his or her pace.

Tolerate

Resist giving excessive reassurance, or letting your child avoid challenges or escape scary situations. While it's hard to see your child feeling anxious, learning to cope with anxiety is a critical life skill.

Further reading/support

- Speak to your school SENCo
- Go your GP – possible involvement of CAMHS
- www.nhs.uk – ‘anxiety’
- www.youngminds.org.uk
- www.plymouthias.org.uk
- www.plymouthonlinedirectory.com

