

**MENTAL
HEALTH
SUPPORT
TEAM**

NHS

Humber Teaching
NHS Foundation Trust

Helping Your Child with Anxiety



What is anxiety?

- Anxiety is a natural human response to feeling threatened, worried, tense, or afraid about present or future events. It is something we all experience.
- Fear is a natural human response to danger, triggering physical and behavioural changes to protect us.
- Anxiety is like fear; however, it occurs in the absence of danger.
- Anxiety is a reaction to a perceived danger.

Although it can be helpful to understand what has caused your child's anxiety, this is not essential for successful treatment. It is much more important to the treatment process to understand what is maintaining your child's anxiety (i.e., helping to keep the anxiety going).



How can anxiety present?

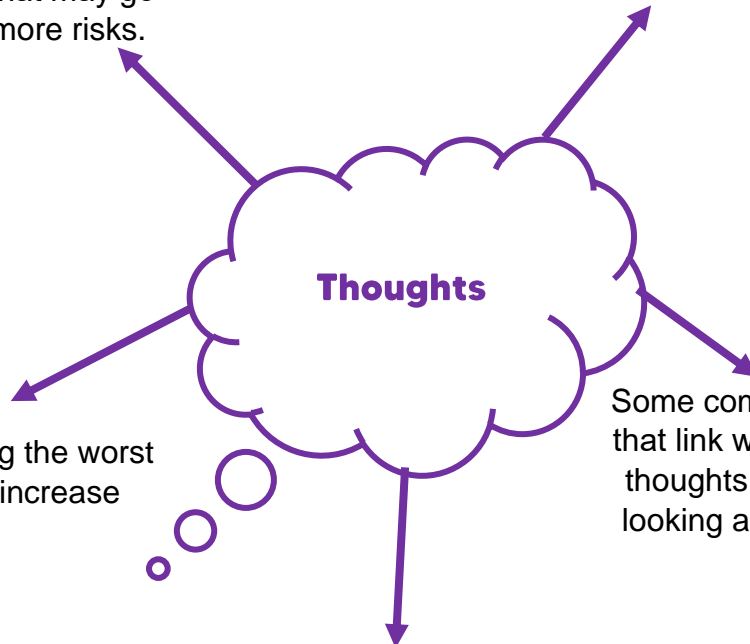
Anxious feelings make us focus more of our attention on looking out for 'threat' or what may go wrong, so we see more risks.

When we are anxious, our thoughts 'race' and may take over our minds – no switch-off button.

Sometimes expecting the worst thing to happen can increase anxiety.

Some common types of thoughts that link with anxiety are 'What If' thoughts e.g. What if people are looking at me, what if something bad happens!?

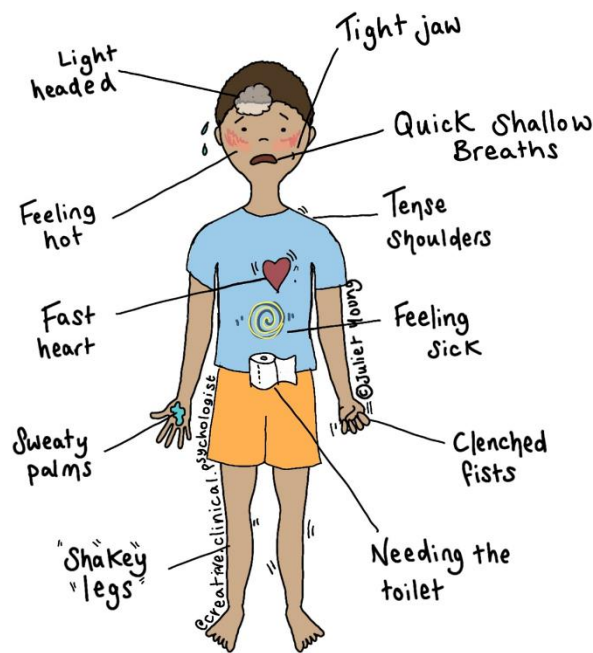
Sometimes not being able to predict what will happen increases anxiety.



Physical Responses:

When the fight, flight or freeze response is activated it alerts the body to do several things. It can be helpful to know the causes of physical symptoms, so you know what is happening to your body. We can interpret these as a sign that something bad is happening.

Anxiety and our Bodies



Anxious Feelings:

It is important to use the language your child/young person identifies. Here are a few examples of ways in which people share how they feel in times of heightened anxiety.

Scared



Stressed

Worried

Confused

Excited



Angry

Nervous

Sad

Anxious

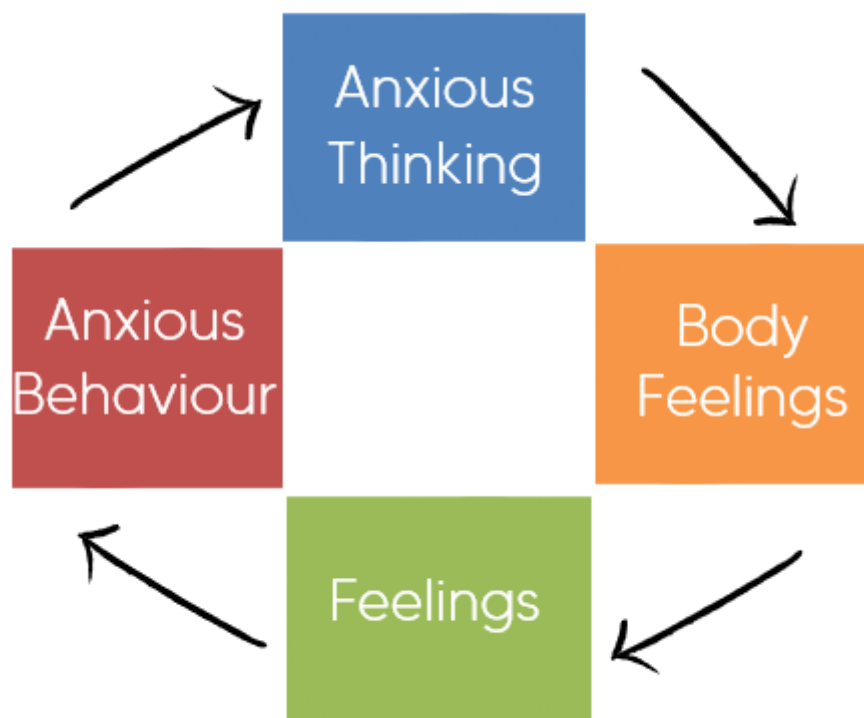
Behaviours:

Not all these behaviours will be due to anxiety, but it is important to understand the full context when a child presents in this way- anxiety **could** be a reason for this.

Hiding	'Freezing'
Avoidance/refusal to face situations	Repeated questioning, "What's happening?"
Changes in sleep (waking, nightmares)	Loss of appetite
Regression	Seeking reassurance
Nail biting	Racing thoughts and seeming more energetic
'Clingy' behaviours	Difficulty breathing/panic
Increased obsessions	Aggressive-hitting out when faced with anxiety-provoking situations

Thoughts, feelings & behaviours cycle:

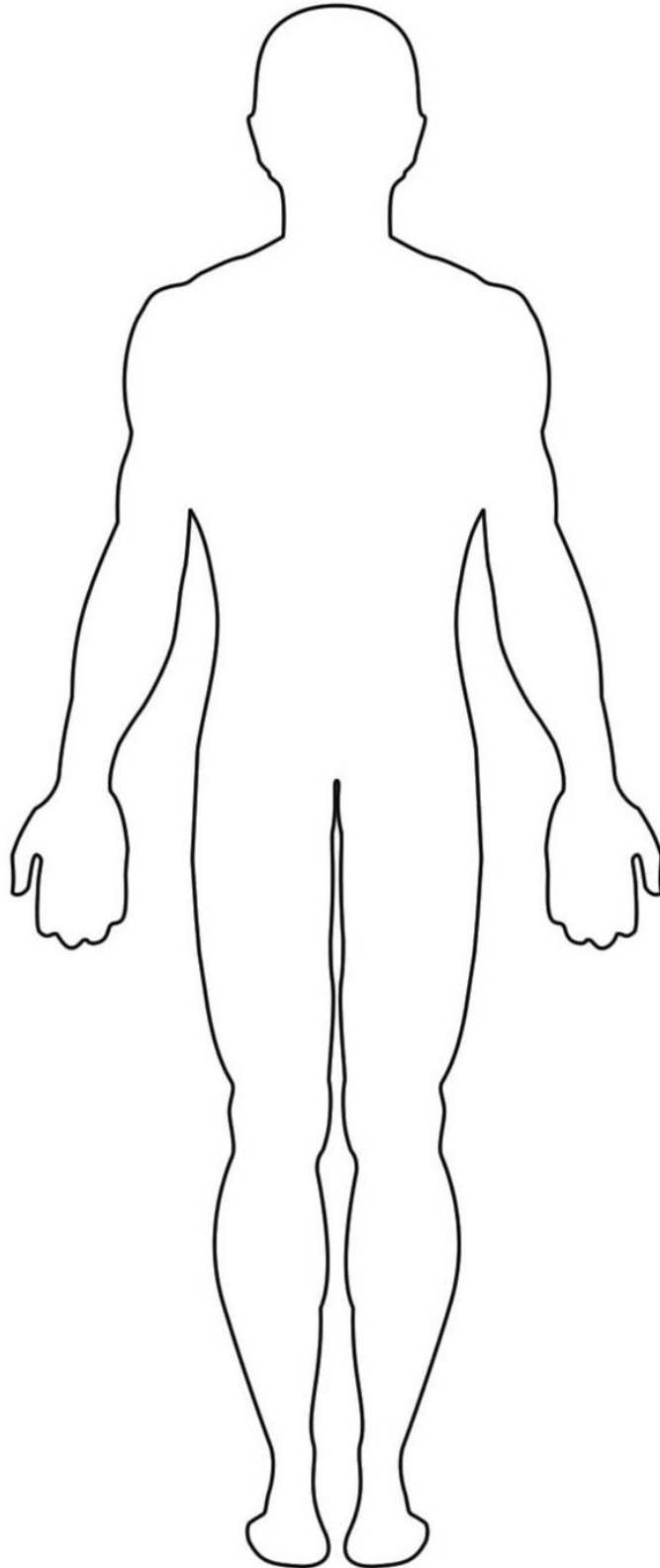
Our thoughts, feelings and behaviours are all linked together, and all have an impact on each other. When we are feeling worried, scared, or anxious, we can get stuck in a cycle of negative or unhelpful thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.



Take home activity 1:

Anxious feelings in my body-

Spend time with your child labelling the below body map ways in which your child physically feels anxiety:



Take home activity 2:

Using the thoughts feelings behaviour cycle help your child familiarise how they feel in certain situations using this take-home activity.

Situation;

Anxious Thoughts

What am I thinking? What thoughts are going through my mind?

Anxious Behaviours

What do other people notice I do? What do I not do?

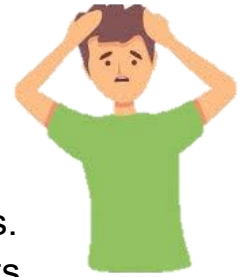
Body Feelings

What happens in my body?
What changes do I feel?

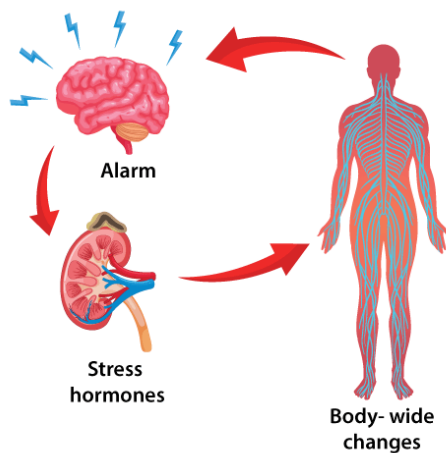
Emotions: What am I feeling?

Different types of anxiety:

- **Separation anxiety**- anxiety provoked by the separation or threat of separation from an object or person.
- **Phobias**- an extreme or irrational fear of something.
- **Social anxiety**- feelings of extreme anxiety in social situations.
- **Generalised anxiety**- feelings of excessive worry about events, activities, and situations.
- **Panic**- intense and recurrent panic attacks that occur unexpectedly.



When does anxiety become a problem?



Anxiety alarm:

Anxiety is comparable to a fire alarm. It warns you of danger and helps keep you safe, but if it goes off unnecessarily, it can feel scary.

The anxiety alarm signals danger for survival, but it can also be triggered in non-life-threatening situations, hindering the enjoyment of social activities.

For example, sometimes our smoke alarms in our house go off even when there is no fire.

This is similar to our brains.

We will start to feel physical symptoms when our anxiety alarm goes off. Yet sometimes our alarm goes off and the brain has got it wrong we are not in danger, but we are left with the physical symptoms but with no threat.

Fight, Flight, and Freeze Response:

We all have the same automatic response to danger called the FIGHT. FREEZE or FLIGHT response. Humans developed this as cavemen because it was a much more dangerous time to live back then.

The fight, freeze or flight response meant that cavemen's bodies went into survival mode whenever their brains sensed danger. This meant their heart rate and blood pressure would increase so they had a better chance of running away or fighting the danger! Even though we don't face the same dangers today, our brains and same way to the things scary, or worrying. This heart rate and blood

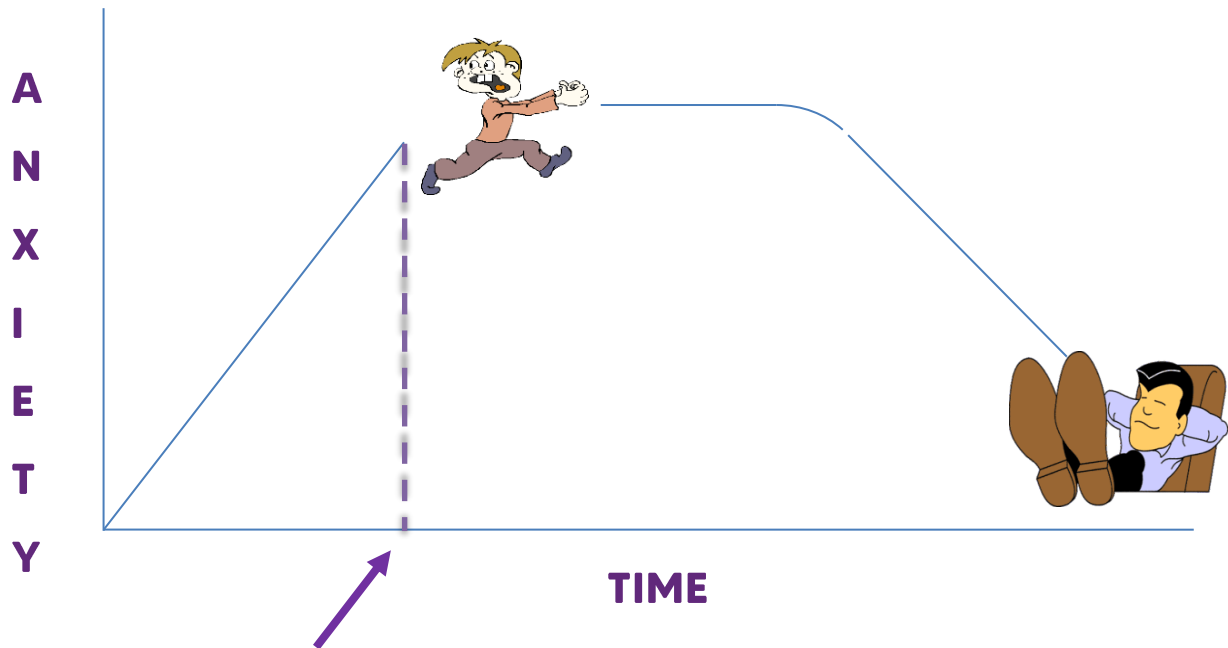


bodies still react in the we see as dangerous, means our increased pressure causes us to

What keeps anxiety going?



Avoidance: Avoidance keeps fears going as we never know if the bad thing will happen or not and don't get the opportunity to develop coping skills.



If people leave at this point, every time they are in this situation it will continue to cause anxiety. This is the cycle of avoidance.

If they can remain in the situation their anxiety will naturally reduce over time. This is known as habituation.



Safety-seeking behaviours: What we do to keep ourselves safe. These could keep fears going if they believe they only coped because of the safety behaviour.



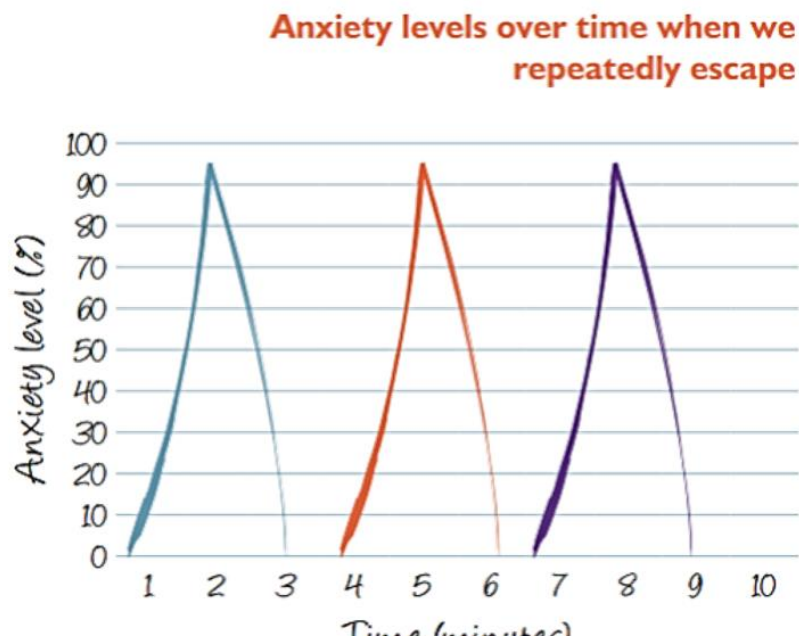
Reassurance-seeking: It is like a safety-seeking behaviour that can prevent us from learning that we can cope independently.

It is normal to give reassurance, everyone does it. Reassurance is addictive. Providing reassurance to children is a natural response that reduces short-term distress, but it can be addictive. While it's tempting to give reassurance, it doesn't help in the long run.

When children seek reassurance, it is an opportunity for parents to explore their anxious thoughts.

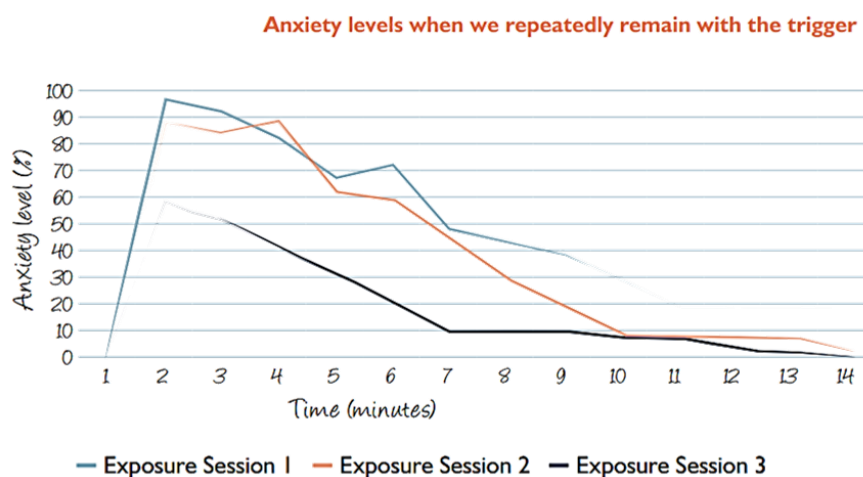
Maintaining fear

Avoiding situations that cause fear may provide temporary relief, but it can maintain the pattern of fear and anxiety. Confronting the source of fear is necessary to break the cycle and prevent further avoidance.

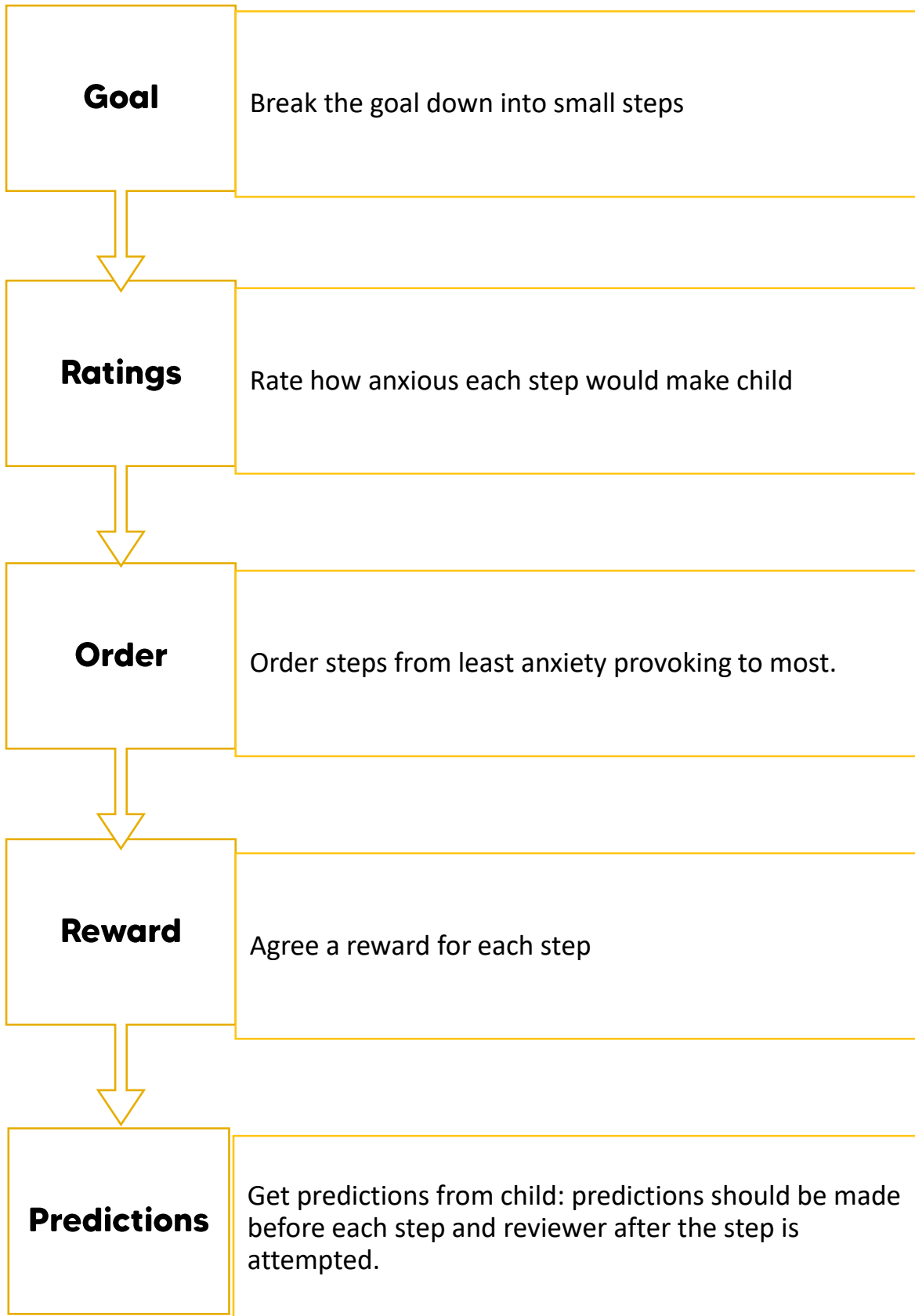


Breaking the Cycle:

Exposure and Habituation is a technique that can help overcome fear by gradually exposing someone to their phobia and allowing them to identify how their fear decreases over time through habituation.



To feel prepared to face fears using a laddered approach can help:



Behavioural Experiment Worksheet:
afterwards, think about whether predictions came true

Experiment Worksheet



Situation or thought to challenge

My prediction is.....

Anxiety rating:

I believe this thought

%

Designing the Experiment



What?

Where?

When?

Who?

Evidence to look out for?

Barriers

What might get in your way?

How can you solve this?



Time to carry it out!

Asking questions V Giving answers:

Some children may not be able to explain what they think will happen in situations they fear. If we can understand a child's thoughts, we can understand what they need to learn to overcome their difficulties with anxiety.

3 steps to responding differently...

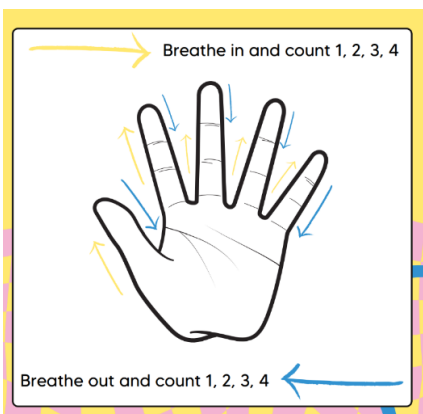
- 1. Acknowledge the child's emotions:** "I can see you're worried, or I've noticed you're upset".
- 2. Ask them what they might be worried about:** "What is it you're worried about? What do you think will happen?"
- 3. Question their response:** try not to give reassurance! "What makes you think that will happen?"



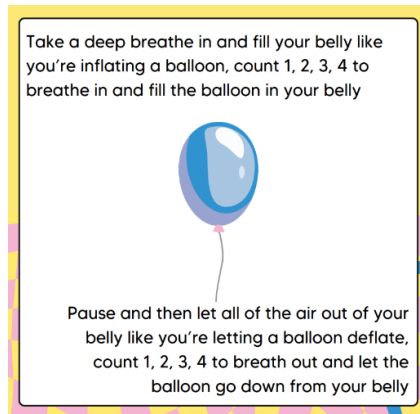
Coping skills:

There are lots of ways that you can try to relieve stress and worries. These are called coping skills. These skills help to distract you from your difficult thoughts or physical feelings by focusing on something else such as your breathing, objects around you or something fun.

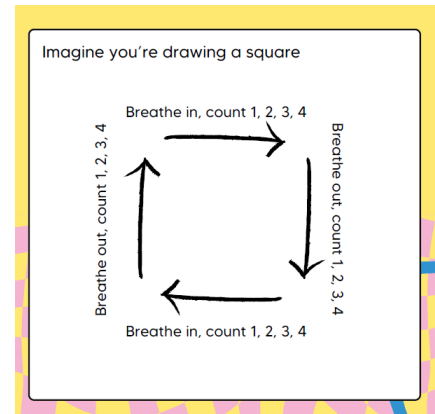
Breathing techniques: can help you to feel calmer within a few minutes. These techniques can be practised anywhere to help you relax.



Finger Breathing

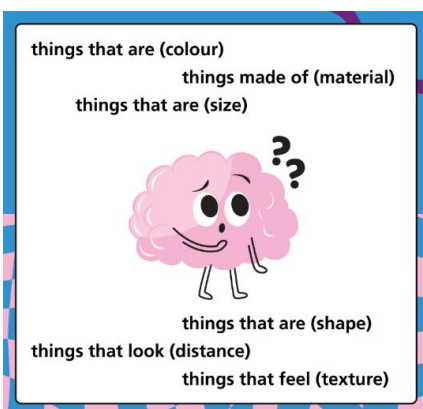


Balloon Breathing

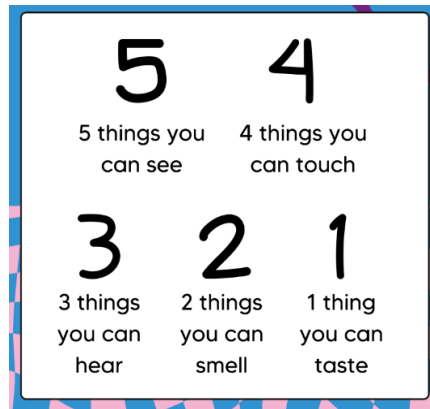


Square Breathing

Grounding techniques: are strategies used to help individuals stay connected to the present moment and reduce feelings of anxiety, stress, or dissociation by focusing on physical sensations, surroundings, or mental tasks.



Room Search



5,4,3,2,1



Fact Thinking

Coping skills:

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR):

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is an exercise that reduces stress and anxiety in your body by having you slowly tense and then relax each muscle.

Lay down and close your eyes if you feel comfortable. Begin by taking a few deep breaths in and out. You will begin to tense each part of your body, holding the tension for a few seconds and then releasing it.

Remember, continue to take deep breaths throughout and avoid tensing to the point it hurts.

- **Feet** (Curling your toes and the arch of your foot)
- **Bottom Legs** (Point your toes and tense your calves)
 - **Upper legs** (Squeeze your thighs together)
 - **Stomach & Chest** (Sucking your stomach in)
- **Back and Shoulders** (Try to touch your shoulders to your ears)
- **Arms & Shoulders** (Make a fist and point your arms to the sky)

Finally, tense your entire body, pause, and then release. Now stretch all of your muscles and open your eyes.



Worry Time:

Worry Time

Worry time gives you time each day to address all of your worries. The more you use worry time, the less your worries will impact you throughout the day.

1 Plan your worry time

It's important to plan in your worry time for the same time each day. This should be a time where you can focus on the worries and not be distracted. Start with a maximum of half an hour each day. As you use worry time more and more, you may notice that you eventually need less than half an hour each day because you get better at dealing with your worries.



2 Catch the worries

As you notice worries during the day, catch them so that you can come back to them later at worry time. You can do this by writing them down, drawing a picture or making a sound recording. You could use a diary, sticky notes, your phone or any other way you can think of to catch the worries as they happen.



3 Refocus your attention

Once you have caught the worry, it's important to focus on something different. Pay attention to whatever it is you're doing at that moment OR do something totally different. You can also refocus by using calming/grounding techniques.



4 Worry time

Use worry time to go back and address all of the worries you have caught that day. For each worry decide whether it is a practical worry or hypothetical worry.

- For **practical worries**, use **problem solving**.
- For **hypothetical worries**, **let the worries go**. You can do this by ripping up, scribbling out, deleting or scrumpling up and throwing away the worry.

Some worries might not even be worries anymore! For these, you will learn that a lot of worries may seem big at the time but later they will seem much smaller and manageable.



Let's Do It

My worry time will be at (time):

It will last for (number of minutes):

I will do it with (will anyone help?):

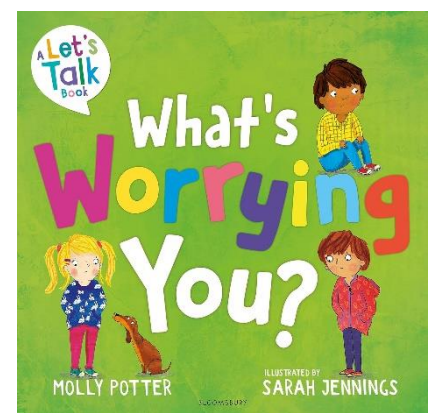
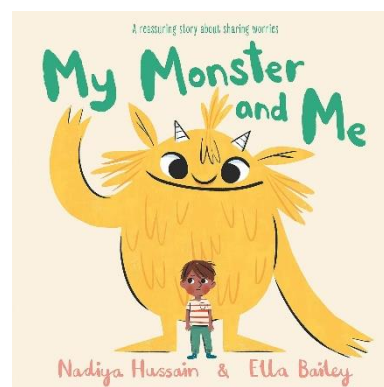
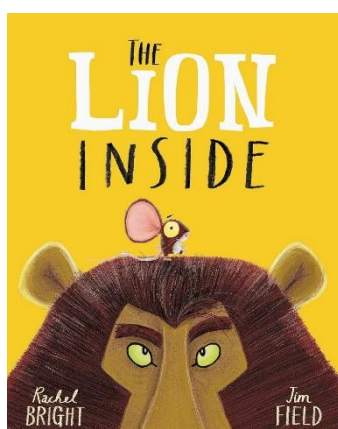
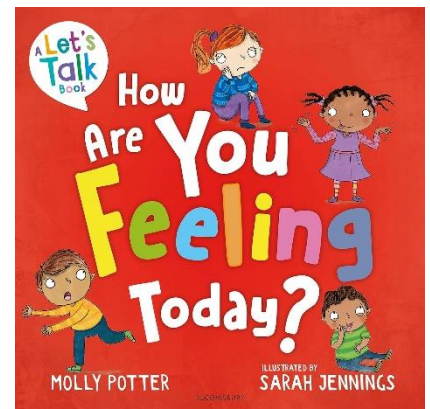
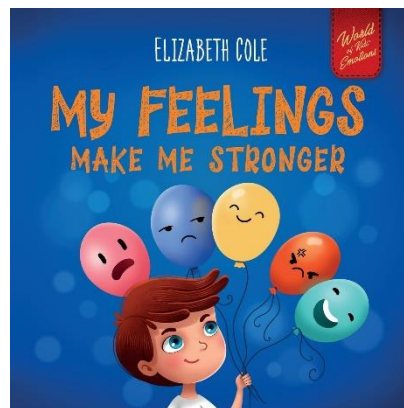
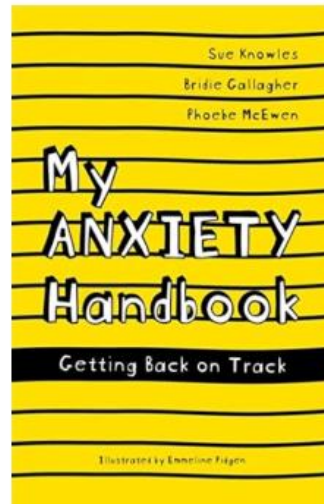
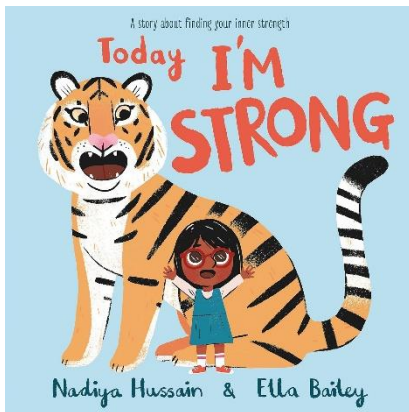
I will catch my worries by (what will you use?):

Top Tip

To refocus your attention, try to take deep breaths and think: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. Notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can feel, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell and 1 thing you can taste. This gives you chance to calm down before focusing on a current or new task.

It can be helpful to use a self-soothe box after as talking about worries could increase physical symptoms.

Children and young people books recommended today:



What can you do if you would like to know more?

This session is just a very brief introduction to what anxiety is and how it can affect us. If you would like some more practical skills and support on how to manage the anxiety your child(ren) experiences, then speak to their Mental Health Lead in school and discuss a referral for Parent-Led CBT.

Parent-Led CBT is a 6-week course, and sessions are 1hr 30mins each.

These take place in person in the local community, or we do occasionally run online groups too.



Feedback

We would really appreciate your honest feedback on how you felt the 'anxiety' workshop went.





Apps:

Head Space/Calm/Moshi/Happify

Websites:

WeHeartCBT - www.weheartcbt.com

Young Minds - www.youngminds.org.uk

Kooth- www.kooth.com

How Are You Feeling- www.howareyoufeeling.org.uk

Cosmic Kids Yoga - www.youtube.com/@CosmicKidsYoga

Services/Useful Contacts:

CAMHS Crisis Team – 01482 259400.

Contact Point – to contact to request further support- 01482 303688

Hull and East Yorkshire MIND - 01482 240200/ Freephone: 08001380990