

SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH ANXIETY

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What is anxiety?

- A feeling of worry or fear that is experienced as a combination of physical sensations, thoughts and feelings.
- A normal part of growing up and throughout life.
- It has its uses too!
- It can become a problem when a young person feels stuck in it, or when it feels like an overwhelming, distressing or unmanageable experience.
- Everyone experiences anxiety sometimes
- Too much can affect our ability to function and feel well.



Prefrontal Cortex

This area is responsible for "executive functions" – contains human thought like abstract reasoning, analysis, decisions, planning, and willpower.

The Limbic System

This primal area evolved to protect us from danger without wasting precious time or resources. It connects directly to the sympathetic nervous system and governs involuntary, automatic functions (heartbeat, breathing) and emotions (anger, anxiety).

When Stress Happens

? Fight or Flight

When the limbic system senses danger, it unleashes a brain chemical that causes a chain reaction known as "fight or flight," preparing you for physical battle or escape. And you can feel it – increased heart rate & blood pressure, clenched muscles, negative feelings.

Your Brain's CEO Goes AWOL

To prepare for running and fighting, blood drains from parts of your body considered less important – like your prefrontal cortex, your brain's "CEO." That might have been useful when your ancestors stumbled upon a tiger, but it's not so great for modern stress like, oh, deciding whether to start or sell a business.



What causes anxiety?

- Feeling 'unsafe'
- Not knowing what's going to happen
- New experiences
- Fear of failure
- Difficult past experiences
- Expecting the worst (catastrophizing)
- Current events (e.g., in home, school, community, the world)
- Physical difficulties (e.g. illness, tiredness)
- Parental/carer anxiety and mental health
- Any more?



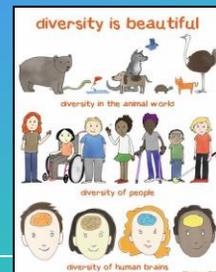
What can anxiety look like?

- Difficulty trying new things or taking risks
- Avoidance
- Inflexibility
- Fearfulness
- Seeking constant reassurance
- Tearfulness and low mood
- Anger
- Controlling behaviour
- Behavioural crisis
- Sleep difficulties
- Concentration difficulties
- 'Hypervigilance'
- Physical symptoms
- Any more?



How does anxiety relate to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)?

- Learning difficulties
- Autism
- ADHD
- Communication difficulties
- Social, emotional and mental health needs
- Physical and health needs



School and home environments



Typically*:

- Structure
- Routine
- Lots of demands
- Lots of sensory factors
- Few places to retreat to
- Social pressure
- Lots of different people



Typically*:

- Not as structured
- Fewer demands
- Familiar people and environment
- Places to retreat to
- Sometimes siblings
- Can 'let loose' (unmask)
- Family difficulties

Anxiety can affect and be affected by more than one environment

Key approaches for school and home



Structure, predictability and routines

- Planning and discussing events for the day/week together
- Written and/or visual schedules
- Preparing for and explaining changes
- Positivity (e.g. "I remember when you...", "I know it feels scary but...")
- Motivational strategies
- Familiar and healthy routines
- Consistency
- Working with school - teamwork

Structure, predictability and routines

My Morning Checklist

- eat breakfast
- put dishes in sink
- use the bathroom
- brush teeth
- wash face
- get dressed
- make bed
- gather things for school
- put on shoes

Summer Schedule

- 8:30 Eat breakfast, get dressed
- 9:00 Empty dishwasher, pick up, help with laundry, check with mom
- 9:30 SCREEN TIME
- 10:00 Play outside, work on a project, play a game
- 12:00 Lunch
- 1:00 Go on an outing
- 4:00 Practice, read, quiet time
- 5:00 Help cook dinner, set the table
- 7:00 Watch TV
- 8:00 Take a bath
- 9:00 Read a book
- 9:30 Lights out

	pull pants down		flush the toilet
	pull underwear down		wash hands with soap
	sit down and potty		rinse off soap
	wipe		dry hands
	pull up pants		ALL DONE!

Active listening

<p>Eye Contact</p> <p>Eye contact during the conversation shows the speaker that you give him your attention and that you really care about what he says.</p>	<p>Avoid Distractions</p> <p>There are so many examples of distractions such as our thoughts, mobile phones, gadgets, music, side activities, other people and more. Learn to avoid these distractions otherwise they can destroy your conversation.</p>
<p>Body Gestures</p> <p>Body gestures and language are a whole science. Your body gestures tell the speaker whether you listen carefully or not.</p>	<p>Give Feedback</p> <p>Ask questions to clarify certain points, tell your opinions, summarize the speaker's comments.</p>
<p>Show That You're Listening</p> <p>Use facial expressions such as smile, note your posture, encourage the speaker to share and to continue.</p>	<p>Listening allows you to learn, to have relationships, to plan, to develop, to be the part of something, to create, to think... and much more!</p>

Don't feel you always have to fix the problem or take responsibility for it all by yourself!

What you could do about that?

How would you like me to help?

Let's problem-solve together

Be conscious of not projecting your own anxiety or reinforcing the anxiety

De-escalating anxiety

- A child in crisis is not a child who can think straight
- Practise deep breathing together (modelling)
- Give them physical comfort if they respond well to that
- Remind them it will pass but don't dismiss the feelings
- Provide a calming activity or resource
- Adults must manage their own reactions too
- Model calm
- Make it safe
- Provide a quiet space to calm down
- Once they are calm, talk through what happened

Media and exposure to world events

- Be conscious of what adults discuss in front of them
- Discuss events in an appropriate, supportive way
- Monitor internet use and access to media
- Provide age-appropriate media such as Newsround and First News
- Avoid devices before bedtime



School engagement

- Ensure you show a 'united front' with school. Adults must work as a team.
- Be positive.
- Communicate with key staff (e.g. class teacher, SENCO).
- Discuss what is being done at school that you could replicate at home, and vice versa.
- Ask for help if you need it (e.g. making resources).

Managing anxiety and building resilience

- Resilience = The ability to tackle and recover from difficult events
- Requires experiencing difficult things, not avoiding them
- Support children to face challenges, not just protecting them
- Gradual exposure
- Allow for disappointments
- Face challenges together – as a team
- Encourage them to ask for help
- Reflect on small steps of progress
- Allow them to discuss their fears – don't dismiss them
- Remind them that no-one is perfect and they don't have to be
- Remind them of previous times when they've shown resilience



Some useful tools



Social Stories

- Focus on a key area of social knowledge of skill
- Better understanding of conventions and expectations
- Gain insight into the perspectives of others
- Encourage the identification of important social 'clues'
- Promote better self-awareness
- Understand how behaviour impacts self and others



www.autism.org.uk and www.autismtrust.org.uk

Zones of Regulation

The ZONES of Regulation®

BLUE ZONE	GREEN ZONE	YELLOW ZONE	RED ZONE
Sad Sick Tired Bored Moving Slowly	Happy Calm Feeling Okay Ready to Learn	Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Excited Loss of Some Control	Mad Angry Scared Terrified Out of Control

Build your toolkit with your children...

Blue Zone Toolkit

- Stretch and exercise
- Draw a picture
- Talk to someone
- Ask for a hug

Green Zone Toolkit

- Drink some water
- Listen for instructions
- Help people around me
- Be a model for others

Yellow Zone Toolkit

- Exercise and heavy work
- Deep breathing
- Squeeze a stress ball
- Go for a walk
- Talk to an adult

Red Zone Toolkit

- Time out
- Design breathe
- Count to ten
- Talk about the problem

The Zones of Regulation (ztknortonco.co.uk)

Gremlins series of books

<p>'Emotionally Based School Avoidance Guidance for professionals working with families and young people' (Sheffield Educational Psychology Service, 2020)</p>	Other useful Anxiety Management tools	
	Worry Time	Worry time is a set time in the day where a CYP can focus on their worries either by themselves through drawing or writing, or with another person through talking. Having a fixed and limited time to concentrate on your worries can help reduce the amount of time you spend thinking about them.
	Worry Monster	Some children find a worry monster helpful. They can write/draw their worries, or tell an adult who writes them down and then the child can feed their worries to the worry monster's mouth. Worry monsters can be bought or easily made out of a cardboard box and some craft materials.
	Journaling	Journaling or keeping an anxiety diary can support the CYP in working through anxious feelings.
	Talking	Talking to other people can help to manage anxiety as it provides an opportunity to express feelings, challenge thinking and problem solve. It can be helpful for the CYP to identify who they can talk to about their worries.
Books about anxiety	<p>Books can be a useful tool in helping the CYP and adults to understand more about their anxiety.</p>	

Helping Your Child With Anxiety (youngminds.org.uk)

Includes guidance on seeking professional help around anxiety and mental health

- ### Next steps
- Make a plan
 - Discuss it within your child/family/support network
 - Ask for support if you need it
 - Give it a try!
 - And remember....no parent is perfect!

Questions and discussion