

Understanding & Supporting Anxiety

Parent / Carer Workshop



Northorpe Hall
Child & Family Trust

Session Agreement



Session Structure



Part 1: Understanding
Anxiety



Part 2: Supporting
Anxiety



Resources



Evaluation

SESSION LENGTH: 1 HOUR 30

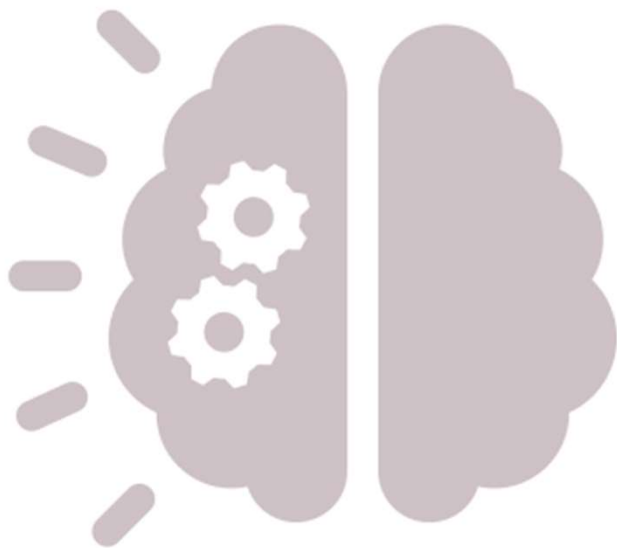


Northorpe Hall
Child & Family Trust

Session Aims:

- ✓ To develop an understanding of anxiety and the triggers and symptoms associated with it
- ✓ To explore how to effectively support your child if they are exhibiting symptoms of anxiety

PART 1



UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY AND THE TRIGGERS AND SYMPTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH IT



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What is Anxiety?

- There is some blank paper on your tables and a pen.
- In table groups, come up with a definition for the term 'anxiety'.
- Feedback.

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of **tension, worried thoughts** and **physical changes** like increased blood pressure. People with **anxiety** disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry.

APA (American Psychological Association)

Types of Anxiety Disorder



Agoraphobia

Separation Anxiety

Generalised Anxiety

Social Anxiety

Panic Disorder

Phobias

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

Rates of probable mental disorders have increased since 2017; in 6 to 16 year olds from one in nine (11.6%) to one in six (17.4%), and in 17 to 19 year olds from one in ten (10.1%) to one in six (17.4%).
NHS Digital 2021

Separation anxiety is the most common anxiety disorder in children younger than 12. (NHS Scotland, 2020)

**Around 4% of children aged 5-10 will have anxiety. In girls aged 11-16, this rises to 8% and for boys, 6%.
NHS Digital 2017**

At some point, anxiety affects 30% of children and adolescents, yet 80% never get help (Child Mind Institute, 2018)

Children are 3 times more likely to struggle with anxiety than depression.
NHS Digital 2017



Anxiety: A Summary

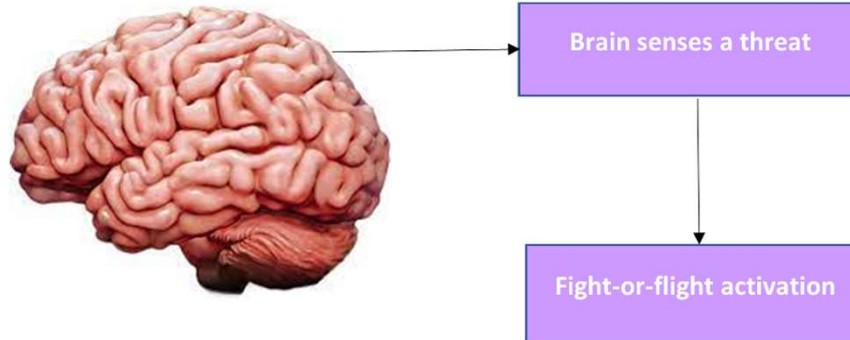
- Anxiety is a ***normal*** feeling and does affect children.
- Not all children will need help; some will find ways of managing this themselves.
- The earlier you start to treat the anxiety, the better the outcome.
- The first intervention that should be given is called **psycho-education**. This involves explaining to a child how anxiety works in their body and what they need to do to manage it. This may be the only intervention they need.

Anxiety: Psycho-Education

- Common symptoms present across the different types of anxiety disorders.
- Symptoms vary in number and intensity for each child.
- The same chain of events in the body happens each time a child becomes anxious.
- In-built threat system in the brain is activated.
- Anxiety, and the threat system, are primarily there to keep us safe.
- However, sometimes the threat system can become too sensitive and this is where anxiety can become unhelpful and impact on many areas of life.

How Anxiety Works in the Body

- The threat system is also known as fight-or-flight.



- It's like an alarm being set off in our brains, telling us we're in potential danger.

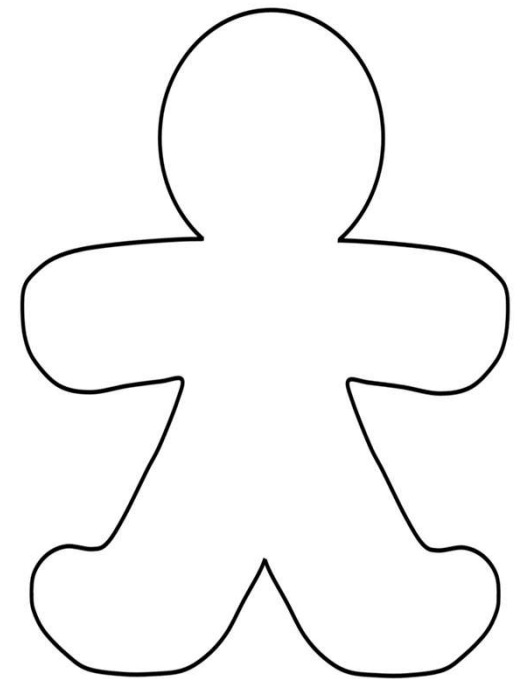
How Anxiety Works in the Body

- When our fight-or-flight system is activated, it increases the levels of adrenaline and cortisol; the stress hormones.
- These hormones set off a common chain of events in the body.

Group Exercise: 5 Minutes

In your group, write down on the outside of the person template what you think may **trigger** anxiety.

Then think about and write down what **symptoms** may occur on the inside of the template.



[This Photo](#) by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY

Triggers and Symptoms

Triggers

- School / homework
- Expectations
- Bullying
- Confrontation
- Lack of sleep
- Social media
- Social gatherings
- Uncertainty
- Relationships / not fitting in
- Family / finance / housing / stress
- Appearance and / or weight
- Uncertainty
- Significant life changes
- Traumatic events
- Phobias
- Diagnosed / undiagnosed learning difficulties or neurodevelopmental conditions

Symptoms

- Feeling sick, dizzy or faint
- Upset tummy / stomach ache
- Increased heart rate / racing heart
- Sweaty / sweaty palms / feeling hot
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritability /snapping
- Restlessness
- Feeling nervous / on edge
- Change in appetite
- Body pumps blood to limbs
- Feeling overwhelmed or full of dread
- Low appetite
- Tearful
- Dry mouth
- Trouble sleeping

Other Factors

- Family traits
- Personality
- Stressful childhoods
- Frequent house or school moves
- Transition
- Parental separation
- Bereavement
- Physical illness
- Conflict or discord at home

Reflection / Discussion

- We are just going to have an opportunity for discussion to think about personal experiences with our own children:
 - What symptoms does your child present with?
 - Do you know what the trigger(s) is?

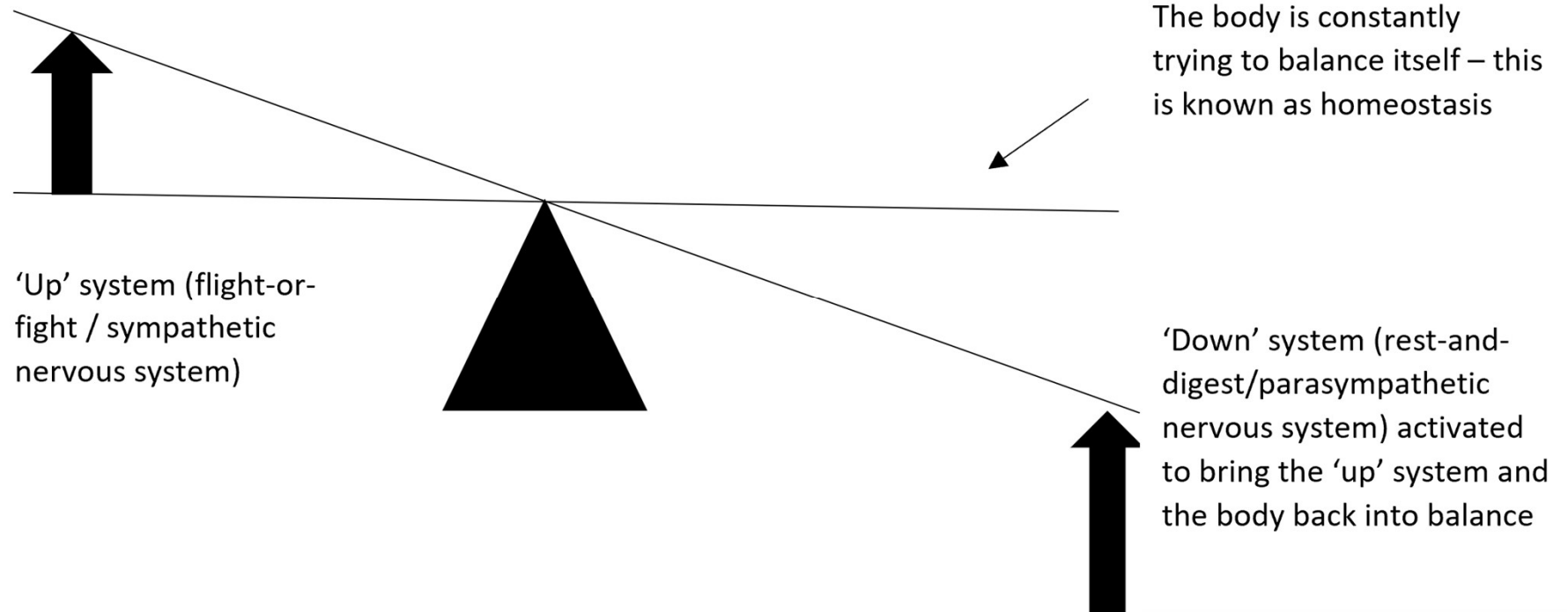
Fight-or-Flight System

- When the human body is healthy, one of its main functions is to keep harmony and stay in balance.
- If the body is off balance in any way, it will try to rebalance itself; a bit like a see-saw trying to get level.
- This is called homeostasis; to maintain this, the body will do things such as keep your temperature regular, keep your vitamins and hormones at the right level etc.
- The process of homeostasis takes approx. 40 minutes and is important in the role of anxiety.

Fight-or-Flight System

- We can think of the activation of the fight-or-flight system as the 'up' system.
- Homeostasis can be thought of as the 'down' system; this will do things such as try to regulate breathing.
- If breathing is regulated by your child, this will help the progress of the 'down' system. Breathing exercises, like breathing as though you are trying to blow up a balloon, will help your child.

Up and Down System



Homeostasis

- Over the period of 40 minutes that the process of homeostasis takes, anxiety symptoms come down on their own.
- You don't have to do anything to make this happen, it is how the body is designed to keep itself healthy.
- Whilst your child may think they are anxious all day, it is not biologically possible.

Avoidance

- Physical avoidance is something we all do.
- It's an easy and safe way to avoid something challenging.
- However, when avoidance of an object starts to impact on life, it becomes a problem.
- If a child avoids situations / objects that make them anxious, the anxiety will reduce. However, their level of anxiety will still feel the same on different occasions due to the same actions being taken.
- When children expose themselves to the source of their anxiety and stay with it, their anxiety will eventually lessen in severity and will occur for a shorter length of time.

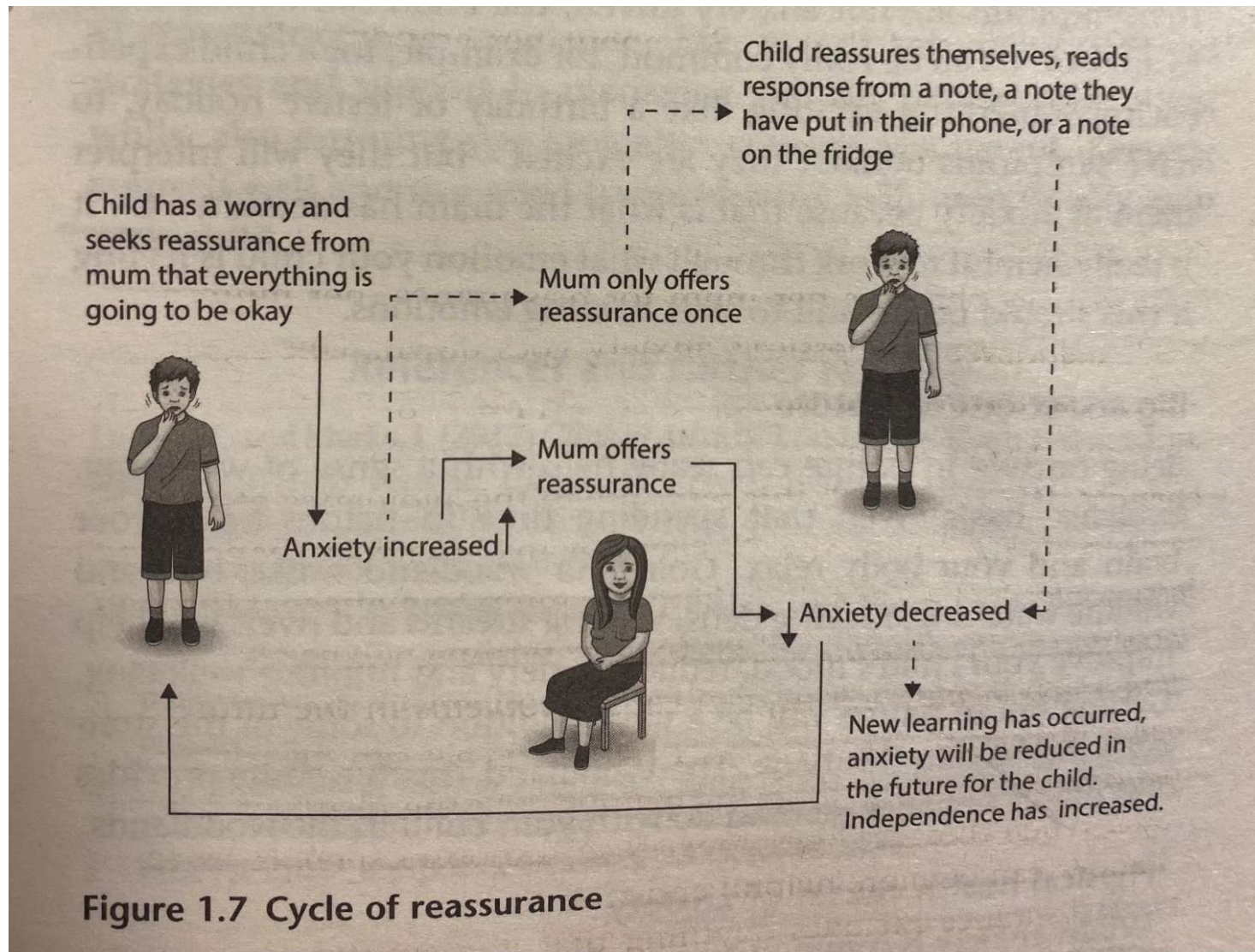
Safety Behaviours

- ‘Safety behaviours’ are things that we do to make ourselves feel better when in anxiety-provoking situations, for example, looking at our phones / searching in our bags for things / listening to music on headphones when waiting in a queue / waiting room.
- Safety behaviours can make us feel safe, but sometimes they can be unhelpful.
- One type of unhelpful safety behaviour used a lot by children is reassurance (or seeking reassurance).

Reassurance

- Something we should all provide for our children.
- By offering reassurance, we are providing guidance and support to help our children develop and take risks to increase their independence.
- However, reassurance in anxiety can be unhelpful.
- Too much reassurance can be counterproductive and become part of the anxiety cycle rather than reducing it.

Cycle of Reassurance



Reassurance Strategy

- Offer verbal reassurance *once*.
- After this, your child has to learn to reassure themselves.
- Support this by the changing responses you give e.g. 'What did I say to you last time?' or 'What do you think?'
- This helps the child to process and manage the worry themselves.

Worry v Anxiety

- We tend to feel worry in our heads, and anxiety in our bodies
- Worry tends to be specific, anxiety more general
- Worry can be more verbally focused while anxiety includes verbal thoughts and mental/physical affects
- Worry can trigger problem solving behaviour, anxiety does not (unless aware)
- Worry creates mild distress, anxiety more severe
- Worry is caused by realistic concerns whilst anxiety often irrational
- Worry tends to be controllable, anxiety much less so
- Worry can be a temporary state, anxiety often lingers
- Worry doesn't impact our day-to-day functioning, anxiety does
- Worry is considered a “normative” psychological state, whilst unnecessary anxiety is not



We need to try and change how we react when we have worrying thoughts.

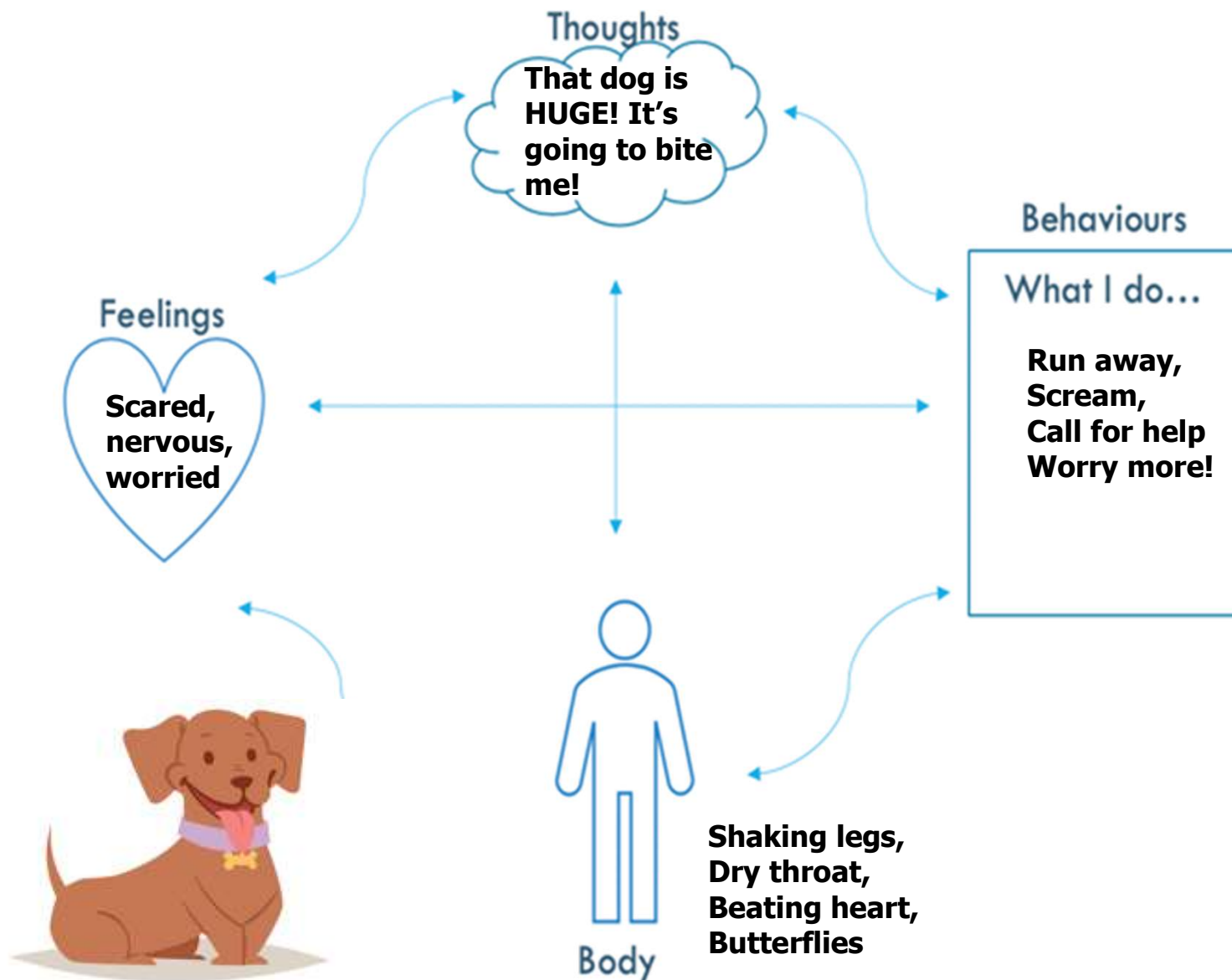


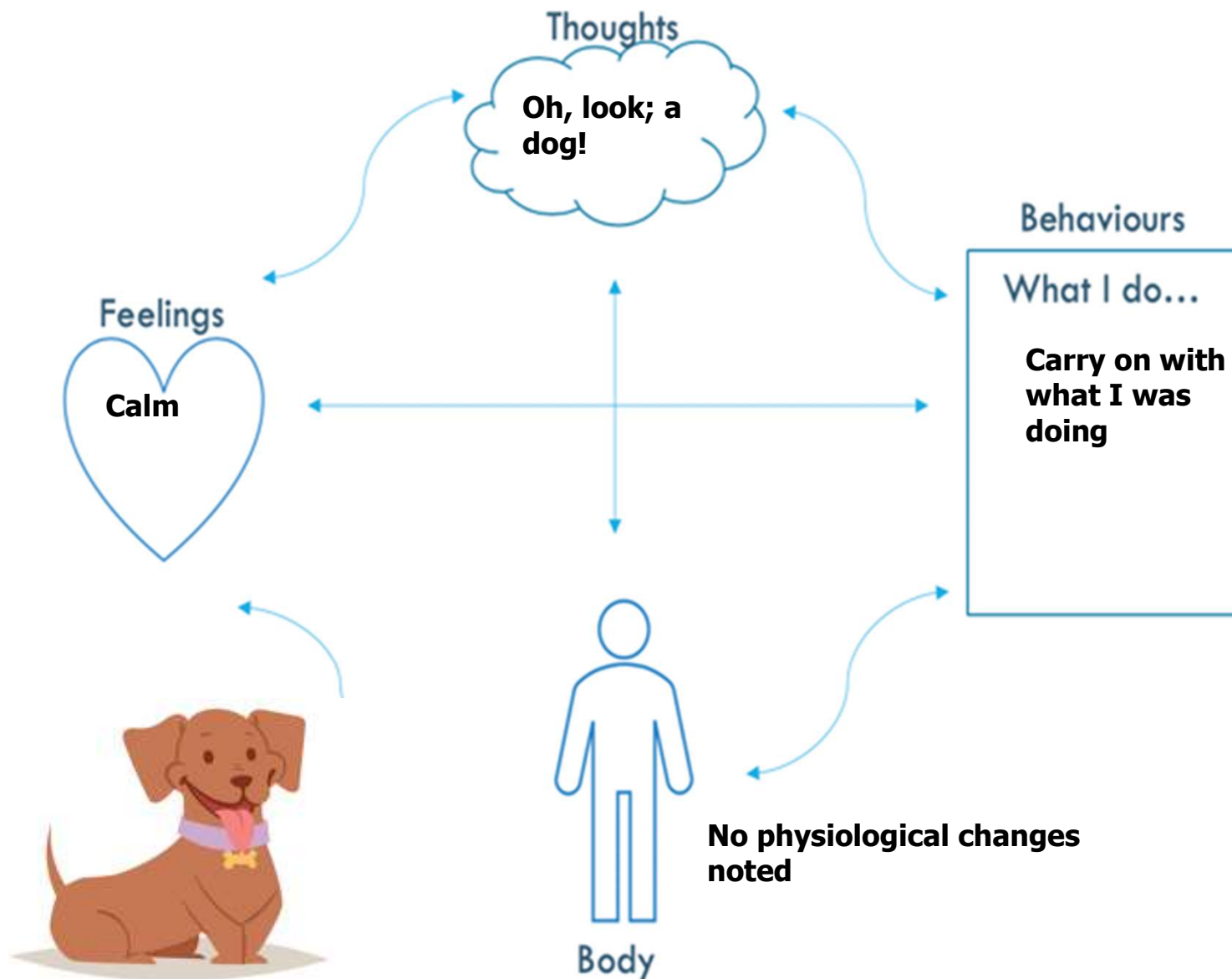
Let's imagine, for example, a child who is terrified of dogs.



We're going to compare them with someone who isn't at all frightened by dogs

Thoughts and Behaviours







Both characters experienced the same thing, seeing a dog.



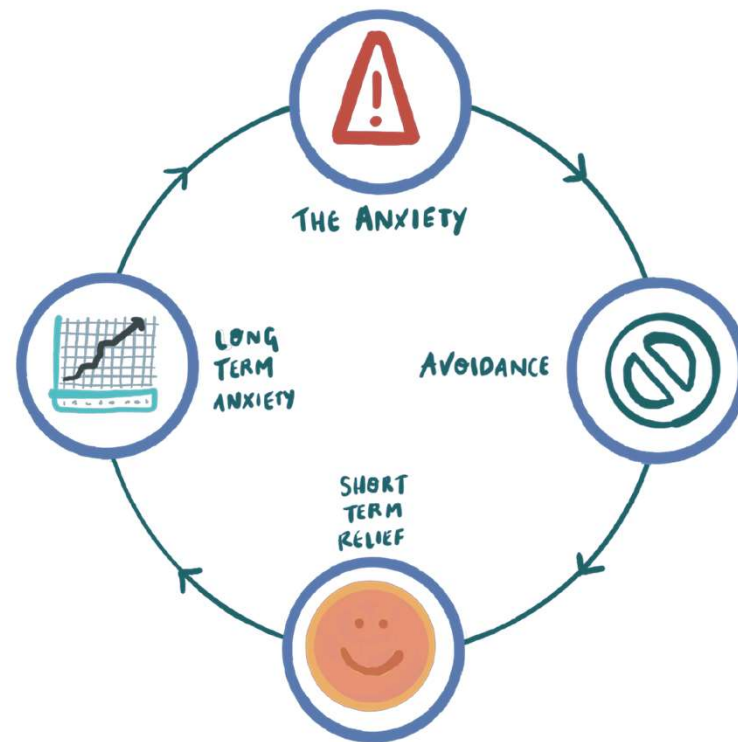
But both of their thoughts were different!



They then behaved in a different way and felt differently.



Anxiety Cycle



PART 2



TO EXPLORE HOW TO
EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT
A CHILD EXHIBITING
SYMPTOMS OF
ANXIETY



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What Can Parents and Carers do to Support a Child or Young Person who Experiences Anxiety?

The best way to help young people dealing with anxiety is to find ways to face feared situations. Help plan ways for them to test out their fears gradually and set specific goals.

Stay calm but supportive and try not to get drawn into their emotions. It helps if you are supportive but stay practical. Normalise talking about feelings of worry and anxiousness and what happens to the body when this happens (psycho-education).

Listen and validate their emotions e.g. 'I have noticed that you seem a little worried. Can you talk to me about it?' or 'Can you tell me how you're feeling?'

Reassure once and instead of telling the child that nothing bad will happen, ask things like 'what has happened in this situation before?' This can help them to begin to challenge any negative thoughts.

What Can Parents and Carers do to Support a Child or Young Person who Experiences Anxiety?

Help the child think through what they learned about their fears and about themselves (e.g., did their worry come true? did they cope?). Parents can help children to rate their anxiety levels on a scale of 1-10, and notice that when they face their feared situation repeatedly the anxiety level goes down.

Praise and reward small (and big) successes when they face their fears. It can help them remain positive.

Speak to school staff so that they are aware.

Create consistent routines and prepare children in advance.

Use distraction techniques to take their mind away from the anxiety.



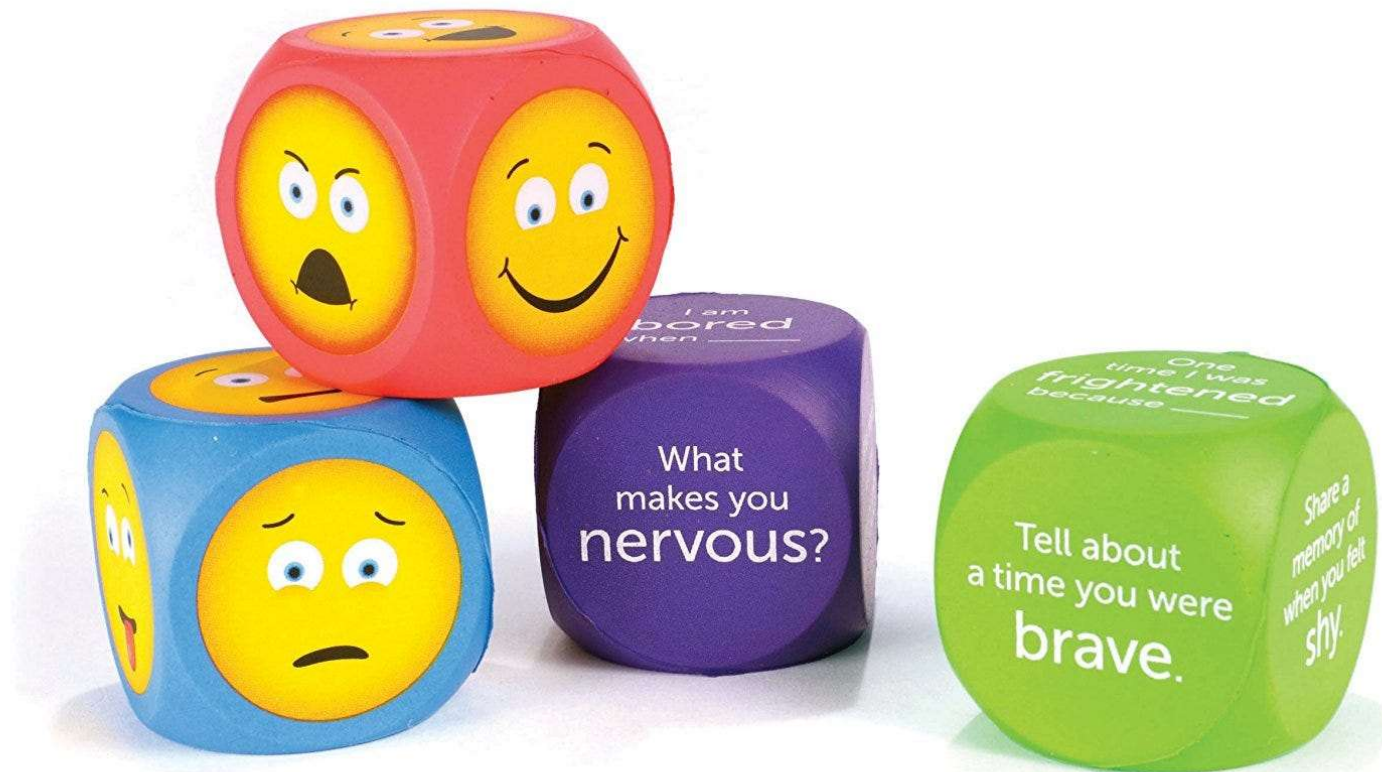
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Resources: Child-Friendly Psycho-Education Video



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfSbWc3O_5M

Resources: Emotions Dice



Resources: Worry Box / Jar



**Parents can get creative with their children when making a worry jar.
Alternatively, you can buy them online.**

Resources: Worry Monsters



**Create a model of
your worry monster**

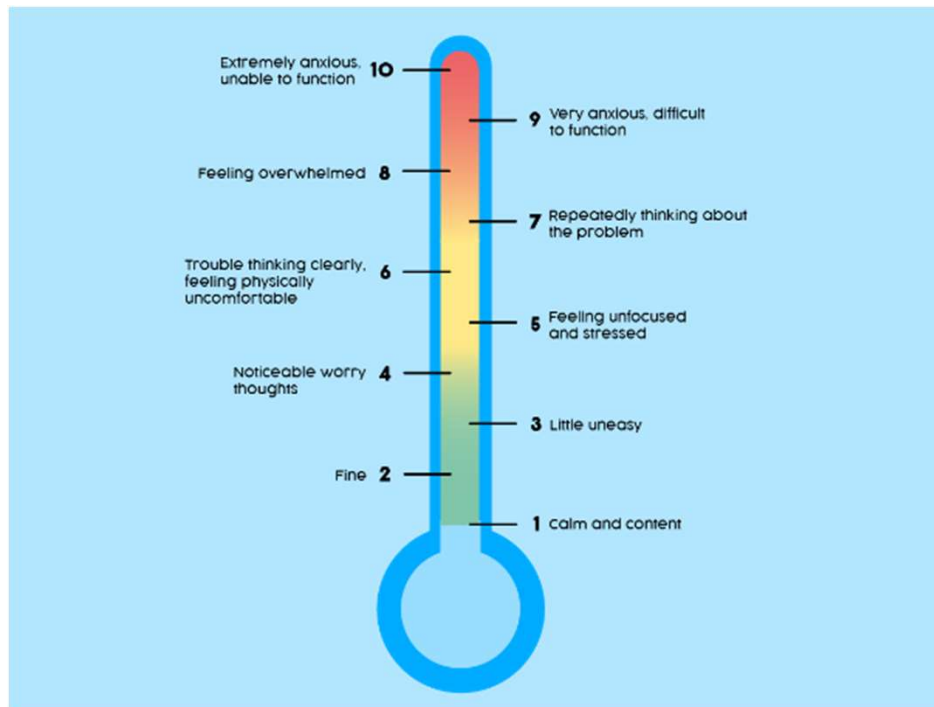
Resources: Self Soothe Boxes



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyfgodSSdV4>

Resources: Anxiety

Thermometer



Resources: Distraction Toolkits

- ✓ Draw a picture
- ✓ Make slime
- ✓ Use a fidget toy
- ✓ Play on a table
- ✓ Build lego
- ✓ Talk to friends / family
- ✓ Use / create a glitter jar
- ✓ Go for a walk / do some physical activity



Resources: Just Dance



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpdRc9L97TY>

Resources: Mindful Breathing

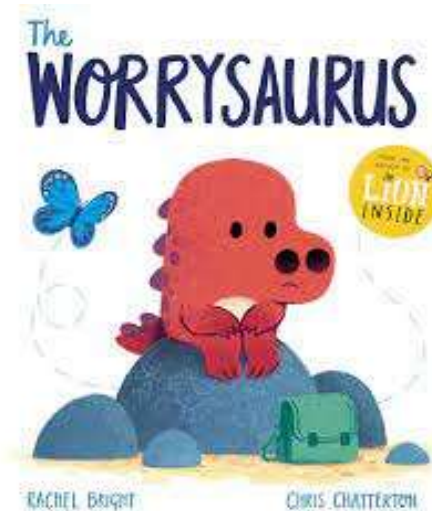
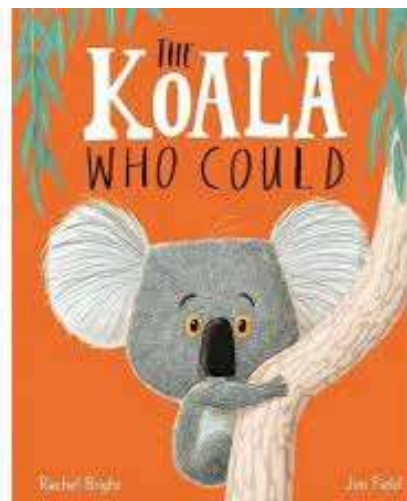


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIbBI-BT9c4>

Resources: Mindfulness Exercises

| MON | TUES | WED | THURS | FRI |
|--|--|---|---|--|
| <p>COUNTING BREATHS</p> <p>1-2-3</p> |  <p>ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE</p> |  <p>USING THE SENSES</p> | <p>COLOUR BREATHING</p>  |  <p>BIRTHDAY CAKE BREATHING</p> |
| MON | TUES | WED | THURS | FRI |
| <p>FEATHER BREATHING</p>  |  <p>FINGER COUNTING</p> | <p>SLIMY HANDS</p>  | <p>RISE AND FALL</p>  | <p>RELAXING MUSCLES</p>  |

Resources: Fiction Books



Resources: Exposure Ladder



8 – Eating dinner with my family at a local restaurant.

7 – Having a takeaway with my family.

6 – Seeing someone being sick.

5 – Looking at a picture of someone being sick.

4 – Hearing the word 'sick'.

3 – Making the sound of someone being sick.

2 – Writing the word sick.

1 – Reading the word sick.

Resources: Level of Anxiety Table

| Minutes | Level of anxiety |
|---------|------------------|
| 0 | |
| 5 | |
| 10 | |
| 15 | |
| 20 | |
| 25 | |
| 30 | |
| 35 | |
| 40 | |

Resources: Worry Table

| What was going on? | How it made me feel? | What I was thinking about? | What I did? |
|---|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Didn't want to go back to school after the weekend. | Initially felt worried and stressed but relieved afterwards. | I don't like school, I feel that no one likes me. The work is too hard. | I went to talk to my Mum about it. |

Other Strategies

- ✓ Take a break and go outside;
- ✓ Use creative play / role play to find solutions
- ✓ Use gratitude cards / jars
- ✓ Visualisation exercises
- ✓ Relaxation exercises – lots on YouTube
- ✓ 5 senses



Final Questions

Any final thoughts or
questions?

Feedback Forms

Please complete the feedback form on
your table.



Many thanks for your time 😊