

HANDOUT 1 – MAINTENANCE OF CHILD ANXIETY PROBLEMS – Part 1*

TRIGGER/SITUATION: _____

YOUR CHILD'S ANXIOUS EXPECTATIONS:

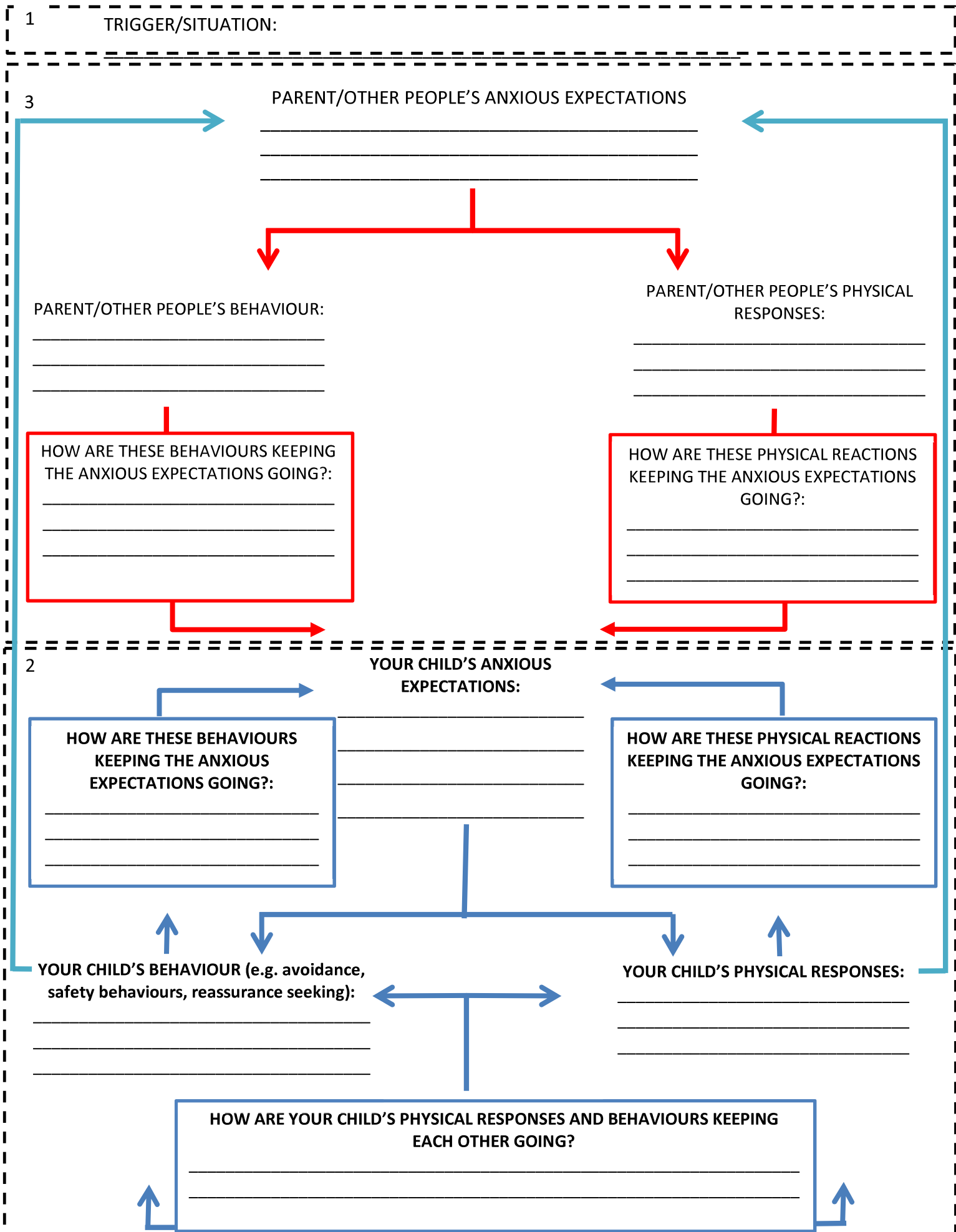
YOUR CHILD'S BEHAVIOUR:

YOUR CHILD'S PHYSICAL RESPONSE:



* OPTIONAL HANDOUT

HANDOUT 2 – MAINTENANCE OF CHILD ANXIETY PROBLEMS – Part 2



HANDOUT 3 – WHAT ARE MY CHILD’S ANXIOUS THOUGHTS/ EXPECTATIONS?

WHAT IS HAPPENING?	WHAT IS MY CHILD THINKING?	MY RESPONSES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Why are you feeling worried?</i> • <i>What is frightening you?</i> • <i>What do you think will happen?</i> • <i>What is the worst thing that might happen?</i> • <i>What is it about [this situation] that is making you worried?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Be curious</i> • <i>Help your child feel understood</i> • <i>Help your child feel normal</i> • <i>Make suggestions</i> • <i>Check you have understood</i> • <i>Keep it rewarding (and fun, if applicable)</i>

HANDOUT 4 – WHAT DOES MY CHILD NEED TO LEARN

- **WHAT DOES MY CHILD NEED TO LEARN? HELPFUL QUESTIONS:**
- *Is the feared outcome as likely as your child thinks?*
- *If the feared outcome does happen, will it be as bad as they think it will be?*
- *Might they cope better than they think they will?*

Goal	What does my child expect will happen?	What does my child need to learn?

HANDOUT 5 – ENCOURAGING INDEPENDENCE*

Independent Activity	When did my child try this?	What tips for success did I use?	How did it go? What did my child do?
1.			
2.			
3.			

* OPTIONAL HANDOUT

HANDOUT 6 – REWARDS

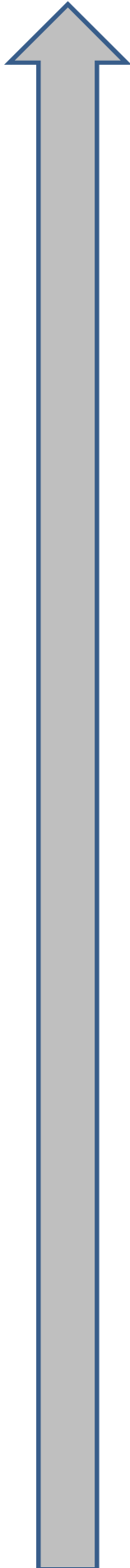
Tips to remember:

- Make praise clear and specific
- Include a range of rewards under each category
- Rewards don't need to be expensive
- Make sure both you and your child agree to the reward
- Make sure you would be willing to *not* give the reward if the goal was not met
- Try to have rewards that can be given immediately or soon after the goal has been met

Things to do with my child:

Other things my child would enjoy:

HANDOUT 8 – STEP-BY-STEP PLAN



PREDICTION	ULTIMATE GOAL	ULTIMATE REWARD
PREDICTION	STEP 9	REWARD
PREDICTION	STEP 8	REWARD
PREDICTION	STEP 7	REWARD
PREDICTION	STEP 6	REWARD
PREDICTION	STEP 5	REWARD
PREDICTION	STEP 4	REWARD
PREDICTION	STEP 3	REWARD
PREDICTION	STEP 2	REWARD

HANDOUT 9 – KEEPING TRACK OF MY CHILD’S PROGRESS WITH THEIR STEP-BY-STEP PLAN

Date/Time	Which step did my child try?	What did they think would happen?	What strategies did I use to encourage them to 'have a go'?	How did it go? What did my child do?	What did they learn?

HANDOUT 10 – PROBLEM SOLVING

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?	LIST ALL THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS (NO MATTER HOW WEIRD OR WONDERFUL!)	WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I CHOSE THIS SOLUTION? (IN THE SHORT TERM? IN THE LONG TERM? TO MY ANXIETY IN THE FUTURE?)	IS THIS PLAN DOABLE? YES/NO	HOW GOOD IS THE OUTCOME? RATE 0-10	SELECT PLAN. WHAT HAPPENED?

HANDOUT 12 – THINGS FOR ME AND MY CHILD TO CONTINUE TO WORK ON

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

HELPING CHILDREN OVERCOME FEARS AND WORRIES – A GUIDE FOR TEACHERS –

We have written this guide for teachers of children who are experiencing difficulties with anxiety. We hope that it will provide you with a helpful summary of the techniques that parents are using at home so that you can use the same strategies at school. You may well be familiar with some of the ideas already, but if you would like more information about the strategies we have outlined, we suggest you read the rest of the book that we have written for parents ('Helping your Child with Fears and Worries', Creswell & Willetts (Publisher: LittleBrown)).

What are common fears and worries of anxious children?

Everyone, children and adults alike, experiences worries, fears and anxiety some of the time. However, for some children these fears and worries can be excessive; they interfere with their everyday life including school attendance and participation in school activities. Fears, worry and anxiety involve (i) an expectation that something bad is going to happen, (ii) physical responses to this (e.g. 'butterflies' in the tummy, fast breathing, or fast heart rate) and (iii) things we do to keep away from things we fear or to try to stay safe when we have to confront them (e.g. avoiding eye contact in frightening social situations). Anxiety problems are actually the most common emotional and behavioural problems experienced by children. Children often do not grow out of these problems, and they can be a risk factor for other issues, such as depression, in adolescence or adulthood. Therefore, it is essential that children experiencing anxiety problems are supported in overcoming their difficulties.

Fears and worries in school

Children with anxiety difficulties often feel anxious about various aspects of school. There are many different reasons for this. Some children find social situations scary, such as mixing with their peers, speaking to teachers, or contributing in class. Other children are worried about separating from a parent or caregiver. For other children, their worries or anxious expectations are more general and may involve a whole host of different things, including getting told off, not doing well enough in their work or

sports, or falling out with a friend. Suffice to say, school can be a scary place for many children. Sometimes you may see the direct effects of this in school – for example, children may be withdrawn, tearful or have behavioural outbursts – but sometimes children may manage to ‘keep it together’ during the school day and the emotional fallout happens when they get home. This can sometimes lead to a tricky situation for teachers, as parents may be reporting that the child is very anxious about school, but teachers may not see the evidence of that, which may lead them to think the problems are all at home. In these situations, it is really helpful when schools and parents can work together to help the child overcome their difficulties.

What can be done in school?

There are various things that can be done in school to help children overcome their anxiety difficulties, alongside parents or carers implementing strategies at home. Below we outline strategies that teachers or other school staff we have worked with have found they can use with children to help them to overcome their anxieties.

Overcoming fears and worries in school

We have talked above about the tendency for children to try to stay away from things they are scared of (avoidance) or do things that will make them feel safe (safety behaviours) when they get anxious. The trouble is that if anxious children avoid the things that make them feel anxious they don’t get the chance to gather new information about the situation, so they don’t find out if their anxious expectation will actually happen or not and whether they could really cope.

Here’s an example:

Jane thinks that if she answers a question in class she will get it wrong and her classmates will think that she is stupid. When her teacher asks her a question, she therefore looks down at the desk and does not answer. In doing this, she does not get to know if she would get the answer right, and if she didn’t whether her classmates would even care. In helping a child overcome their anxieties, the child needs to be supported in gathering new information about their anxious expectations so they can discover that:

1. *Things may not turn out as they fear.*

2. *Even if things don't go well, they can cope or do something about it.*
3. *By facing fears, we learn new things that help us overcome them*

Facing fears gradually

When a child is anxious, people around them can often try hard to make sure they won't become distressed. For example:

Whenever Jane's teacher asked her a question, she went red, avoided eye contact and stared at the desk. This seemed to attract more attention to Jane, which the teacher could see was not helping. Gradually she stopped asking Jane questions in the hope that she would begin to put her hand up.

Although Jane's teacher's response was completely understandable, and in fact showed that she had quite a good understanding of Jane's anxieties, it did also allow Jane to avoid facing her fears and learning from these new experiences. Teachers are in a great position to provide children with opportunities to face their fears gradually so that they can overcome those fears. Here is an example of what Jane's teacher did.

Jane's teacher sat down with Jane during break time and let Jane know that he could see she was finding it hard to answer questions. He asked Jane what made it so difficult for her. Jane told him that she was worried that she might get the answer wrong. Jane's teacher suggested they try to find out if she really would get it wrong and what would happen if she did. Every day at break-time he would ask Jane one question from the lesson and they would see how many she got right.

Having done this for a week, her teacher discussed with Jane what she had discovered from asking questions at breaktime. They noted how they had found that although she didn't always get the answer right she didn't get it wrong more than other children in the class would have done. Her teacher congratulated her. They decided that, as she was so good at answering questions at break time, it was now time to start answering questions in a small

group. He agreed that each day when she was working in a small group, he would ask her a question about the work. Jane was worried that she would be singled out, so he agreed to also ask other children in the group questions. Gradually, Jane and her teacher progressed from answering questions individually, to a small group, to the whole class, and finally to asking the teacher a question herself in front of the class.

Using problem-solving to tackle real life problems or threats

Although children's anxious expectations are not always realistic, sometimes they might reflect an actual problem that the child is facing. For example, a child who is worried that other children will reject them if they ask to join in because other children are sometimes unkind and say that they don't want to play with them. This will need a different approach. In the case of bullying this clearly needs to be dealt with using official school procedures. However, you may also be able to support the child in problem-solving these types of situations. What can they do if a child says that they do not want to play with them? How many different ideas can they come up with? What do they think would happen if they tried each of these ideas? Which one seems the best? Can they give it a go? (and How did it go?)

Another example might be a child who is worried about doing badly in a test and does in fact struggle academically. You could support the child in problem-solving solutions to this 'real life' problem, thinking with them about things you can be doing at school to help and things they can be doing at home.

Tips for helping children to overcome anxiety in school

In helping children to gather new information about their anxious expectations and to face their fears gradually, the following tips can be useful:

1. *As much as possible, work with the child to set goals so you both know what you want to achieve.*

2. *Think about what the child needs to learn in order to challenge their anxious expectations.*
3. *Work with the child to develop a plan to test out fears and gain new knowledge. Make a step-by-step plan to gradually try out new things to test their anxious expectations.*
4. *If the child struggles with a step, it may simply be too difficult, in which case break it down into smaller ones.*
5. *Be open and explicit with parents about the strategies you are using so that you can work together. If a similar approach is being taken at home and at school, change will occur faster. Meet with parent/s to review progress regularly.*
6. *Find ways to motivate and reward the child – facing fears is hard work (and they may not always show you how hard they are finding it)!*
7. *Be positive and praise the child – just having a go is an achievement!*
8. *Be prepared for setbacks, they always happen. Just try again the next day or the next week.*

Common concerns

If I praise a child who is anxious, won't it just draw more attention to them?

It is a question of *how* to give it rather than whether to give it. Negotiate with the child how they would like to receive praise or how they would like to be rewarded. It can be done very subtly, or you can praise them when you meet with them separately or with their parent/s. Similarly, they do not need to be rewarded in front of the whole class if this makes them feel uncomfortable; you can do this away from other pupils if need be.

I am no expert in children's anxiety, so should I really be doing this type of thing? Is this not more appropriate for a specially trained staff member?

We would certainly encourage you to work with other members of staff who have particular expertise in helping children with emotional difficulties. However, you are well equipped to help a child in your class: you are likely to know them very well and you will be able to create opportunities for them to face their fears. As long as you communicate regularly with the child and their parent/s, all agree a plan of action and

regularly review it together, you are very likely to be helping the child overcome their fears.

How I am supposed to find the time to do this?

The strategies described here have all been used by teachers and other school staff that we have worked with. It is true that some extra time and thought may be required to get the ball rolling, but often things can start to change quickly. We would hope that this work will prevent a greater input of time further down the line, should problems become more entrenched. However, there is no reason why you cannot enlist the help of a colleague, perhaps a teaching assistant, specially trained staff member or similar.

For more information:

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