

# Introduction to Anxiety

## For Children in Primary school setting:



# Aims and objectives

- Build on understanding of anxiety
- Consider physical aspects of anxiety
- Look at signs of anxiety in children
- Learn some helpful suggestions and strategies
- Know where and how to access support if needed

# What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a sense of apprehension and fear that goes beyond expected levels and can feel overwhelming. It is often marked by physiological signs such as sweating, tension, and increased pulse.



high belief that bad stuff will happen  
low belief that I will be able to handle it = ANXIETY

# Anxiety is an emotion....

Emotions are experienced when our brains try to make sense of what is going on around us and move us into action.

Feeling anxious at times is **normal** (especially when we experience something new).

We might feel anxious because we care and want to do well or when we have to do something new, different or challenging.

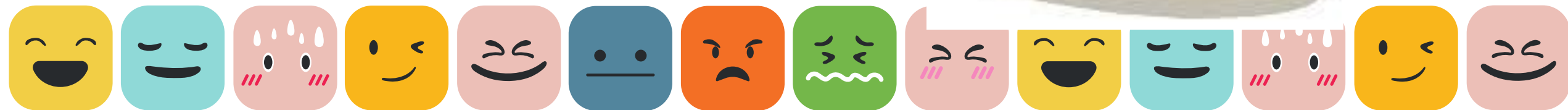
Learning to accept that we can feel anxious from time to time is key to learning to manage it and understand it can be a way that we grow.



# Anxiety becomes a problem when...

...it stops your child from enjoying normal life, when it affects their school, work, family relationships, friendships and social activities.

This is when we need to support a child to regain control.



# Why do we experience anxiety ?

Anxiety is a defence mechanism designed to keep us safe.

When we perceive danger our internal worry alarm system in the brain triggers our **Fight or Flight** response

Sometimes, the system gets confused and mistakes perceived danger for real danger.

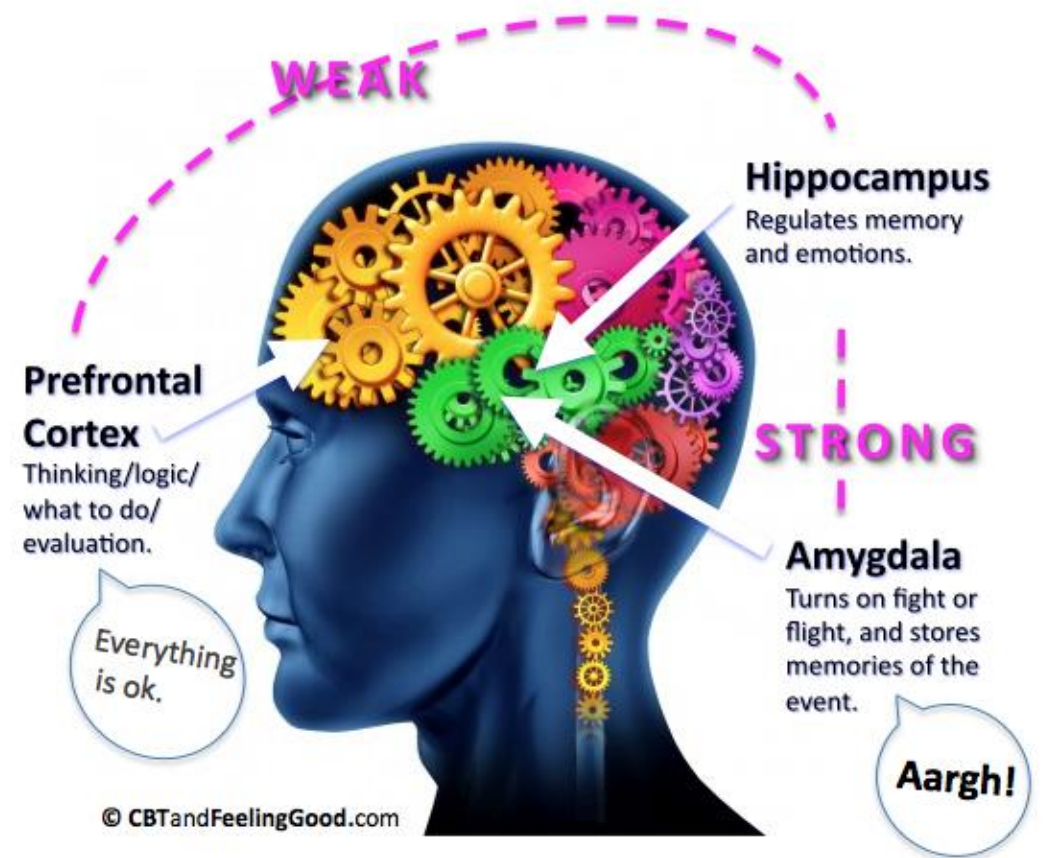


<https://cbt4panic.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/The-anxiety-cure-cbt4panic-fight-flight-response.png>

# How Anxiety Works:

Your brain is made up of two main parts:

- **Thinking brain** (logical, rational, memory)
- **Feeling brain** (emotions)
- When the worry alarm is triggered, the Feeling Brain hijacks the system and takes over, making it difficult to think clearly.
- It makes you act instinctively without stopping to think



# How does anxiety present?

**Children are often not able to verbalise that they feel anxious, but will highlight and might get investigated for physical symptoms**

## **Common physical symptoms:**

Upset tummy/stomach pains

Headaches

Trembling

Shaking

Perspiring

Shortness of breath

Dizziness



Chest pain

Flushing

Feeling sick

Wanting to go to the toilet a lot

Vomiting/diarrhoea

Stiff muscles/tension

Reported sleep problems



# Additional signs might be seen in the younger child

## Could include...

- Avoidance, crying, clingy,
- school refusal
- Easily upset, sensitive
- Change in behaviour
- Resistant to change
- Meltdowns, anger
- Expecting the worst
- May affect sleep



# Possible triggers or stress factors:

- . **Changes in routine-** changes to school routine, how to get to school, attending a new childminder/after school club.
- . **Significant events-** births, deaths, moving house
- . **Changes in relationships-** parental separation, new sibling
- . **Even if changes are positive or exciting, the change may feel uncomfortable and precipitate an anxious response in the child**
- . **Child attachment to parents and significant others-** behaviours to seek parents/caregivers care or attention



# Why do some children develop anxiety?

## **Behavioural factors; coping or avoidant behaviours**

The child's anxious behaviours may have been developed by the child to cope with the feelings of uncertainty associated with certain people, environments, situations or experiences, such as attending school. For the younger child anxiety can become a mode of expression.

## **? Family/Genetic influence (NB Tentative evidence here!)**

History of panic disorder/anxiety/depression in parents may possibly be linked to increased chance of anxiety disorders in children (role modelling can also play a part)

## **Neurodiversity**

Intolerance of uncertainty – misunderstanding others intentions (Deliberate/accidental)  
Executive function- the ability to manage some behaviours and traits, Sensory sensitivity

# What is a normal developmental fear in primary aged children?

- **Fear of the dark.**
- **Fear of danger.**
- **Tests.**
- **Peer rejection.**
- **Insects.**
- **Animals.**
- **Ghosts.**



- .Bad people.
- .Anticipating something bad will happen –
- .Parental separation etc.
- .Being home alone.
- .Sickness.
- .Dying.
- .School failure.
- .Peer rejection.
- .What others think of them.

The **Red** being the younger development years, and **Black** as they progress through Primary School.

## Other general worries in this age group

- **Separating Fantasy and Reality**- nightmares/dreams seem real
- **Managing Rules**- ‘will I get told off if an adults thinks I’m messy?’
- **Fearing the Unknown** -new teacher, class trip
- **Experiencing School-Related Fears**- speaking aloud, not finishing work
- **Focus on Cooperation**- more aware of others and their opinion, fragile egos get easily offended by playful taunts
- **Fears of ‘individuality’** –fear of wanting to fit in and whilst being unique
- **Fear of Change**-changes with friends/family can feel like a loss

**Okay...but what can we do to help ?**



# Things to avoid.....

**Avoid dismissing a child's emotions:** saying 'don't be scared' can lead the child to think they are wrong and bad for feeling that way

**Avoid lying to avoid an emotional reaction:** 'it won't hurt' when it will may lead to a sense of distrust and increase the emotional response



**Avoid shaming a child for their emotions:** teasing a child may lead to a sense of shame and undermines confidence...humour can be a useful distraction but not if it minimises the child's feelings.

**Avoid ignoring a child's emotions:** this may tell the child that their emotions are not important and limit opportunities to learn new ways of managing emotions

**It is important to acknowledge and demonstrate understanding before moving on.**

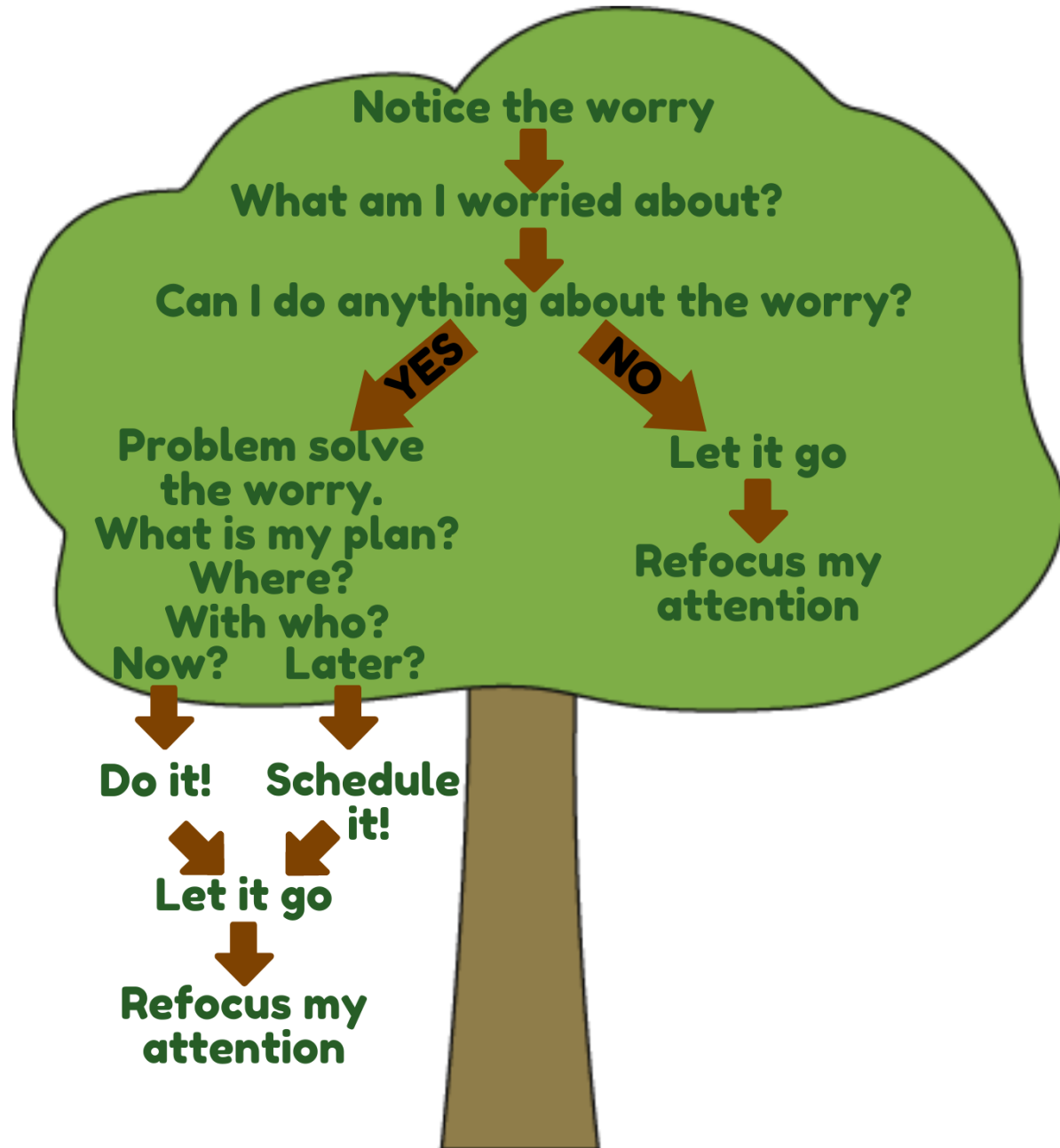
# Emotional regulation...the basics

- **A good nights sleep-** have a bed time routine and set bed time, avoid screens 1 hour before bed and promote quiet calm activities. Try not to talk about worries at bed time unless you have to.
- **Healthy and regular meals-** maintain blood sugars, avoid caffeine and too much sugar.
- **Be active, have lots of fun, socialise with friends but also set time to relax** (try not to overschedule your child.)
- **Be available to talk through problems and worries,** -remember to praise your child for effort, not just results. Worry/Thinking Time (not at bedtime can help)
- **Offer your child stability and clear behaviour boundaries,**-they will feel secure.
- **Have good communication with your school/parents.**
- **Your wellbeing is vital, get some support for yourself.**





# Support your child to strategize: The Worry Tree



# Worry/Thinking Time:



- **Allow 15 minutes per day to talk** about worries. This is time together so really make the most of talking and listening about whatever worries. **There should be no interruptions**, no TV, no telephone, no sister, or brother wanting to play or have help with their homework.
- Worry Time is the time to say whatever the child wants to say about their worries, during this time mum/ dad/ guardian should listen and try and help.

## **There is one important rule about Worry Time:**

**At all other times** when your child feels that their head is full of worries, they must write them all down and pop them into a WORRY BOX, A BOOK, - ready for discussion later.

# Get the child to question their anxiety thoughts



- Questions to ask my thoughts and worries
- What am I worrying about? Have I coped with this before?
- What is the proof that this thought is true or will happen? What is the evidence that this thought is not true or will not happen?
- What would I tell a friend if he/she had the same thought?
- What would a friend say about my thought?
- Am I 100% sure that this thought will happen?
- **Is this a feeling or a fact?**

# Anxious Behaviours- graded exposure work

Make a plan with the child to approach whatever makes them feel anxious gradually:

1. Break the worry down into manageable chunks – write a list of what makes them anxious
2. Create a hierarchy or 'ladder' of their anxious situations and fears, by rating how anxious they would feel (0-10) and place them in order- 10 being worst
3. Start with no 1 and practice & rehearse (repeatedly!) until the child feels less and less anxious....
  - ❖ Encourage the young person to think “*what did I think would happen?*” e.g. the anxious thought will come true, then consider “*what actually did happen?*” e.g. I coped with my worry/fear....**then move onto step 2 when ready**...this process can take a while and you go at the child's pace, **if you need to take a step back and redo the previous step until ready again**

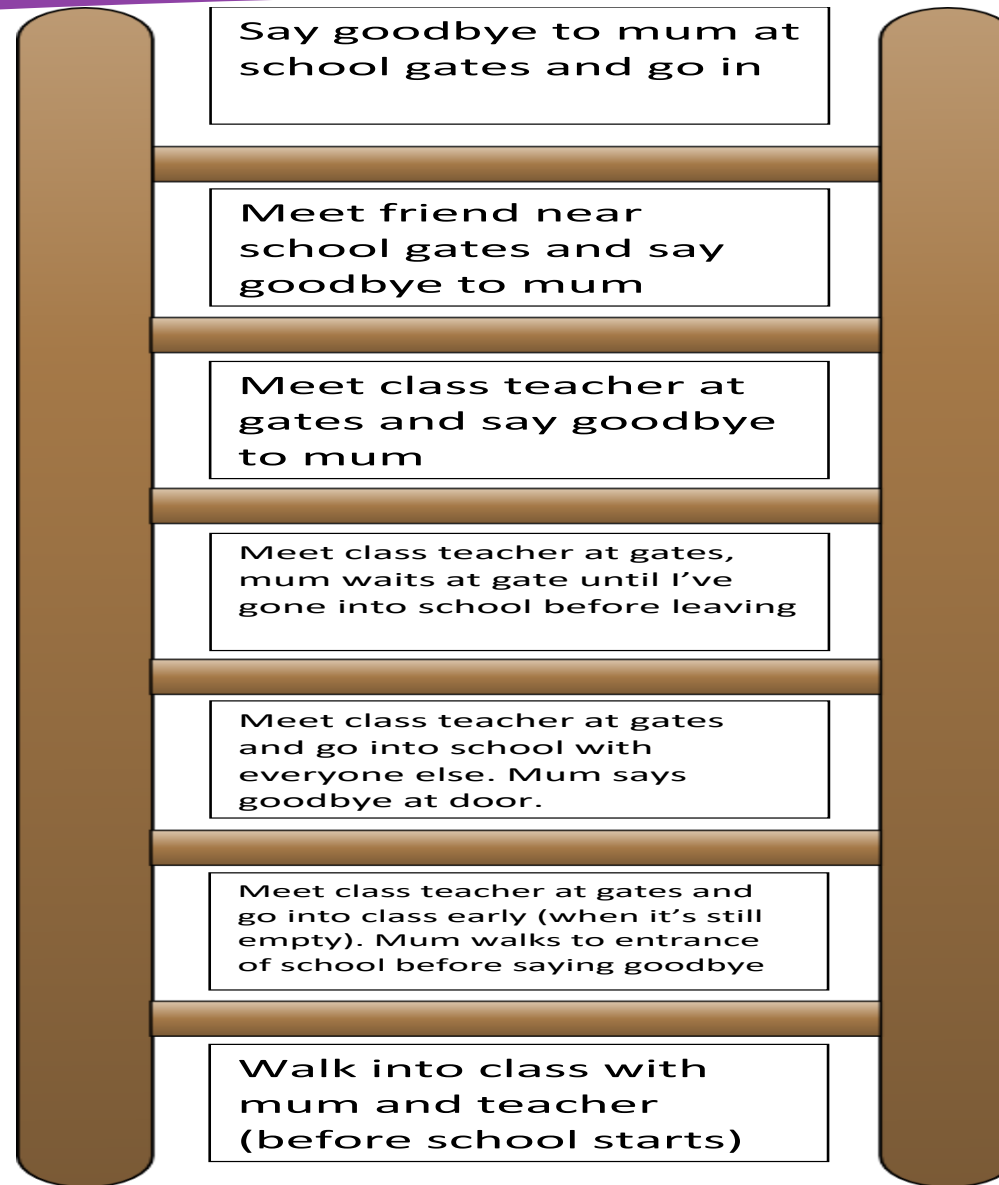
4. Reinforce the learning with praise/ rewards.



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**Step 1.  
Break the  
worry down  
into smaller  
manageable  
steps**



**GOAL: To go into school by myself**

# Make a checklist

- What do trained pilots do when they face an emergency? They refer to a checklist. Even with years of experience a pilot will refer to a checklist because when you are faced with danger you cannot think straight.
- When we feel anxious, we can get overwhelmed and not be able to think clearly.
- Drawing up a checklist of things that you know help you to calm down can be really useful.
- You can try out new techniques and evaluate how helpful they are for reference.

<p>Take a Time- out</p> 	<p>Color or draw</p> 
<p>Count to</p> <p>10</p>	<p>Take a deep breath</p> 
<p>Write in journal</p> 	<p>Listen to music</p> 

# Other calming strategies

Reducing worry feeling techniques: -

'Breathe in for 7 ...out for 11'.

'5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, 1 slow breath in and out'.

'Square breathing'

'Find items A, B, C etc'

**Mindfulness activities:** Breathing in as though to smell of the flower, blowing out to blow out a candle, taking a walk-in nature and noticing the present moment

Think what works for you when you are stressed/anxious?

# Suggestions to help challenge worries

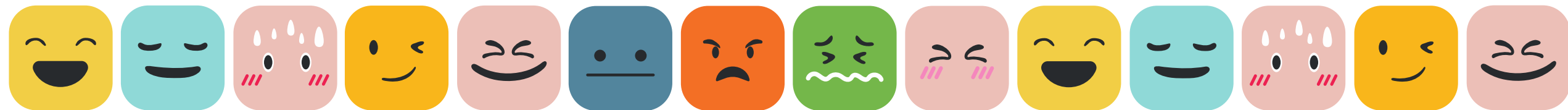
**THOUGHT DIARY** – write down worries and fears and contain to a book you can just shut and close off your worries and fears

**CHALLENGE WORRIES** Make a list of all the things that worry you. Write positive challenging statements next to your worry thoughts – “What would you tell your best friend to do”; is it a ‘fact or a belief?’

**FINDING SOLUTIONS** using the worry tree

**TALK to someone** – a problem shared is a problem halved.

**Tell the Worry Monster that he cannot beat you!!**





# Other ways to help with Worries

Writing out/drawing out the worry

Anxious thoughts make us feel powerless, but talking back to anxious thoughts gives us control over the situation

- ❖ Talk back to the worry – telling the worry to **GO AWAY!** or “you are not helping me solve a problem right now”
- ❖ Use puppets/stories to create a character – super hero or self to challenge worries – make a script
- ❖ Thought stopping - saying **STOP!** This technique interrupts the anxious flow
- ❖ Put a big full stop on the end of the worry .....**FULL STOP!**

One positive from today was....help the young person identify a positive for the day.

# STOPP Technique

**STOPP**

**TAKE A BREATH**

**OBSERVE:** What am I thinking?  
What am I reacting to?  
What am I feeling in my body?

**PULL BACK:** Put in some perspective. See the bigger picture. Is this fact or opinion? How would someone else see this?

**PRACTISE WHAT WORKS:** What's the best thing to do for me, for others, for this situation?



# Building A Coping Kit/Toolbox

- . Have a list of strategies to use in a moment of anxiety
- . Have a list/box which includes a checklist covering different, useful strategies
  - ❖ Inside could include a stress ball, a glitter ball, a calming picture, age-appropriate instructions for deep breathing, colouring kit, etc.
  - ❖ Home could have a duplicate box.
- . The child could try to use this first before involving an adult to encourage age-appropriate independence

# Classroom interventions for Anxiety Suggestions:

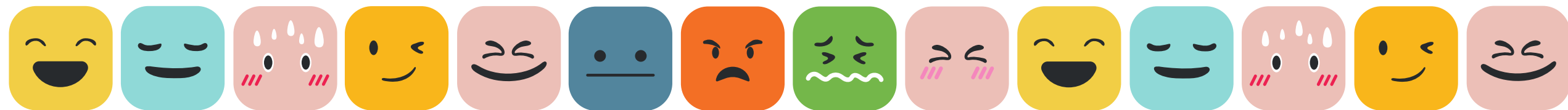
- Create a 'safe' place and identify a trusted person for the child to go when symptoms are high
- Watch for physical symptoms/expressions and have distraction activities to mind
- Allow a few minutes at the start of the day/session for transition and offer preparation for the day ahead – what to expect
- Talks with the student about what they find helpful
- Teach the class relaxation techniques
- Praise and reward effort
- Encourage positive self-talk

## Classroom strategies cont...

- Use small group activities if possible
- Offer role play opportunities to demonstrate appropriate behaviours
- Make students aware of daily routine and expectations (and maintain these as far as possible) and offer notice before any changes
- Help break down tasks and activities
- Incorporate where possible regular times of increased physical activity and times of calmness in the class
- Have resources; books, symbols (zones of regulation) and stress toys available

# Summary

- Anxiety is normal and a small amount is necessary for us all to function well.
- Feel the fear and face it anyway, encourage brave behaviour.
- Encourage helpful coping strategies : they WILL work, just keep practicing
- Have a 'calm plan' prepared. Acknowledge, contain and help problem solve
- Enjoy life; do not let worrying take enjoyment away!
- Know where to go to ask for help if you need it



# Surrey's emotional wellbeing and mental health service for children and young people



Please do look at our new website: <https://www.mindworks-surrey.org/> There is information for children, young people, families and carers about services, advice and resources, including how to ask for help in a crisis via the 24/7 Crisis Line.





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A NEW free 24/7 emotional wellbeing and mental Health

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Crisis line for children, young people and families in surrey

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**Call 0800 9154644**

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A professional will support, advise or signpost you. No referral needed





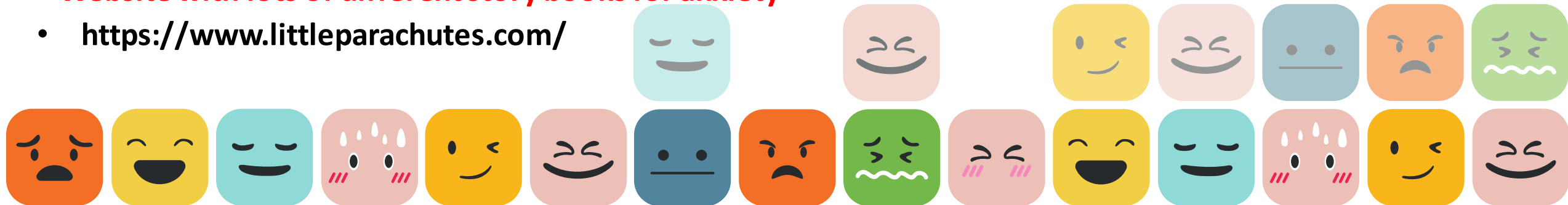
# Websites

- **Resources for anxiety**
- **[www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)** Young Minds is a UK national charity for children and parents of children with mental health problems. They offer information and advice to parents, young persons and professionals about mental health problems, how to cope with mental health problems, best practice, current campaigns, and information about child and adolescent mental health services.
- **[www.ocdaction.org.uk](http://www.ocdaction.org.uk)** The OCD Action Help and Information Line: 08453906232 (UK) The website gives advice and information about OCD and related conditions.
- <https://www.anxietycanada.com/> - free online resources
- [Ordinarily available provision \(schools\) | Surrey Local Offer](#) – Surrey Guidance on support schools should offer in relation to specific difficulties



## Website with lots of different story books for anxiety

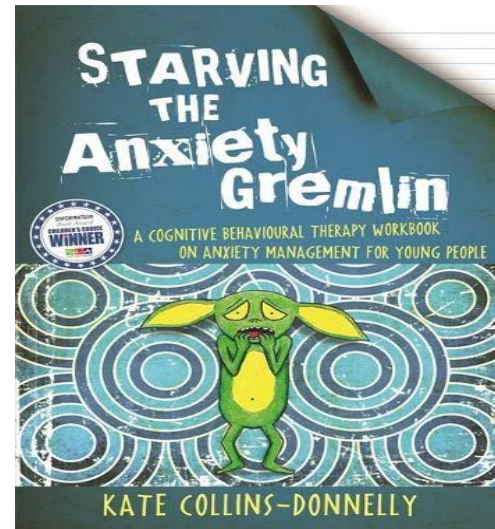
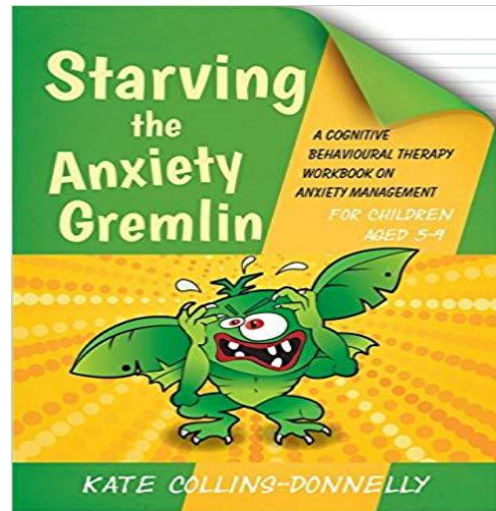
- <https://www.littleparachutes.com/>



# Book References

- **Helping Your anxious Child** by Rapee, Spence, Cobham and Wignall
- **What To do When You Worry Too Much – A Kids Guide To Overcoming Anxiety**, Dawn Huebner
- **What To Do When You Grumble Too Much – a Kids Guide to Overcoming Negativity**, Dawn Huebner
- **1,2,3 Magic by Thomas Phelan** book/DVD resource which can help remind everyone of useful age appropriate strategies when trying to encourage young people to make wise choices in their behaviour especially useful for parents of children aged 2 to 12; learning to manage troublesome behaviour, encourage good behaviour, and strengthen the parent-child relationship
- **Overcoming Your Child's Fears and Worries** a self-help guide to using CBT Techniques by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts
- **Overcoming Your Childs Shyness and Social Anxiety** a self-help guide to CBT techniques by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts
- **Relax Kids Aladdin's Magic Carpet** by Marneta Viegas
- **The Whole Brain Child** by Dr Daniel Siegel
- **The Brain** by David Eagleman
- **Frazzled** By Ruby Wax
- **The Chimp Paradox** by Steve Peters
- **The Huge bag of worries** by Virginia Ironside

# Book References

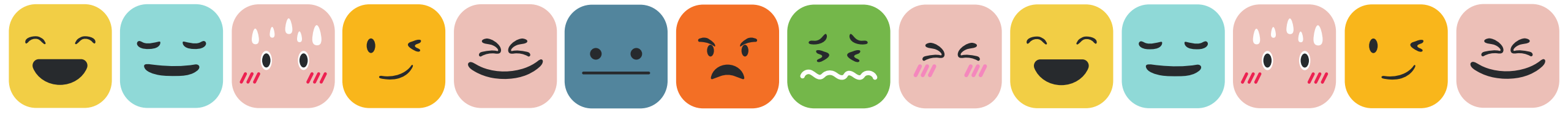


- A kid's Guide to overcoming OCD (What to do Guide for kids) by Dawn Huebner "This story guides children and their parents through the cognitive-behavioral techniques used to treat Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. Revealing OCD in a whole new light, this interactive self-help book turns kids into super-sleuths who can recognize OCD's tricks. Engaging examples, activities, and step-by-step instructions help children master the skills needed to break free from the sticky thoughts and urges of OCD, and live happier lives. This is a complete resource for educating, motivating, and empowering children to work toward change".

# Resources for Parents

- **Cruse Bereavement care** Helpline: **0800 808 1677** Website: <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>
- **Mind Matters Surrey IAPT** (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) is a talking therapy service for adults (18+) registered with a GP in Surrey. They provide quick and easy access to talking therapies, <https://www.mindmattersnhs.co.uk/>
- **Samaritan helpline** - Whatever you're going through, samaritans will face it with you. Open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Call 116 123 for free <https://www.samaritans.org/>
- <https://www.qwell.io/> Online emotional wellbeing and mental health support.

THANK YOU!!!





Surrey and Borders  
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The children and young people's emotional  
wellbeing and mental health service



Find out more at  
[mindworks-surrey.org](http://mindworks-surrey.org)

