



Kids & Anxiety

Handouts

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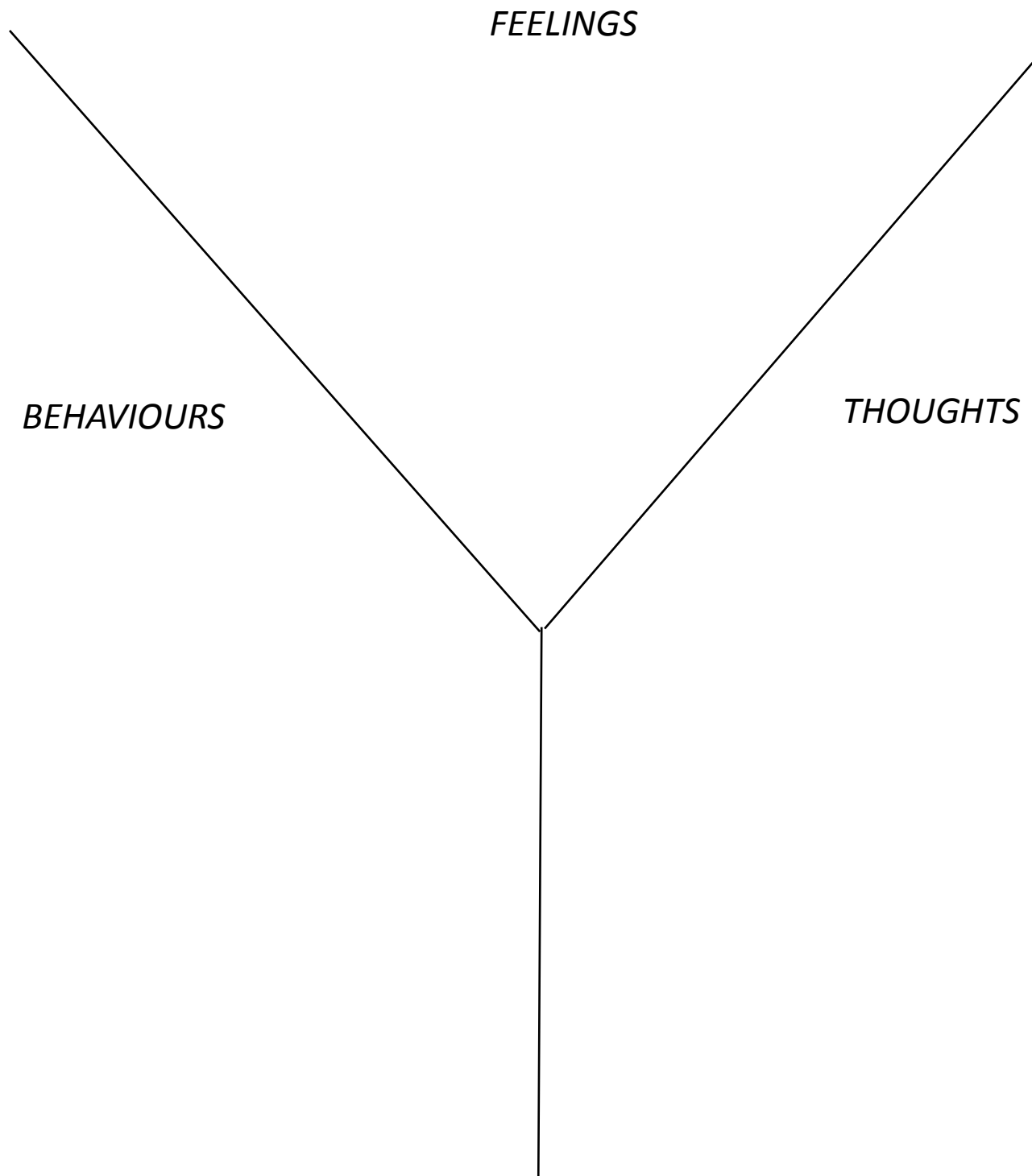
What is anxiety?

Anxiety is an anticipated fear or worry about something that might happen in the future. Anxiety can be a helpful way of processing our feelings when we are faced with something difficult and is a natural part of life. It can be a useful way of identifying potential problems, and work like an alarm system.

However, anxiety is different for everyone. Something that causes anxiety for one person may not cause it for another. While everyone feels anxious at some time, for some adults and children, anxiety can be frequent and overwhelming and prevent them from being able to function. In this case, the person lives with a constant feeling of unease and is easily distressed.

When anxiety gets in the way of living life... then it is a problem.

Activity:



What does anxiety look like in children?

Everyday anxiety is normal in children and unavoidable, some children are naturally more anxious than others. While they might feel anxious, we would expect them to be able to function, because the anxiety would not be overwhelming.

For example, toddlers might be afraid of the dark, a school aged child may be afraid of failing a test and a teenager might be anxious about fitting in with friends. These are all normal fears and we would expect children to be anxious about these things. Anxiety can also be triggered at times of stress – for example when a new baby arrives, when they start school or when there is parental conflict. It can also be triggered by a scary experience, such as being in a car accident, or because they see anxious behaviour in others.

Common types of anxiety in children are fear of being away from family members (separation anxiety- this is considered normal in children up to the age of 2 but may also occur in older children), phobias of doctors or needles, social phobia (severe shyness, including an inability to speak in public or talk to new people), post-traumatic stress (after a traumatic event) and school refusal.

What anxiety might look like in a child:

FEELINGS	THOUGHTS	BEHAVIOURS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lightheaded or faint• Upset stomach or nausea• Sweating• Sad• Rapid heartbeat• Butterflies in stomach• Numbness or tingling sensation• Fearful• Breathlessness• Hot/ cold flushes• Chest pain/ heart palpitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excessive fear• Worry• Catastrophizing• Obsessive thinking• Pessimism• Procrastination• Poor memory• Perfectionism• Negative thoughts of oneself	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Anger/ aggression• Tantrums/ crying• Restlessness, irritable• Acts shy• Excessive clinginess• Sleeping difficulties• Complaints of stomach ache, headache or fatigue• Asking “what if”, “why” questions• Seeking reassurance• Withdrawal

Strategies to assist your child with anxiety:

1. Home Environment

- Provide a consistent, safe and secure home life
- Spend calm and relaxed time with your child
- Have good routines where possible (i.e. bed time, mornings)
- Set limits and consequences
- Reward effort rather than success
- Exercise and fresh air
- Have fun and be silly!



2. Reduce Exposure to Stress

- Give your child opportunities to make choices and have more control over situations they may find stressful
- Be selective in the types of TV programs, i.e. the news & TV/DVD ratings
- Be aware of gaming & the internet
- Involve your child in activities where they feel successful

3. Positive Role Modelling

- Act confident
- Show vulnerability and model the healthy ways we can manage our own emotions
- Encourage brave behaviours gently
- Model & teach relaxation techniques

4. Other Strategies

Maggie Dent advises:

- Be comfortable with silence
- Use quiet tonality when speaking
- Use soothing music in home especially nature sounds
- Read to children to calm them
- Use massage & safe touch
- Connect children to nature and spend time outside
- Create family time without distractions
- Sensory activities
- Hug and reassure often
- Improve sleep patterns and opportunities

Additional Strategies

- Make time to be with your child one-on-one
- Encourage your child to talk about what they are worried about
- Prepare them for events they find stressful (talk about the events and what might cause them to feel anxious, discuss strategies that may be useful)
- Use warnings before transitions (e.g. "in 5 minutes we will need to start packing the toys away")
- Remind them of what they are good at
- Step ladder approach

Emotional Intelligence:

“The ability to recognize, understand and manage our own emotions; and influence the emotions of others” (Quote Daniel Goleman)



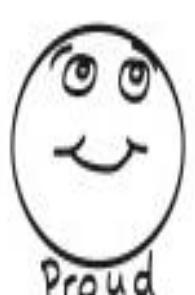
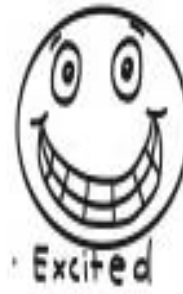
We can help our children to become more emotionally intelligent by teaching them to:

1. **Identifying the emotion** (“I can see you are feeling angry”)
2. **Tracking the emotion** (where are they on the ‘angry’ scale- a little bit angry or meltdown angry!)
3. **Manage the emotion** (age appropriately. Remember children can’t do this alone- we need to emotion coach them)

To help us do this we need a really good vocabulary of age appropriate feeling words...

Activity:

Feeling Faces



Activity:

At Home Scenarios

1. Child: Why do Mum & Dad always make me pick my things up, Billy never has to...Mum and Dad love him more.

Feelings: _____

Parent Might Say: _____

2. Child: Everyone is being so noisy, don't they know I'm trying to practice for my spelling test. I am going to fail my spelling test because no one cares and they are all selfish.

Feelings: _____

Parent Might Say: _____

3. Child: I am not going to sport today, I am rubbish at sport, I miss the ball and they all laugh at me.

Feelings: _____

Parent Might Say: _____

4. Child: At school today my friends' didn't want me to sit next to them at lunch, they don't want me to be their friend anymore.

Feelings: _____

Parent Might Say: _____

Develop Helpful Self Talk

- Helpful/ Unhelpful thoughts or Green or Red thoughts
- Connect & Redirect- help the child identify the feeling and try to help them think logically by asking:
 - What is making you feel scared?
 - What are you worried will happen?
 - What bad things do you expect to happen in this situation?



Other ways to connect

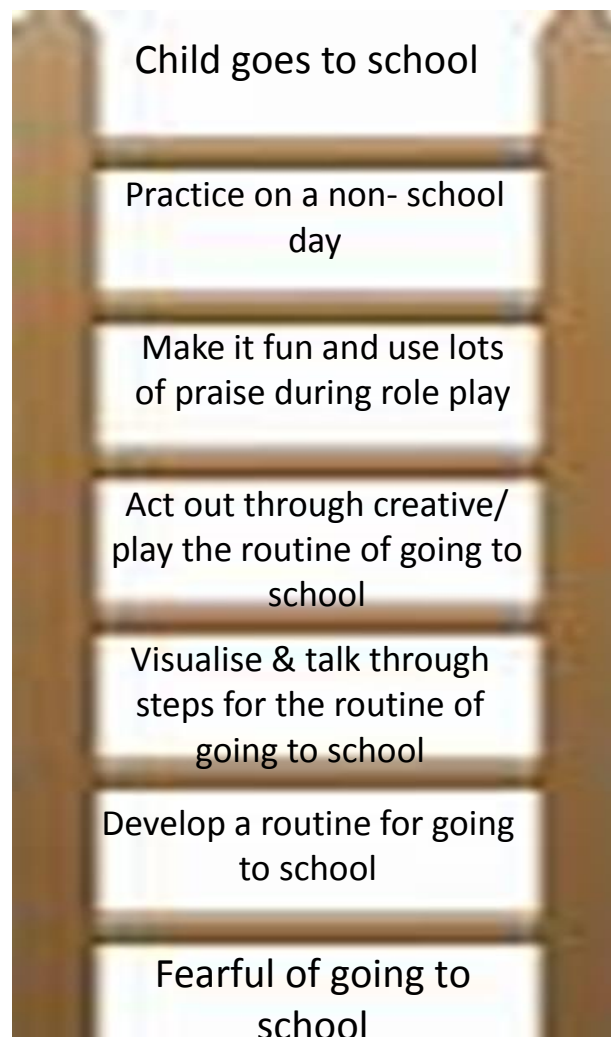
- Role play
- Use their favourite toys
- Puppet show!
- Drawings, play dough, writing
- Talking with another trusted adult/ sibling

Problem Solving

1. Identify the problem
2. Why is it a problem?
3. Brainstorm possible solutions – listen non-judgmentally
4. Evaluate the possible solutions
5. Support child to put into action
6. Evaluate the outcome

Step Ladder Approach

The stepladder approach is a step-by-step way of helping with anxiety in children. It's based on the principle of 'graded exposure'. This means starting off small, tackling the little things before you face the really scary things, be sure not to skip a step or move too fast!

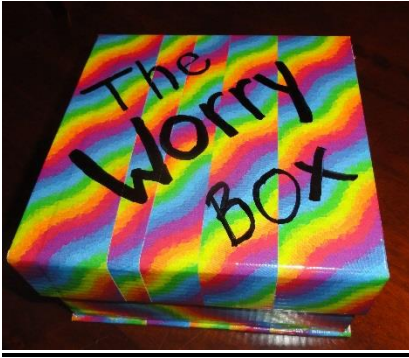


Activity: Step Ladder Approach

Think about something your child gets anxious about and write down your own step ladder approach:



Other Practical Strategies to Try



- Reading a favourite book
- Doing a puzzle or other distracting activity
- Having a hug.
- Playing with a pet
- Playing with a favourite toy
- Having a warm drink
- Having a warm bath
- Going for a walk
- Listening to music, drawing....
- Cuddling a teddy
- Thinking of something to look forward to

Relaxation & Other Techniques:

1. Grounding:

Grounding is a technique that helps keep someone in the present. They help reorient a person to the here-and-now and in reality. Grounding skills can be helpful in managing overwhelming feelings or intense anxiety.

Examples

- Listen to soothing music
- Hold a cool cloth against your face
- Name 5 things you can see in the room
- Keep your eyes open, look around the room, notice your surroundings, notice details
- Put your feet firmly on the ground and breathe steadily from your core

2. Mindfulness:

Similar to Grounding, Mindfulness refers to the idea of focusing on the present moment, however it involves and aims to develop skills of awareness of the world around you and of your behavioural patterns and habits.

Examples

- *Body scan*- Lie on the floor, making sure you are warm and comfortable. Firstly checking in with your body just as it is right now noticing the sensations that are present, feeling the contact the body is making with the floor. Then starting to scan the body, sweeping your awareness through different parts of the body, without judging what you are aware

of but as best you can bringing attention to your experience moment to moment. Take nice deep breaths as you conduct your body scan.

- Mindfulness apps for children: Smiling Mind, Breathing Bubbles, Stop Breathe & Think Kids

3. Deep Breathing:

Deep breathing is one of the best ways to lower stress in the body. This is because when you breathe deeply, it sends a message to your brain to calm down. The brain then sends this message to your body. Breathing exercises are a good way to relax, reduce tension, and relieve stress.

Examples

- Abdominal Breathing Technique- lie or sit comfortably and place one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. Breathe in slowly through your nose so that your stomach moves out against your hand. This technique tries to teach us to breathe with our belly rather than our chest and can work wonders!

When do I need to ask for help?

All children feel anxious at times and often anxiety can be managed with the support of parents and teachers. However if a child feels anxious very frequently and the anxiety prevents them or other family members from being able to do the normal things they would do, then they may need additional support. It is also vital to seek support if there is talk of self-harm or harm to others.

Available Supports:

- GP/ doctors
- School support/ school chaplain
- Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Headspace
- Beyond Blue
- Kids Help Line
- Worry Wise Kids

Helpful Resources

- But What If? A book about feeling worries- by Sue Graves
- David and the Worry Beast—Helping Children Cope with Anxiety- by Anne Marie Guanci
- Don't Worry, Hugless Douglas- by David Melling.
- Samuel Scaredosaurus- by Brian Moses and Mike Gordon
- Sophie Shyosaurus- by Brian Moses and Mike Gordon
- Understanding Myself. A kid's guide to intense emotions and strong feelings- by Mary C. Lamia, Phd.
- What to Do When you WORRY too Much. A Kid's guide to overcoming anxiety- by Dawn Huebner, Phd.
- Your Emotions—I feel Angry.- Illustrated by Mike Gordon
- The Worry Tree- by Marianne Musgrove
- My Daddy's going away- by Christopher MacGregor
- Actually, I Can- by Nicky Johnston

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