

Parent Worries and Anxiety Workshop

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Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)



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Understanding and Supporting Worries

Aim of the session:

- To understand the worries and emotions your child is experiencing.
- Physiology of worry



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Understanding and Supporting Worries

Content of the session:

- Emotional health vs Mental Health
- Medicalised language
- What worries are experienced at each developmental stage
- What is emotional regulation.
- Physical symptoms of worries and how to recognise them.
- Anxiety cycle and negative thinking patterns/What if? Land
- Strategies to help with worries

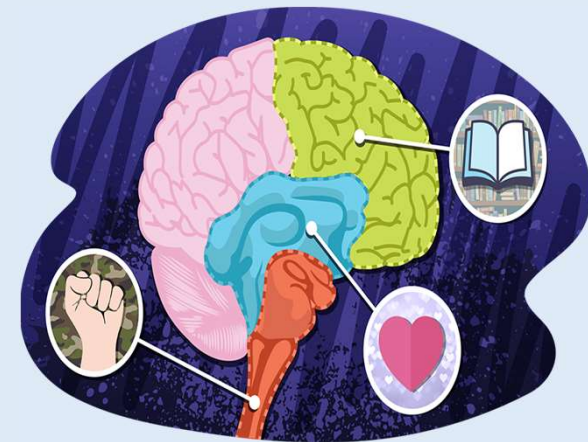


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Why do we Worry?

- Genetics
- Temperament and attachment
- Family factors and environment
- Traumatic life events and stressors
- Evolutionary reasons
- Worrying keeps us safe.



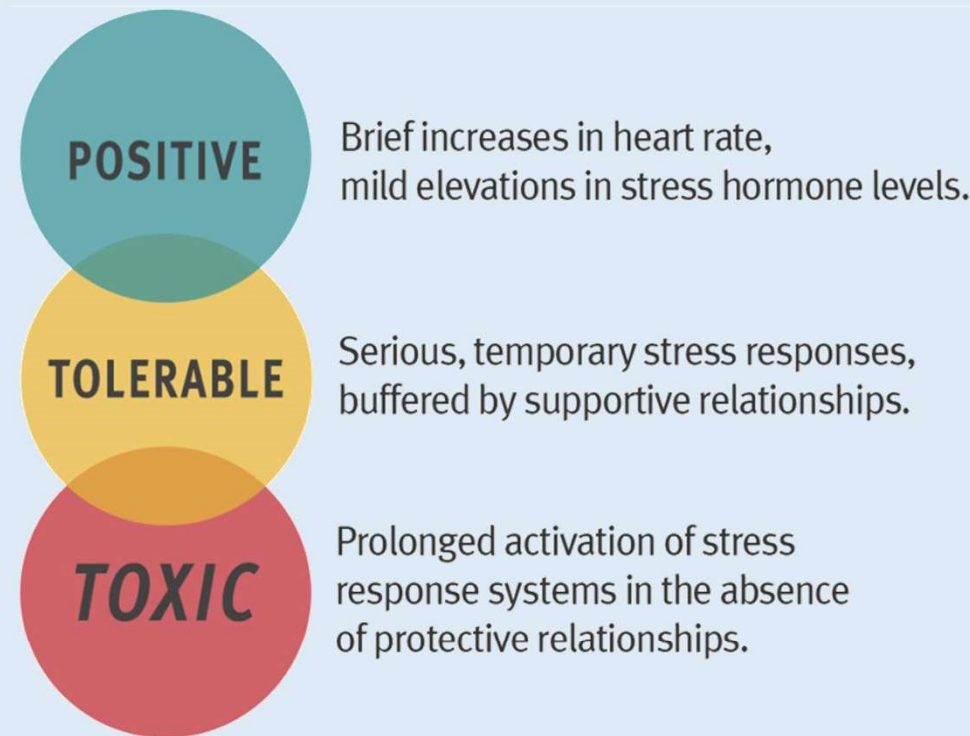
[Here is what happens in your brain when you're anxious | Kids Helpline](#)



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Stress and worry is a normal part of childhood



“Human beings become a reflection of the world in which they develop” (Perry, B 2004)

[Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University](#)



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Effects on Family Life

Worry is difficult for your child but can also affect family life.

- Limits everyday activities
- Strain family relationships
- Impact on leisure activities
- Increase worry and mental or emotional health in other family members
- Impacts on parents work life balance

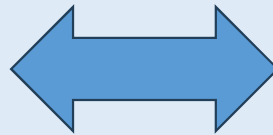
[The burden of anxiety disorders on the family - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)



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Emotional health vs Mental health



"The terms “mental health” and “emotional health” aren’t interchangeable. Whilst they are connected, they have very different meanings”. (Lane 2020)



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Understanding Emotional health

"Children's development and emotional health are affected by various factors, including the environments they are raised in, the relationships they build and the experiences they have."

(NSPCC Learning 2023)



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The language we use around Mental Health...

"Used in a constructive manner, language can have a substantial impact on people's lives.

In the context of mental illness, mental health, and wellbeing, negative words can be experienced as condescending, isolating, and stigmatising, whereas positive words can convey dignity, empathy, and hope". (Richards 2018)



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Challenging the medicalisation of well-being needs

I'm a bit OCD about it.

I'm depressed.

I feel psychotic

I'm Bi-Polar

I have anger issues.

I'm stressed out

I'm an insomniac.

My anxiety is playing up.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk>



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Challenging the medicalisation of well-being needs

How we feel could be better explained..

I'm a bit overwhelmed by some big emotions.

I'm feeling a bit sad.

I have lots of worries.

I'm not sure how I feel today.

I have strong feelings about this.

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk>



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Understanding and Supporting Worries

At primary school age, it is likely that a child's thoughts and emotions relating to worries are much better explained by:

- Reasonable and expected responses to the environment or event.
- Their developmental stage.
- Ability to regulate emotions.
- In certain cases, a neurodevelopmental disorder e.g., ASD/ADHD.



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Worries children may experience at each developmental stage

Age	Typical Fears
9 months- 3 years	Sudden movements or loud noises, toilets and large objects, strangers and separation from parents/caregivers
3-6 years	Animals, dark and Monsters/ghosts, sleeping or staying alone
6-12 years	Thunder, lightening, death, Tests/ Exams, Performance anxiety
12-18 years	Social anxiety, personal appearance, and Relationships, fear of failure and future
Adulthood	Financial affairs, Death or illness

(Mcnamara 2019)



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Emotional Regulation

"Emotion regulation refers to the processes by which individuals manage and modulate their emotional experiences".



(Mcleod 2023)



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Emotional Regulation

- Children will develop the ability to emotionally regulate at different stages. This ability continues developing well into adulthood.
- A child cannot usually emotionally regulate to any great effect until **at least** the age of 8.
- Without this ability being fully developed, children often display greater conflict, higher levels of stress and have difficulty in expressing how they feel.

We need to model and support emotional regulation.



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Common Worries

What are your child's top 3 worries?

Separation from
parent/s

Harm coming to loved ones

Death

School

Feeling unsafe

Friendships

Health

Sleep/own bed

Any change



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N.B. If your child's worries aren't noted here, it does not mean they are a cause for concern.

Common Worries

Avoidance

Delaying
Missing deadlines
Running away
Wanting to stay home

How does your child behave when worried?

Reassurance seeking

“attention seeking” ; “Needy” ; “clingy”
Connection seeking
People pleasing

Disrupted sleep

Getting to sleep
Waking up in the night
Nightmares/stressful dreams
Bedwetting

Sense of self

Shame/guilt
Overly critical
Not good enough
Perfectionism
Masking (people pleasing)
Pessimism

Hypervigilance

Spotting small details
Focusing on what could go wrong
Easily startled
Dilated pupils / staring
Misunderstanding neutral comments / happenings as negatives
Quick to defend themselves in action and words
Overstimulated / agitation
Oversensitive
Forgetfulness

Physical Symptoms Including illness



Emotions

Crying
Quick to anger
Flip quickly

Eating

Restrictive
Comfort
Binge

Withdrawn

Avoidant
Zone-out / shutting down / freezing
Trouble thinking clearly/taking on new information
Unsure of new people
Unsure of new places/change
Forgetfulness

Anger

Verbal: shouting, screaming, swearing
Nonverbal: Hitting, biting, scratching, spitting



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N.B. If your child's behaviours aren't noted here, it does not mean they are a cause for concern.

Fight Flight & Freeze

Thinking Brain

Do I need to worry?
How can I solve my worry?



Emotional Brain

Fight
Flight
Freeze

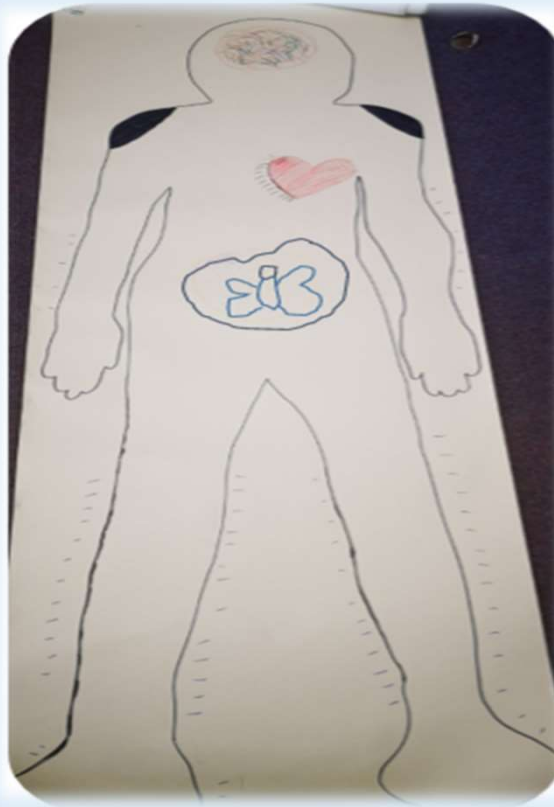


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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfSbWc3O_5M

Education is Empowering



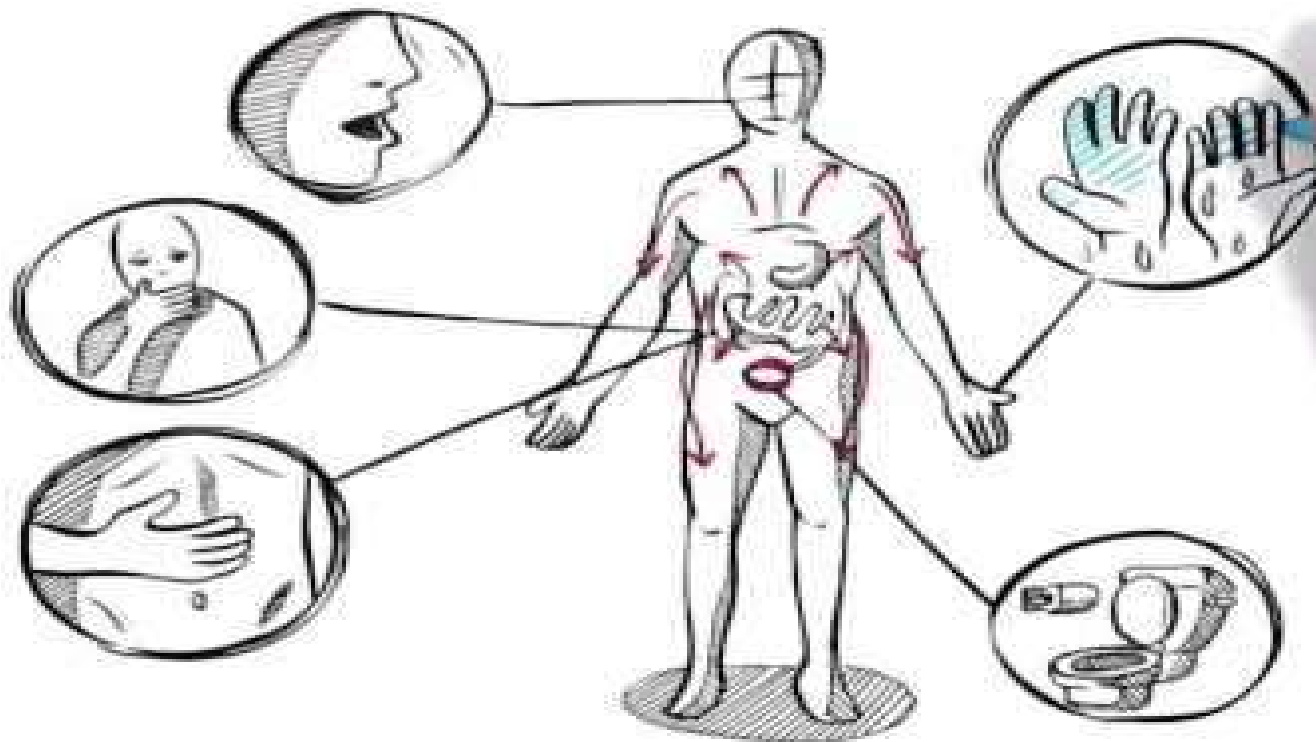
[Preventing anxiety-based school refusal: a guide to working with children and families – Mary Meredith](#)



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Fight Flight & Freeze



Education is Empowering



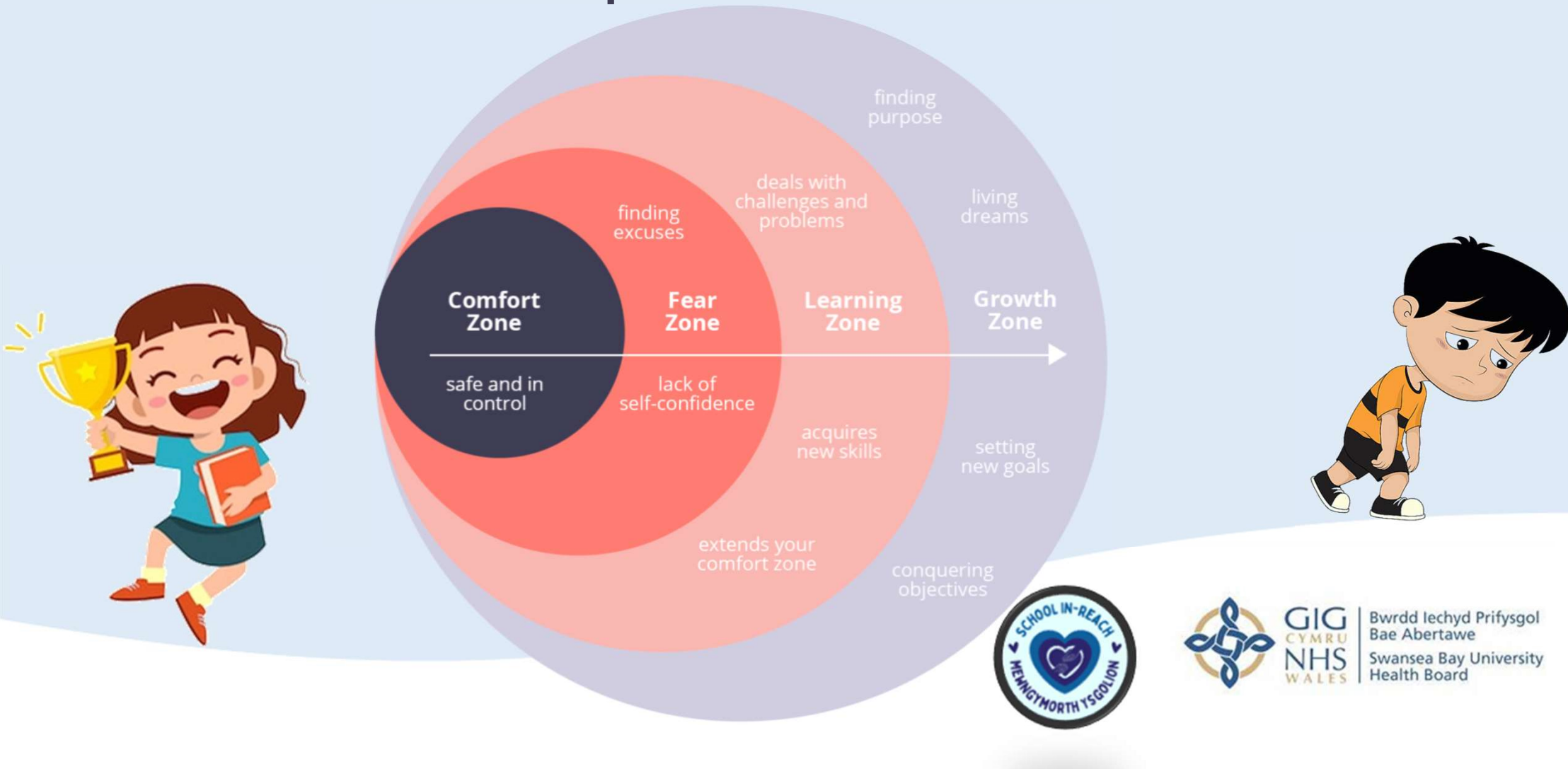
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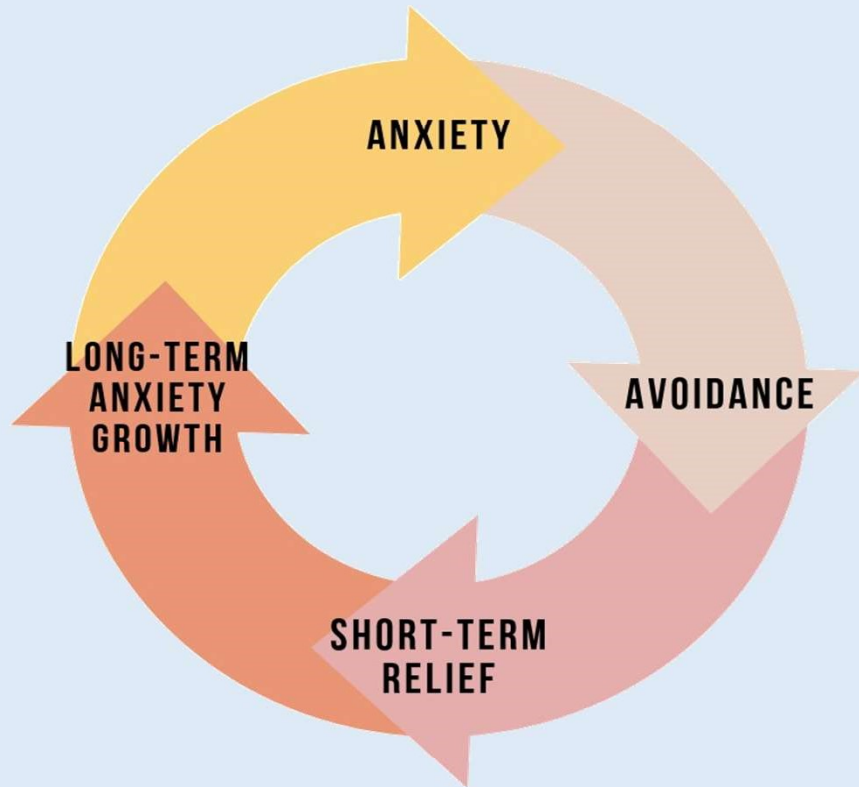
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We have to set aside our own worries and allow children to explore, take risks and experience both success and failure.



The Anxiety Cycle



The cycle of anxiety is when an event or situation happens and the person feels a lack of control or fear and avoids coping in order to escape intense emotions,” (Gulotta, J 2023)

[Anxiety: Understanding the Vicious Cycle — The Counseling Collective \(thecounselingcollectivefw.com\)](https://thecounselingcollectivefw.com)



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So, when do we worry about our worrier?

- Prolonged impact on child's daily functioning
- Consistently tried strategies
- Other people noticing a change in your child/ sudden changes
- Stepped approach; trying strategies at home/ in school and seeking further support if necessary



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The Anxiety Cycle

Worry gets bigger!

Child is worried about going to crowded places.

Providing a way to relieve the anxiety here has reinforced it and allowed it to embed.

Child learns that avoiding crowded places and being in control makes them calm.

Child is allowed to avoid crowded places and chose where to go.

Child feels relief from worries and calms down.



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Your turn!

When have you allowed your child to avoid their worry?

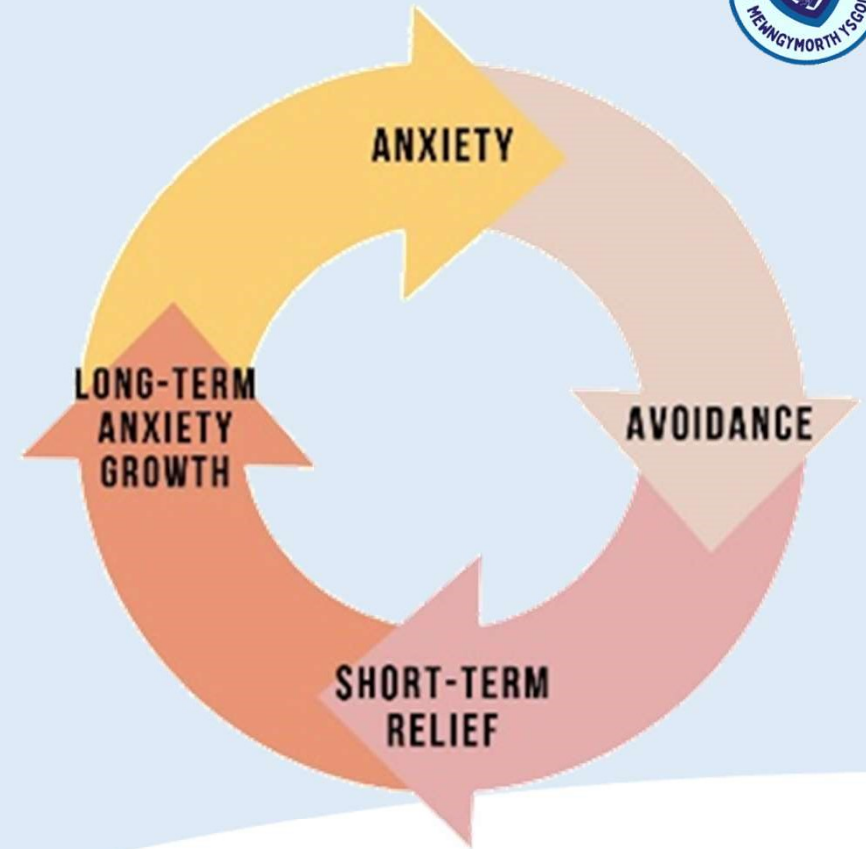
Did avoiding the worry lead to short-term relief?

Did avoiding the worry re-inforce avoidance?

Did avoiding the worry sustain the long-term worry?

Think about yourself, do you avoid a potentially worrying situation?

We all do, sometimes!



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Reassurance Seeking

Reassurance seeking is one of the more common compulsions [seen in anxious patients]... the constant need to hear others' opinions can feel disorienting.

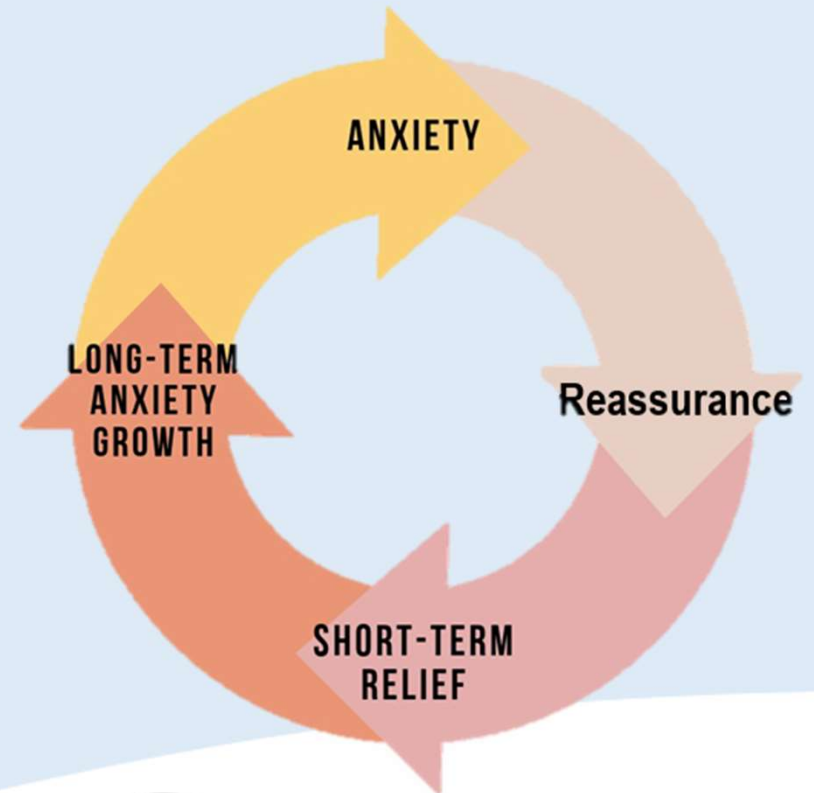
"...I couldn't understand why I couldn't make a decision without getting someone else's reassurance. I needed someone else to tell me it was right," ... "It got very bad to the point where I needed someone there to make a decision."

Lifted from: <https://www.treatmyocd.com/blog/reassurance-seeking-ocd-anxiety-how-to-stop-cycle>

We look to fix the situation for them because we are empathic.

We do not want to be dismissive of our children's emotional needs however, reassurance seeking is reinforced if we are reassuring constantly.

If we are fixing a situation for the child, how does the child learn to "fix" for themselves?



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Breaking The Anxiety Cycle

Avoidance and reassurance feed worries.



1. **Recognise and label the emotion**
2. **Validate Without Agreeing**
3. **Reward with connection**

I can see that you're nervous for your test today, it is normal to be nervous for a test but you are going to your test. You won't be nervous once you finish the test, I will see you after school.

I know you really worry about me, that's okay, lots of children worry about their parents. I am picking you up after school and taking you to swimming lessons.

I can see that you don't like sleeping in your own bed, it is normal for children to be worried when sleeping in their own bed at first but you will get used to it. It's important that you stay in your own bed tonight, we can spend time together in the morning.



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Use 'WINE'

W wonder

I imagine

N notice

E empathy

- I wonder if you are worried about going into a new class in September.
- I imagine that it will be a change for you, and you will miss Mrs Jones.
- I noticed you were worried when we talked about your new teacher and class.
- I understand this will take time for you to feel comfortable.



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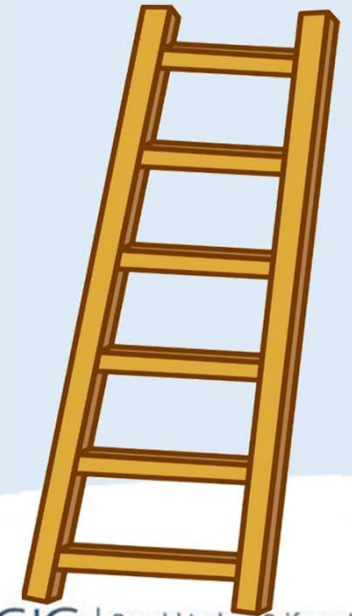
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Breaking The Anxiety Cycle

Gradual Exposure – Separation Anxiety:

You have been invited for a night out! But you know that little Bobby will not want you to go, he becomes upset each time you leave him. You tell him that you will be going out with friends this weekend and he can stay with his grandparents; Bobby says, “NO! YOU CAN’T GO!” and becomes upset. What do you do?

3. Parent(s) tell Bobby they are going out for a 20min walk but Bobby is going to the grandparents house. You set a visual timer.
2. Parent(s) tell Bobby they are going for a walk, grandparents look after Bobby in your house. No visual timer, you go for 40mins
1. Parent(s) tell bobby they are going 20-minute walk, grandparents are coming to your house to be with bobby. You set a visual timer and leave.



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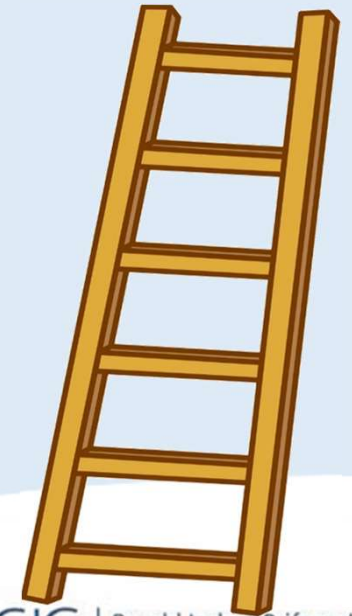
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Breaking The Anxiety Cycle

Gradual Exposure – Separation Anxiety:

5. Parent(s) tell Bobby that he is going to his grandparents. Bobby is taken to Grandparents. Grandparents change Bobby into PJs. Grandparents put Bobby to bed – you go for your night out!

4. Parent(s) tell Bobby that they are going for a walk, it is evening and dark outside. Bobby is taken to Grandparents, is not told a time and there is no visual timer. Grandparents change Bobby into PJs.



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Breaking The Anxiety Cycle

Celebrate success

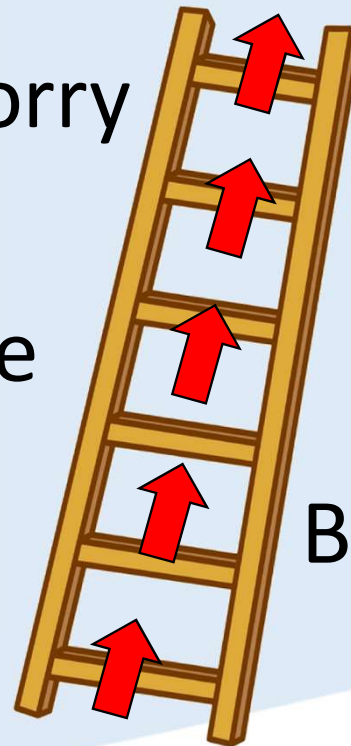
Reduce the worry

Reflect

Experience

Build up evidence

Start with small goals



Gradual Exposure



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Negative Thinking Patterns



If you wear glasses with a purple lens, everything you see becomes tainted with purple. This can make it hard to see things and colours as they really are. The same thing happens with worrying. You begin to see all situations in life through a '**worried lens**' which can prevent you from thinking positively.



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Negative Thinking Patterns



When a child adopts negative thinking patterns, they develop a **negative thinking bias**. They begin to think negatively about situations without giving themselves a chance to think positively about something.



Predicting

Thinking that you already know what is going to happen or what something will be like.



Catastrophising

Thinking the absolute worst.



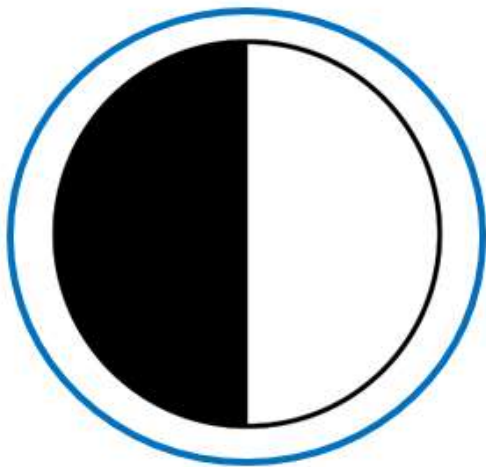
Blaming

Blaming other people or circumstances.

Negative Thinking Patterns



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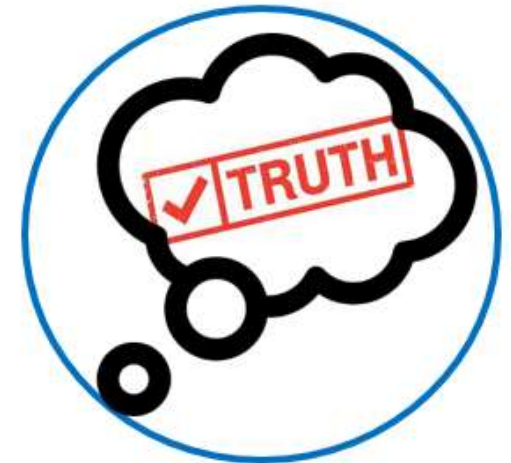
All or nothing

Seeing only one point of view.



Over Generalising

Thinking that something is always a certain way.



Mistaking

Thinking that thoughts are facts.



Negative Thinking Patterns



When a child adopts negative thinking patterns, they develop a **negative thinking bias**. They begin to think negatively about situations without giving themselves a chance to think positively about something.



Mind Reading

Believing that you know what someone thinks about you or a situation.



Spiralling

Allowing one negative thought to 'suck you in' and bring more negative thoughts.

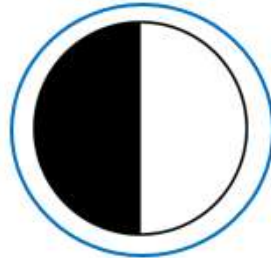
Negative Thinking Habits

When you thinking a certain way over-and-over again this can become a habit. This changes the way you see certain situations and can make you biased. It takes 21 days to break a habit, so try challenging some of these thinking habits.



Blaming

Blaming other people or circumstances.



All or nothing

Seeing only one point of view.



Catastrophising

Thinking the absolute worst.



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Thinking that thoughts are facts.



Predicting

Thinking that you already know what is going to happen or what something will be like.



Over Generalising

Thinking that something is always a certain way.



Allow your child to become familiar with these thinking habits.

Point out to them which thinking habit they are doing and help them to realise it is simply exacerbating their worry.

Sometimes, the simple realisation that they are doing this is enough to destabilise their thought.



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‘What If?’ Land



- Many children express worries using ‘what if?’ questions.
- This can exacerbate their worries as often there is no answers and find themselves with more questions.
- Balancing these questions works well to change their outlook.



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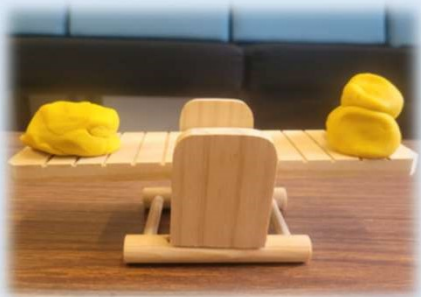
Balancing Thoughts See Saw



Negative thoughts weigh us down.



Sometimes it's useful to think of alternative thoughts, neutral or positive ones.



When we think of these, our negative thoughts get less.



Often our positive thoughts win. Practicing this is important to have a lasting impact!



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Challenging negative thoughts



[Challenging Negative Self-Talk – Family Service Regina | Healthy Families, Strong Communities](#)



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Modelling Feelings

- Acknowledge how you are feeling
- Name the feeling
- Name the worry
- Plan
- Do it
- Celebrate



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Managing Worries not Eliminating Them

Resilience is a skill that we all need in life.

It is likely that your child will face many challenges throughout their childhood and, of course, as an adult too.

Equipping children with the **tools needed** to face worries and how to **manage them**, rather than thinking they will never have worries again.

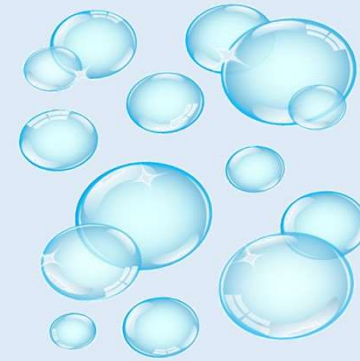
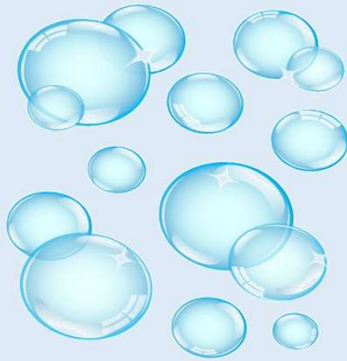


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Acceptance

Thoughts are like bubbles; they float around us and often distract us. Just like bubbles, thoughts swirl around inside our head but then float away. Thoughts are not facts, let them float away.



The first step is noticing the worry and acknowledging it
Is this thought helpful?
Do I need to think about this now?
Then move attention onto something else



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Breathing Strategies

Shallow, upper chest breathing is part of the stress response.

This type of breathing can exacerbate the symptoms of worries and add to a feeling of panic.

Controlling this will be a good step to taking control of the situation.

Breathing Strategies

A brilliant way to manage your anxiety symptoms is to use different **breathing strategies**. I know we breathe all the time so it might seem silly, but breathing in certain ways can bring down the feelings in your body and help you to **take control of your body**.



Volcano Breathing

Stand up nice and tall with your arms by your side. Take a deep breath in through your nose. As you do this, bring your arms up above your head and reach for the sky. Breathe out through your mouth and push your arms back down towards your body. Repeat 5 times or until you feel calm.



Cake and Candle Breathing

Bring both your hands up near your face with the palms facing you. Imagine that you have a delicious cake in your left hand and a candle in your right. Bring your left hand to your nose and smell the delicious cake. Now bring your right hand to your face and blow out steadily through your mouth to blow out the candle. Repeat 5 times or until you feel calm.



Star Breathing

Use your pointing finger to slowly trace the outline of the star. Follow the breathing instructions on each edge of the star, remembering to pause and hold at each tip of the star. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. Trace around the star until you get back to where you started!



5 Finger Breathing

This is similar to star breathing but may be easier as you always have a hand with you! Put one hand out in front of you with your fingers stretched wide. Take the pointing finger of the other hand and place it on the tip of your thumb. Now move your finger and trace the outline of your hand. As you trace down a finger breathe out through your mouth, and as you move up a finger, breathe in through your nose. Do this until you have done the whole outline of your hand. You can do both hands if you need to!



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Create an Action Plan

Abbie's Action Plan

Sometimes, when we're feeling low or having lots of negative thoughts, we need to do things that make us feel better. We might not want to, but it's a good way to help to change our mood. Planning what we will do while we are in a 'good' mood can help us later on.

What will I wear to feel better?



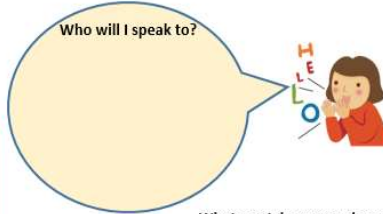
Where will I go to be safe?



How will I manage my emotions?



Who will I speak to?



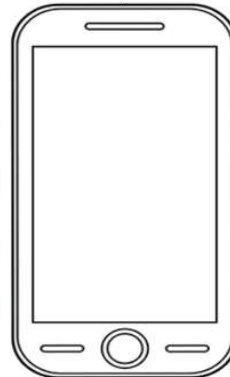
What can I do on my phone to help me?



MoodGym



HappiMe



Sometimes if we plan, we can help reduce the anxious thoughts we are experiencing. Doing this activity together with your child can create an opportunity for them to talk about their worries.



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Calm Down Cards

5 Senses Grounding Tool

Name: _____



5 things you can **see**



4 things you can **feel**



3 things you can **hear**



2 things you can **smell**



1 thing you can **taste**

Rest and Relax

Sit on the floor, close your eyes and cross your legs.

Feel your whole body relax.

Notice the sounds around you.

Feel your body on the floor.



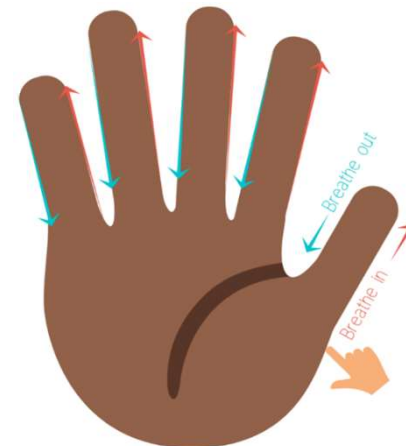
Breathe in and out slowly.

Listen to your breathing.

Count to 30 slowly in your mind.

Open your eyes when you feel calm.

5 Finger Breathing



Wash it Away

Take some cold water and splash it over your face. Now do the same with warm water. Finish by splashing cold water again.



Stretch to the Sky

As you take a **deep breath in**, stretch up as high as you can. Now **breath out** and bring your arms back down to your side.



Repeat 5 times

Balloon Belly Breathing



Inhale Fully

Place your Hands on your Belly.
Inhale and Blow Up your Balloon.
Feel your Belly and Lungs Expand.



Exhale Fully

Blow Out all of the Air in your Belly and Lungs.
Feel Your Balloon Deflate.
Notice how you Feel.



Calm Down Cards

Spiral Swirling

Take your finger and slowly follow the swirl to the middle and out again 5 times.



Mind Garden

Close your eyes and imagine a beautiful garden. Walk around it. What is there? What can you hear? What colour are the flowers? **Make the garden yours by adding things that you like.** Picture yourself here until your body relaxes.



Cake and Candle Breathing

Face your palms towards you. Imagine you have a tasty cake in one hand and a candle in the other. Take a breath in a smell the cake. Now breathe out and blow out the candle.



Category Quiz

Choose a category and think of 3 names or items for it.

Films



Cereal



City



Books



Colour



Fruit



Vegetables



Sport



T.V Show



Name It

Spell out your name. Now think of something that begins with each letter of your name.

N

Netflix

NETFLIX

A

Apple



M

Mouse



E

Electricity



Still as a Statue

Lie down somewhere comfy. Breathe in and out slowly. **Make your body as still as you can.** Count to ten...

Start to move your body by wiggling your toes. Then move your ankles. Wiggle your legs. Move up your body moving each part at a time. When you get to your head, roll it side to side gently. Now gently sit up.





An Emotionally Open Home

Open discussions around all emotions.

Avoid talking about emotions when you or your child are highly emotional. Wait until both are calm.

Allow time to talk through thoughts, feelings and actions.

Good sleep routines -

"magic hour before bed"

Good eat routines – similar times each day, at least an hour before bed.

Create spaces for:
Hot and cold emotions with objects and materials to help regulate.



Self-reflect and co-reflect.
"I know you were angry, that is okay, what made you angry? ... "what can we do next time you are angry?"

Emotion 'check ins'
How are you feeling today?

Why do you think you feel like this?

I understand

What shall we do about this?

Feelings cards available or chart on the fridge. Non verbal communication allowed.

Modelling how to emotionally regulate.



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Worry Time



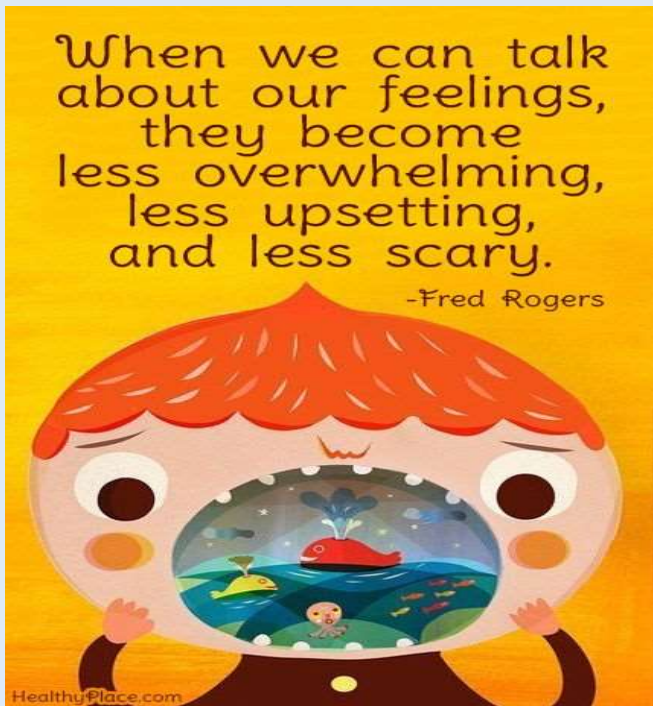
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Naming Emotions

Studies have shown that recognizing and naming emotions reduces the effect that emotion has on the body, which allows us to manage our behaviors.



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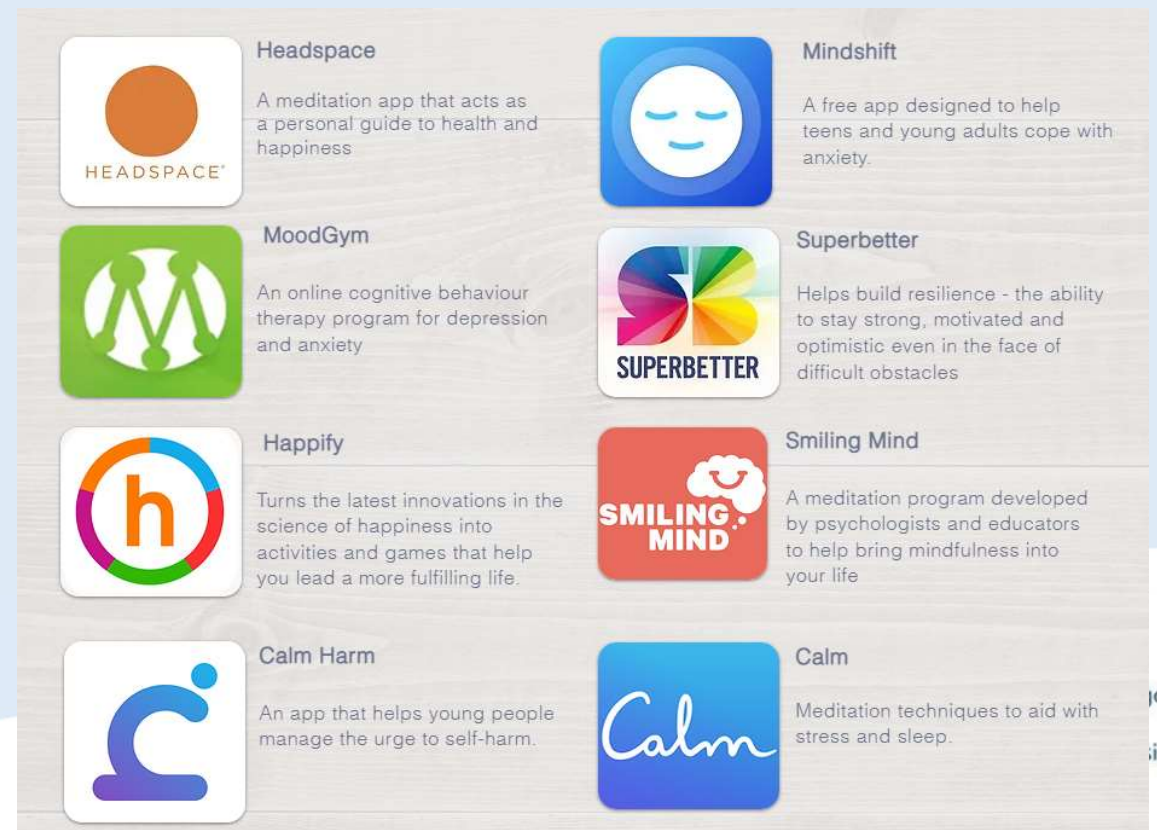
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Resources/Support



- camhs-resources.co.uk
- youngminds.org.uk
- tidyminds.org.uk
- mind.org.uk
- Benardos.org.uk
- Nspcc.org.uk

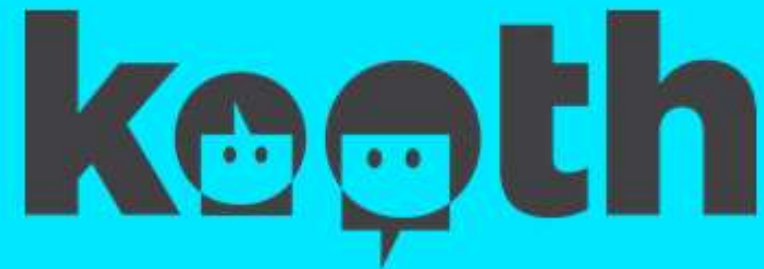




Resources/Support



- For ages 11+
- Endorsed by the NHS
- Funded by the NHS for use in Swansea and NPT
- Access to Wellbeing professionals via text service
- Access to information and interventions on Mental Wellbeing
- Social platform to discuss issues with people who face similar struggles
- All monitored by professionals to safeguard young people.



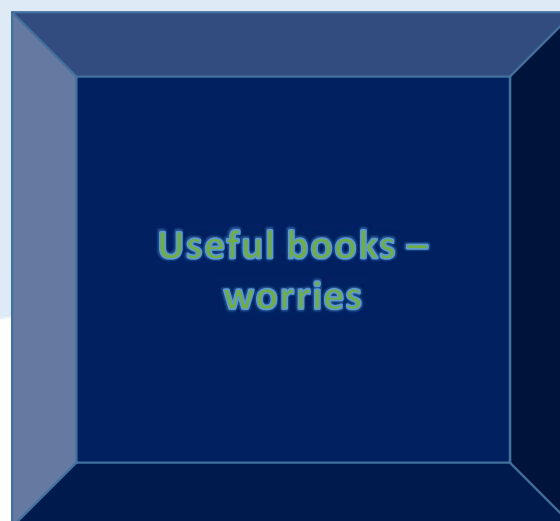
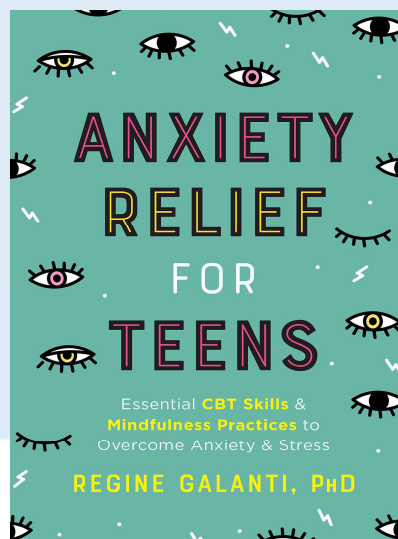
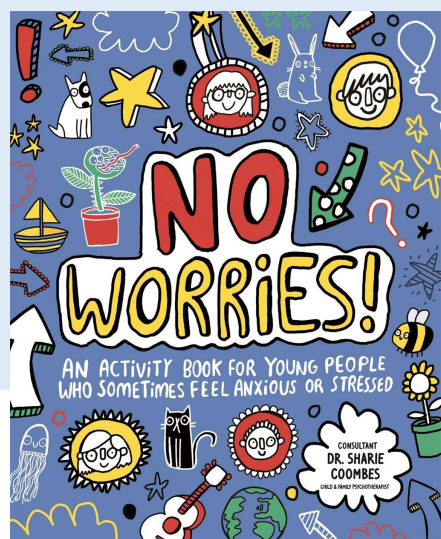
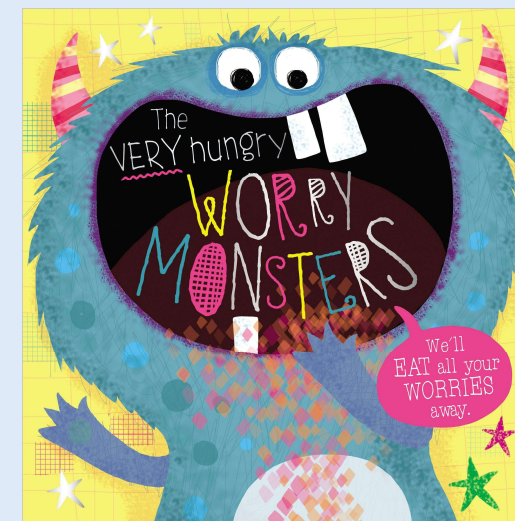
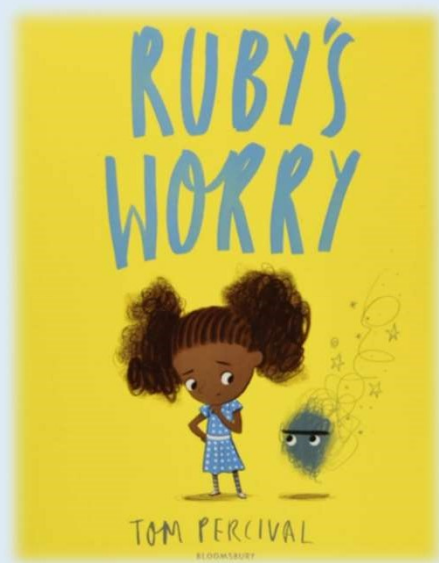
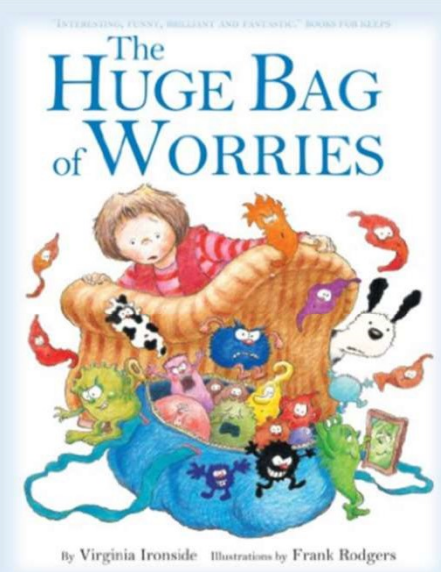
**Kooth is a free online service
offering emotional
and mental health support
for children and young people**

www.kooth.com



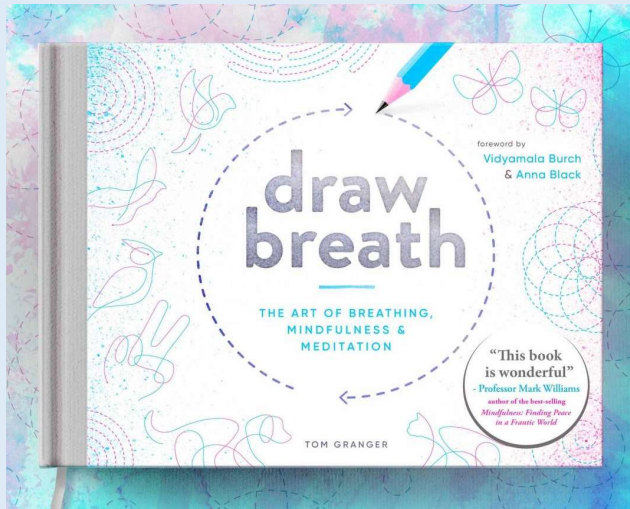
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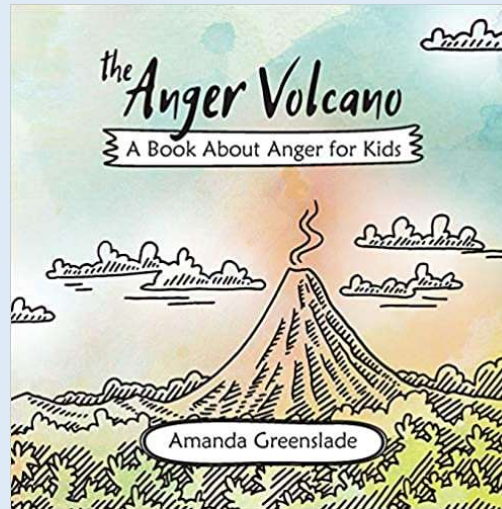


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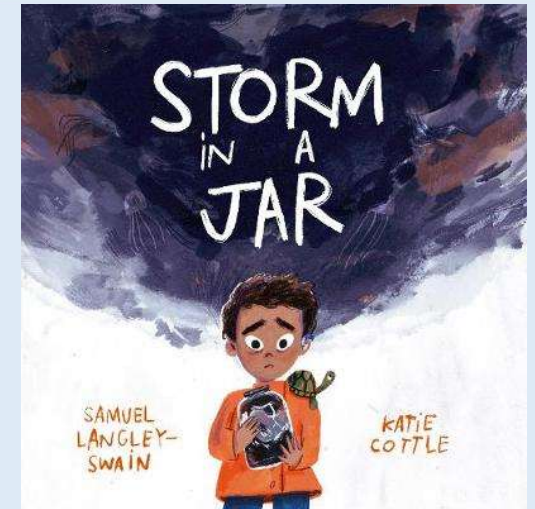




Calming through breathing
Mindful drawing

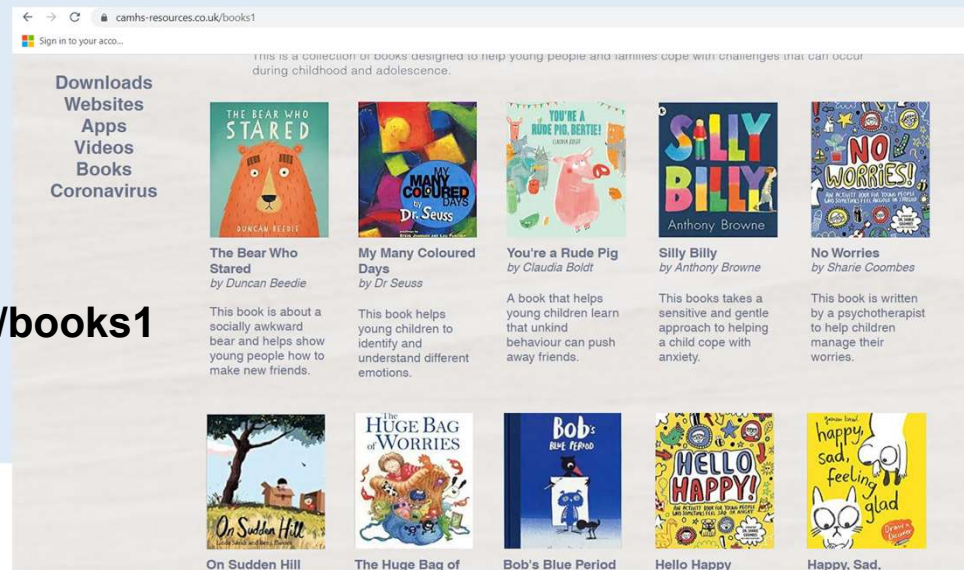


Anger



bereavement

Please check out:
camhs-resources.co.uk/books1

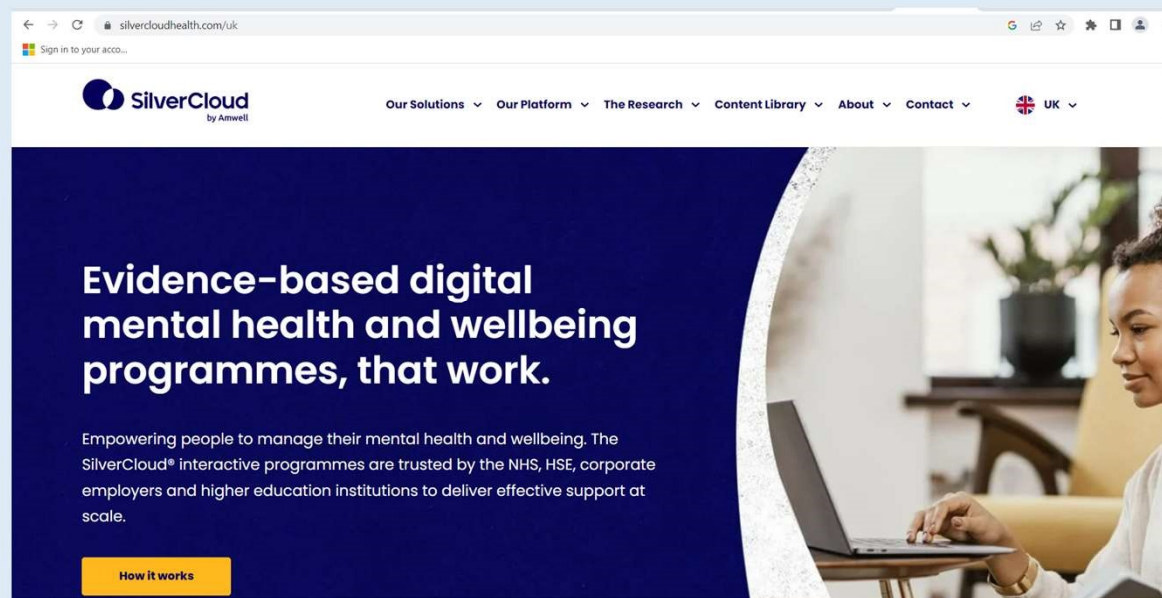


Other useful books



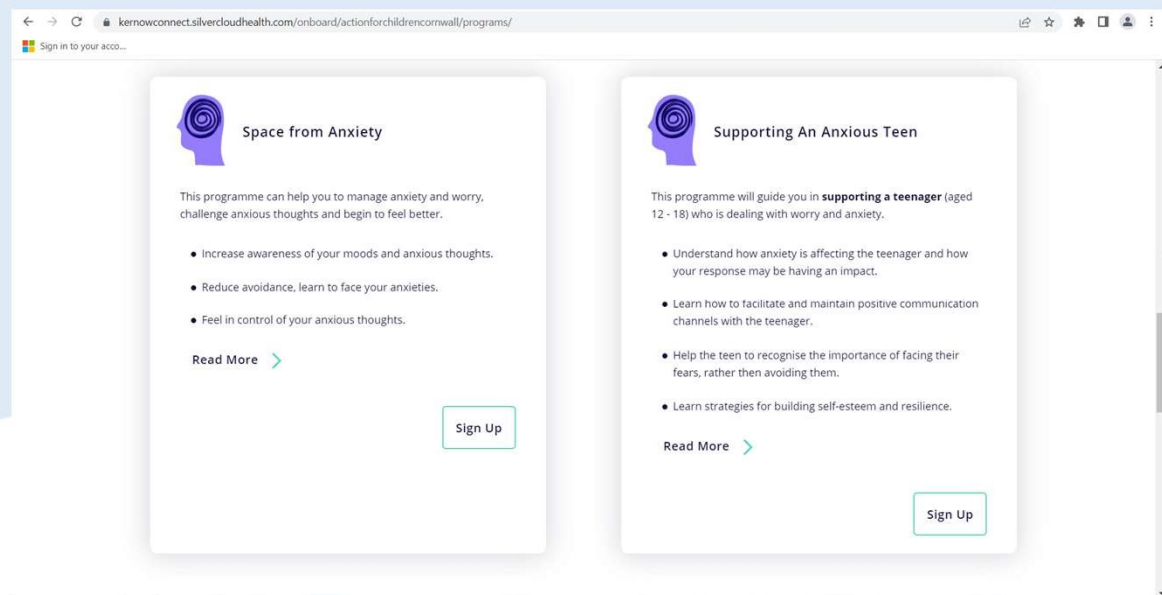
Silvercloudhealth.com/uk

- Information on wellbeing and mental health
- Evidence based
- CBT approaches
- NHS endorsed.



kernowconnect.silvercloudhealth.com/signup/

- CBT based self-help programs for a wide range of wellbeing and mental health
- CBT based programs for parents of children who are facing wellbeing concerns
- NHS endorsed.



Key Points

- Avoid medicalising emotions.
- Strive to break the anxiety cycle.
- Challenge negative thinking patterns.
- Manage anxiety with practical steps.



www.camhs-resources.co.uk

www.tidyminds.org

www.elsa-support.co.uk

www.kooth.com (age 11+)



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