



Supporting my Child's Wellbeing: Strategies to Help with Worry and Anxiety



Dr Zoe Tweedale, First Steps Clinical Psychologist and Part of
the Wellbeing and Mental Health in Schools Project
&
Claire Deegan, SENCo at Shoreditch Park Primary

Ground Rules

- **Mute microphone** whilst not speaking to minimise feedback/noise. Unmute/use the raise your hand icon if you'd like to speak out to the group.
- **Video** – we encourage you to have your camera on where possible 😊
- **Sharing** – there will be opportunities for discussion, please share what you feel comfortable with sharing. There is no requirement for you to contribute if you don't wish to
- **Confidentiality** – the workshop is a safe space, please do not discuss other participants outside of the meeting.

Aims and Objectives

- To understand some ideas about what anxiety is and have the chance to share your current experiences.
- To look at how you can support yourself and in turn your children when anxiety is around.
- To offer some ideas and practical strategies to support your child to manage anxiety and build confidence.



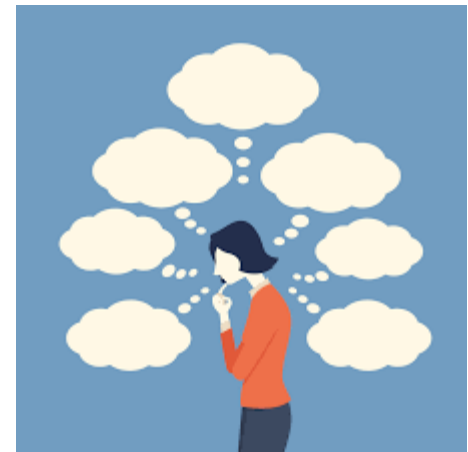
What is Anxiety?



What words/thoughts/images come to mind when you hear the word anxiety?

Go to www.menti.com

Code: 4966 0408



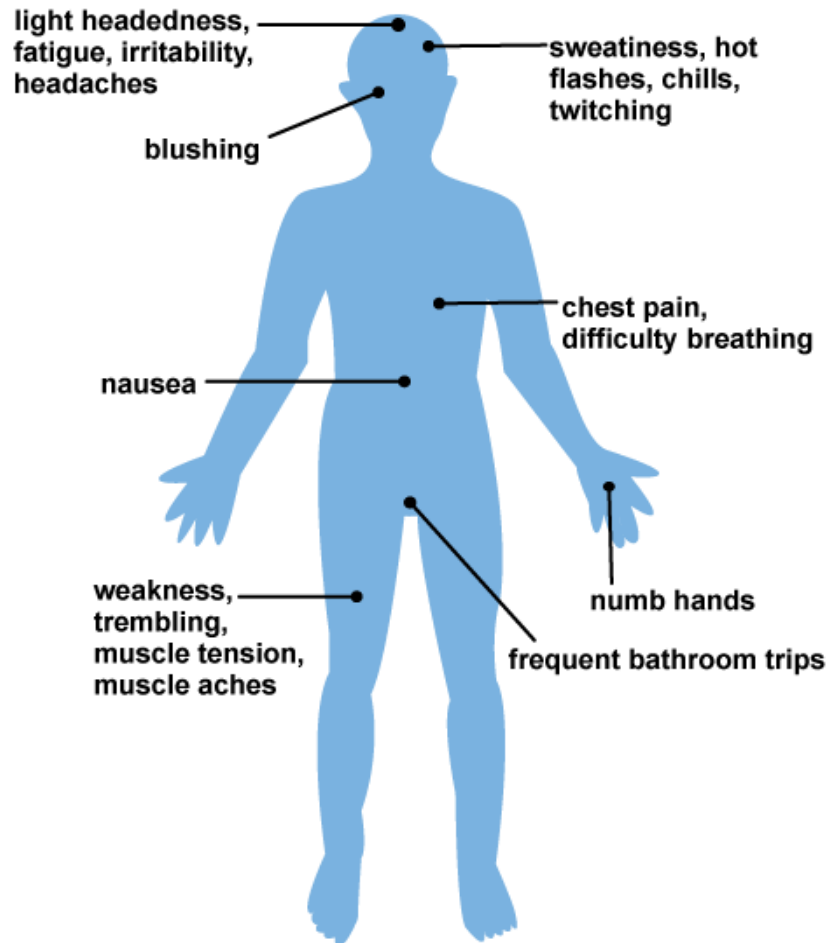
Understanding Anxiety

- Anxiety is a normal emotion, we all experience it
- Some level of anxiety can actually be useful
- Anxiety becomes a problem when it causes a problem



Understanding Anxiety: Anxiety has three characteristics

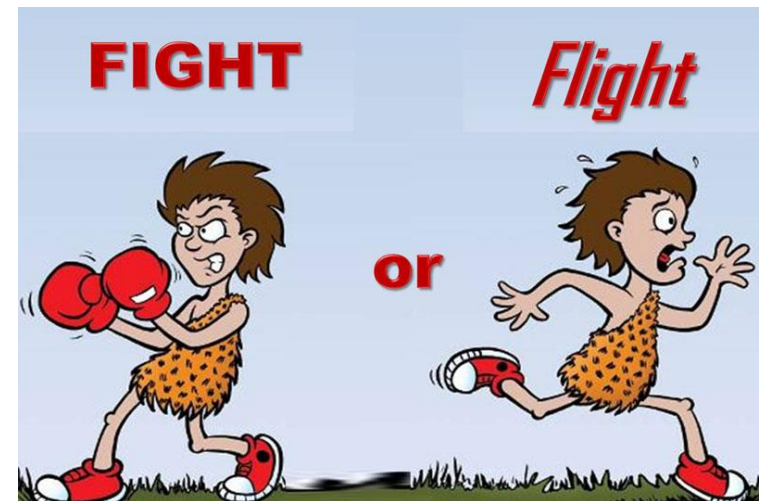
Physical sensations in the body/body states



Anxious thoughts



Anxious behaviour



Your Child's Experiences

- What are their thoughts/worries?
- How does their anxiety show in their behaviour? What do they do?
- How does it show itself physically in their bodies?

Common Anxieties at Different Ages

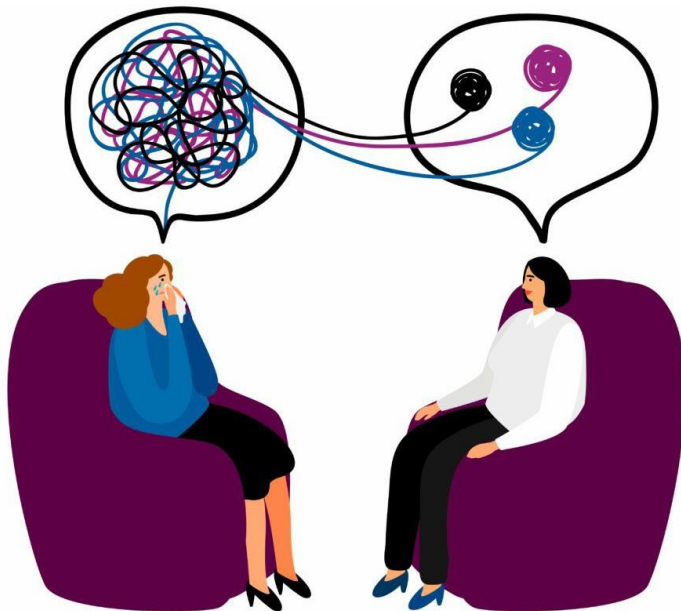
Age	Fears and worries
<i>0-6 months</i>	Strong sensory stimuli (e.g. loud noises); loss of support
<i>6-12 months</i>	Strangers; separation from care givers
<i>2-4 years</i>	Imaginary creatures; potential burglars; the dark
<i>5-7 years</i>	Natural disasters; injury/illness/death; animals; media-based fears
<i>8-11 years</i>	Poor academic and athletic performance
<i>12-18 years</i>	Peer rejection; world issues

Supporting Your Child: The Oxygen Mask Principle



Containment

Containment is where a person receives and understands the emotional communication of another without being overwhelmed by it and communicates this back to the other person.



This process can restore the ability to think in the other person.

Supporting Your Child to Manage

Anxiety

For example:
Going to bed

Thoughts

*There might be a burglar in my room
Mum might not be able to hear me calling for help*

Behaviours

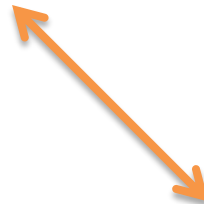
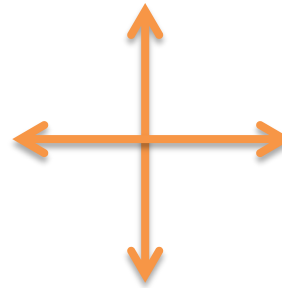
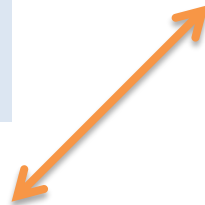
*Procrastinating going to bed
Asking parent/carer to go with them upstairs and to sit with them while they fall asleep*

Feelings

*Nervous
Worried
Scared
Sad*

Physical sensations

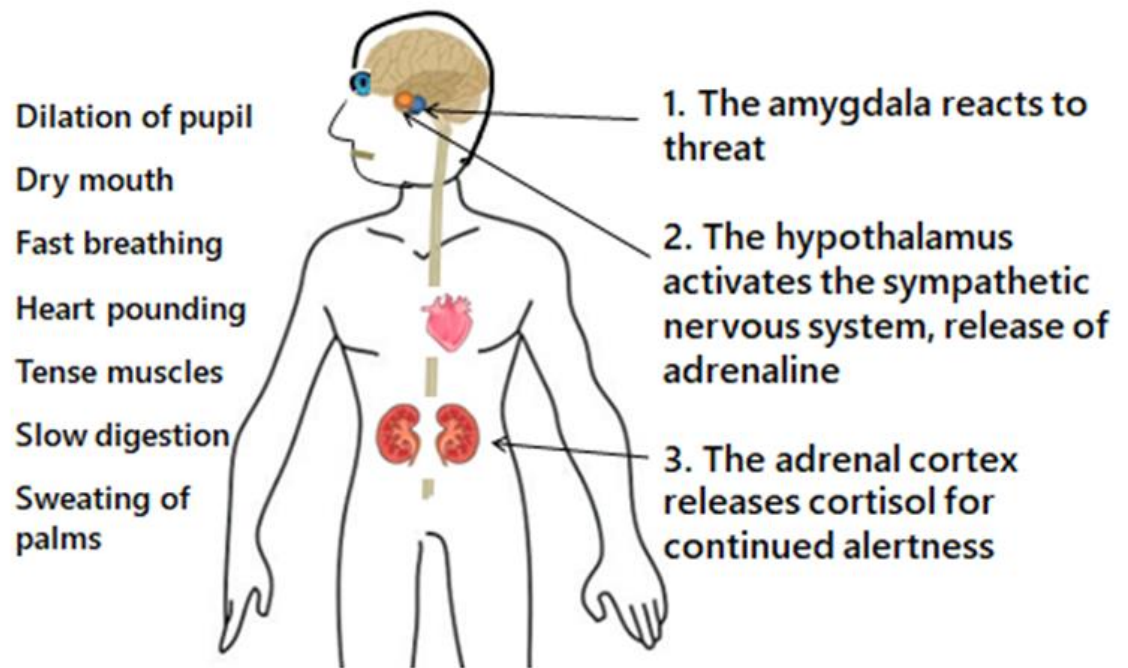
*Tummy aches
Headaches
Heart racing
Jittery*



Physical Sensations: Helping Our Bodies to Calm Down

Fight and Flight

The fight or flight response



Helping Our Bodies Calm Down: Exercise!!!



Any form of exercise enables adults and children to burn off stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol.

Help children to play, run around, go to the park, keep moving!

Helping Our Bodies Calm Down: Breathing

Take 5:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sh79w9pn9Cg>

Volcano Breathing



Stand tall with your hands pressed together at heart center. As you breathe in, keep your hands together and extend your arms up overhead. Breathe out with a strong “Haaa!!!” as you extend your arms out and down to the side of your body. Repeat.



CALM DOWN WITH TAKE 5 BREATHING

1. Stretch your hand out like a star.
2. Get your pointer finger ready to trace your fingers up and down.
3. Slide up each finger slowly ~ slide down the other side.
4. Breathe in through your nose ~ out through your mouth.
5. Put it together and breathe in as you slide up and breathe out as you slide down. Keep going until you have finished tracing your hand.



How do you feel now?
Are you calm or would you
like to take another 5 breaths?

Belly Breathing

Belly Breathing

1. Stand, sit or lie down comfortably in a quiet place.



2. Close your eyes and loosen any tense muscles. Make sure to relax your shoulders.



3. Place one hand on your upper chest and another on your belly button.



4. Breathe in slowly through your nose for *three seconds*. Feel your stomach expand. Your chest should remain still.



5. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for *three seconds*. Feel your stomach move back.



6. Repeat steps 4 and 5. Gradually increase the time you take to breathe in and out.

Four seconds in and four seconds out, five seconds in and five seconds out.....

Balloon breathing: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/get-info/breathing-balloon/>

Helping Our Bodies Calm Down: Attachment and Connection

When children experience anxiety they seek proximity with their key attachment figures.

You might have noticed that your children have been more needy or clingy during the pandemic or during times of change or stress.

It can be really helpful to work on nurturing and sustaining connection with your child. A good way to do this is through play.



Tips For Play



Tip 1: **Stay present** – turn off your mobile, computer, give them your full attention.

Tip 2: **Let your child take the lead** – Let them choose what and how to play. Notice what he is doing, don't overly praise, instead be specific. Mum – “I like the way you are showing he can fly by drawing those wings. It is really creative”

Tip 3: **Be aware that some children might want to play with things that you think are too young for them** – Meet them at their level and play without judging.

Tip 4: **Keep it fun by offering play choices you both enjoy** – with all the other stress you have going on in your life it can sometimes be a struggle to want to play with your child when they suggest something that you find tedious, therefore teach them how to negotiate. Dad – ‘Okay today if we play this then tomorrow we will play with that’

Tip 5: **Play time is not teaching time** – When you are playing just play. If you turn playtime into a lesson you move away from shared pleasure and fun and it becomes a task.

Managing Anxious Thoughts

Anxious feelings actually change how we think!

When we feel anxious our brain tries to keep us safe through going into 'alert mode'.

When we are in alert mode our brain filters the information around us and brings to our attention and focus any possible threats - anything that could go wrong, any sources of possible danger.

It can be very helpful to notice what thoughts come up for you when your child is anxious and also to talk with your child about what worries they notice.

When we talk to others we can feel both understood which calms us down and we can also get another person's perspective.

Managing Anxious Thoughts: Talking About Feelings

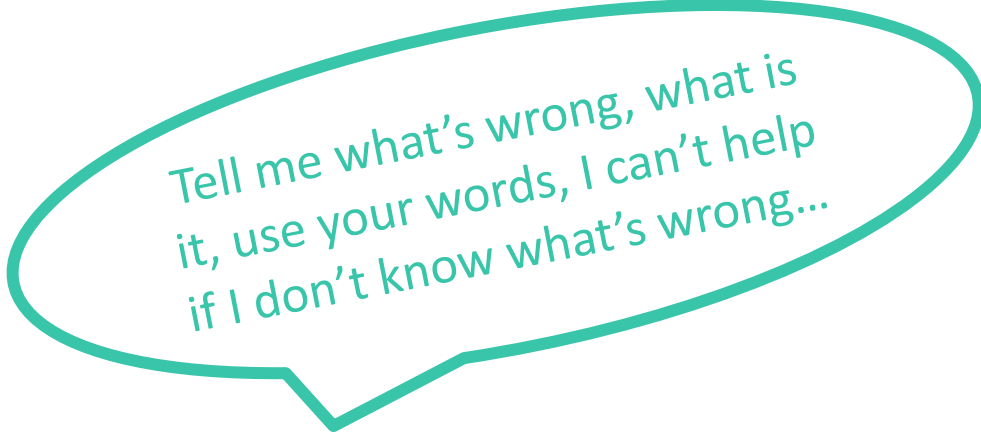
- Why is talking to children about emotions so important?
- A lot of research has shown that children who learn healthy ways to express and cope with their feelings are more likely to - perform better in school, feel more competent, capable and confident and have more positive and stable relationships.
- Children learn from interacting with, watching and copying adults around them.

How have you found it opening up conversations
and trying to talk to your children about their
worries and fears?

Tips For Talking

- Timing: when is good for you? When is good for your child?
- Responding in the moment: If your child looks worried/upset you might ask in the moment “what's going on? You looked worried, unsettled?” This can help them to make links between what they are experiencing in their body and finding words to express this.
- At the same time, if your child is very upset or anxious they may not be able to articulate what's going on for them. They might need to calm down in their body before they can access their thinking skills.
- **Focus on listening and validating**
- Are worries **practical** or **hypothetical**?

Less helpful strategies



Tell me what's wrong, what is it, use your words, I can't help if I don't know what's wrong...



Don't be silly



Let's not do that again



You'll be fine

Helpful Strategies

Why don't we check
under the bed and
have a cuddle and then
go back to bed

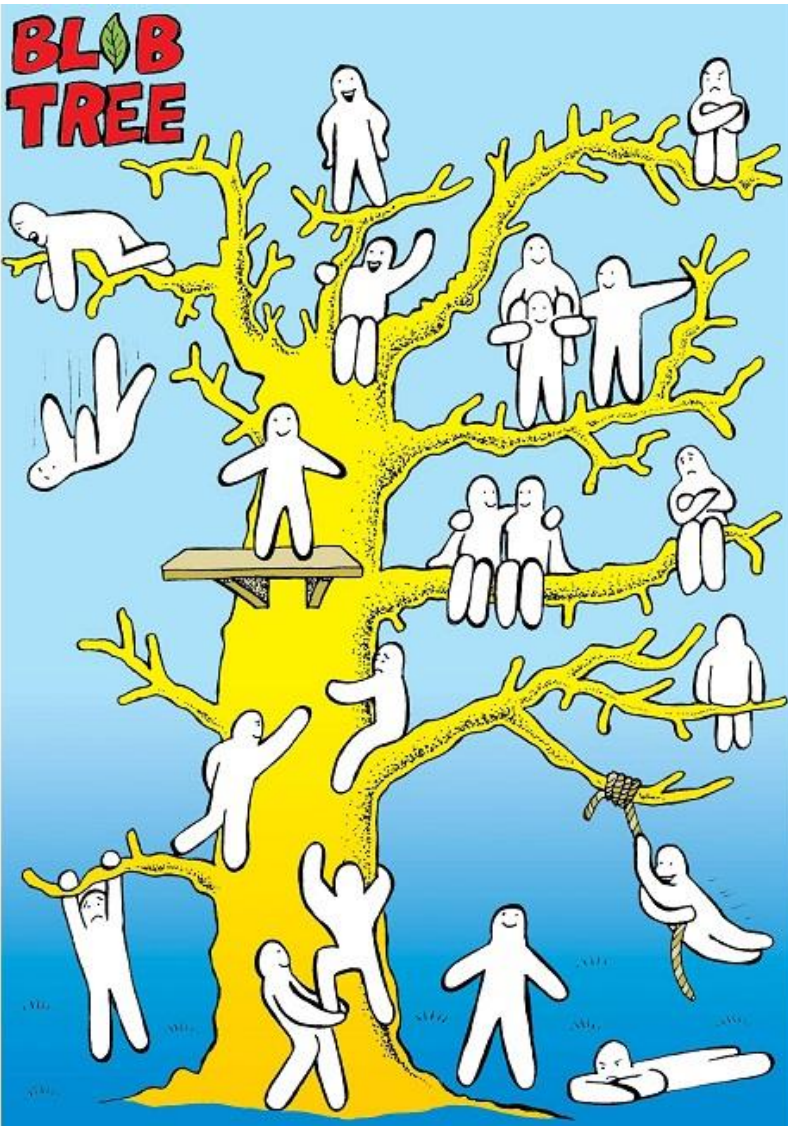
Why don't we try
and do it again
together?

How is this
making me feel?

I know it feels scary, why
don't we plan how we're
going to say hello again
when I pick you up?

How are you feeling?
Are you feeling
worried about
something?

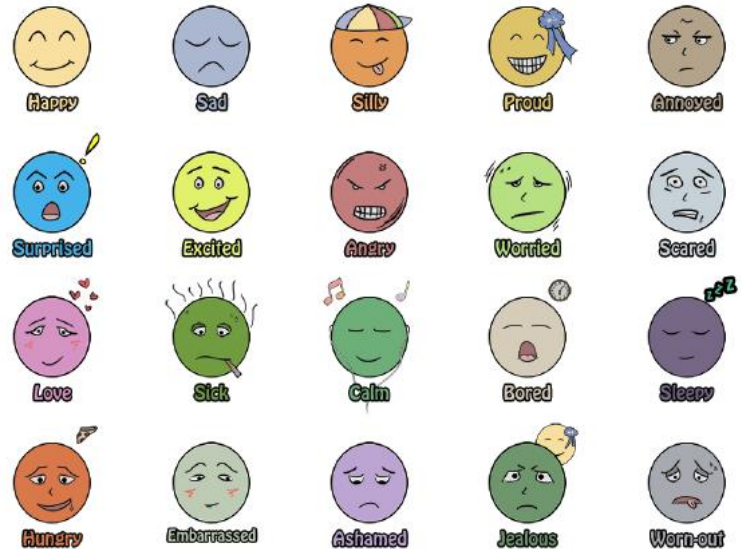
Exercises which can facilitate talking....



ZONES OF REGULATION!

Blue	Green	Yellow	Red
			
Sick Sad Tired Bored Moving Slowly	Happy Calm Good to Go Focused Ready to Learn	Frustrated Worried Silly/Wiggly Anxious Excited	Mad/Angry Mean Yelling/Hitting Out of Control I Need Time and Space

COPYRIGHT - JULIA WISHART, OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST



Anxious Behaviours: Avoidance

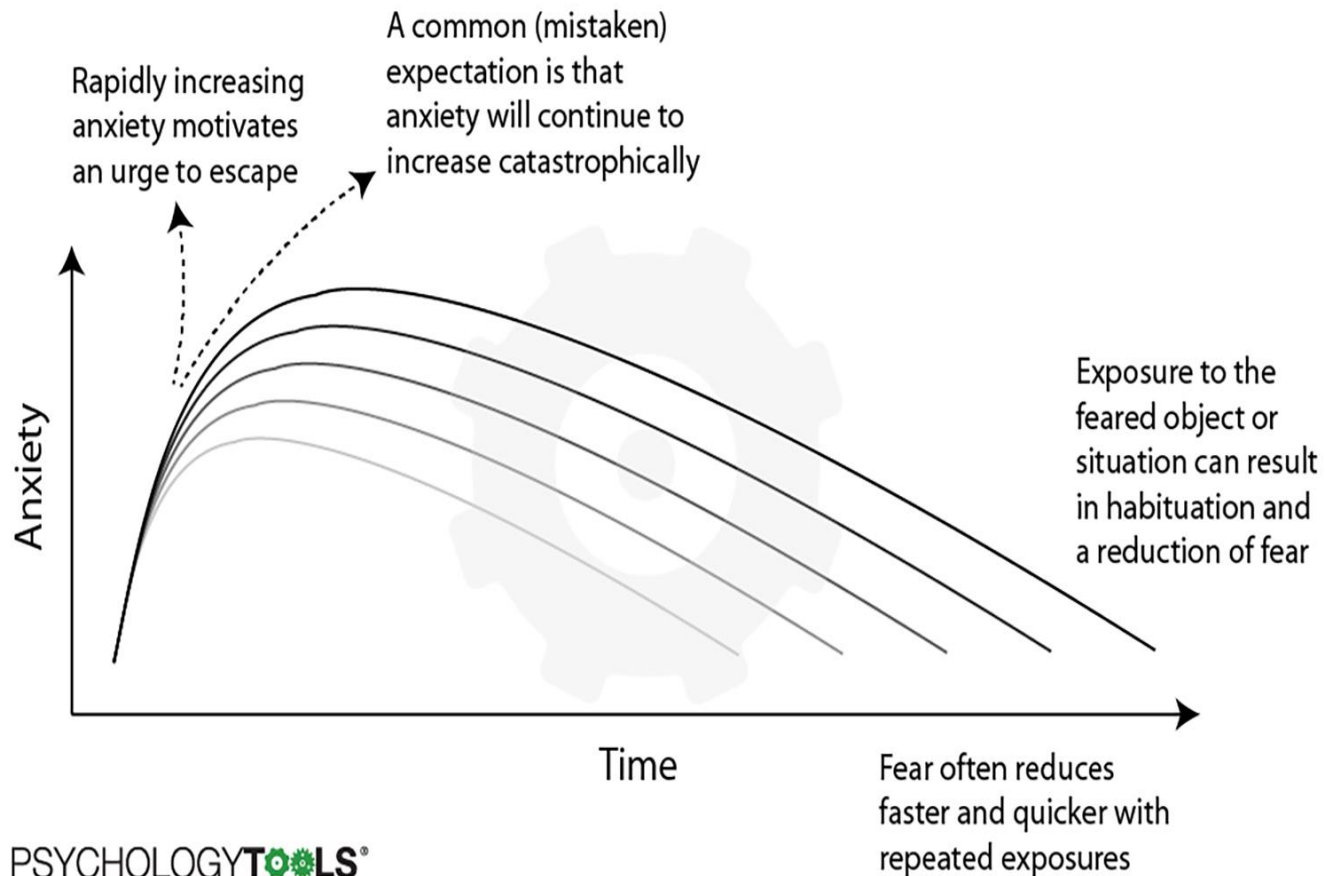
When we feel anxious we experience a very strong and instinctive urge to withdraw and find safety. Although this can get rid of an anxious feeling in the short term in the long term we know that this inadvertently keeps anxiety going and can make anxiety increase!

Can happen to your child and you, as a parent (aim of protecting them)

Importance of you showing confidence in their ability to cope, to help them develop confidence:

Promotes opportunities to develop confidence	Reduces opportunities to develop confidence
Go on, have a go. You've done it before and it went really well	It's ok, Mummy's here
I think you should see how it goes. I feel confident, but even if it doesn't go well we will have an idea about what to work on next time	It will be fine. Don't worry

The Habituation Curve



Things that can Keep Anxiety Going



Things children do

- Thoughts – overestimate danger/underestimate coping
- Feelings – misinterpret physical sensations in the body
- Behaviour – safety seeking behaviours i.e: escaping from a situation, avoidance, seeking reassurance

Things other people do

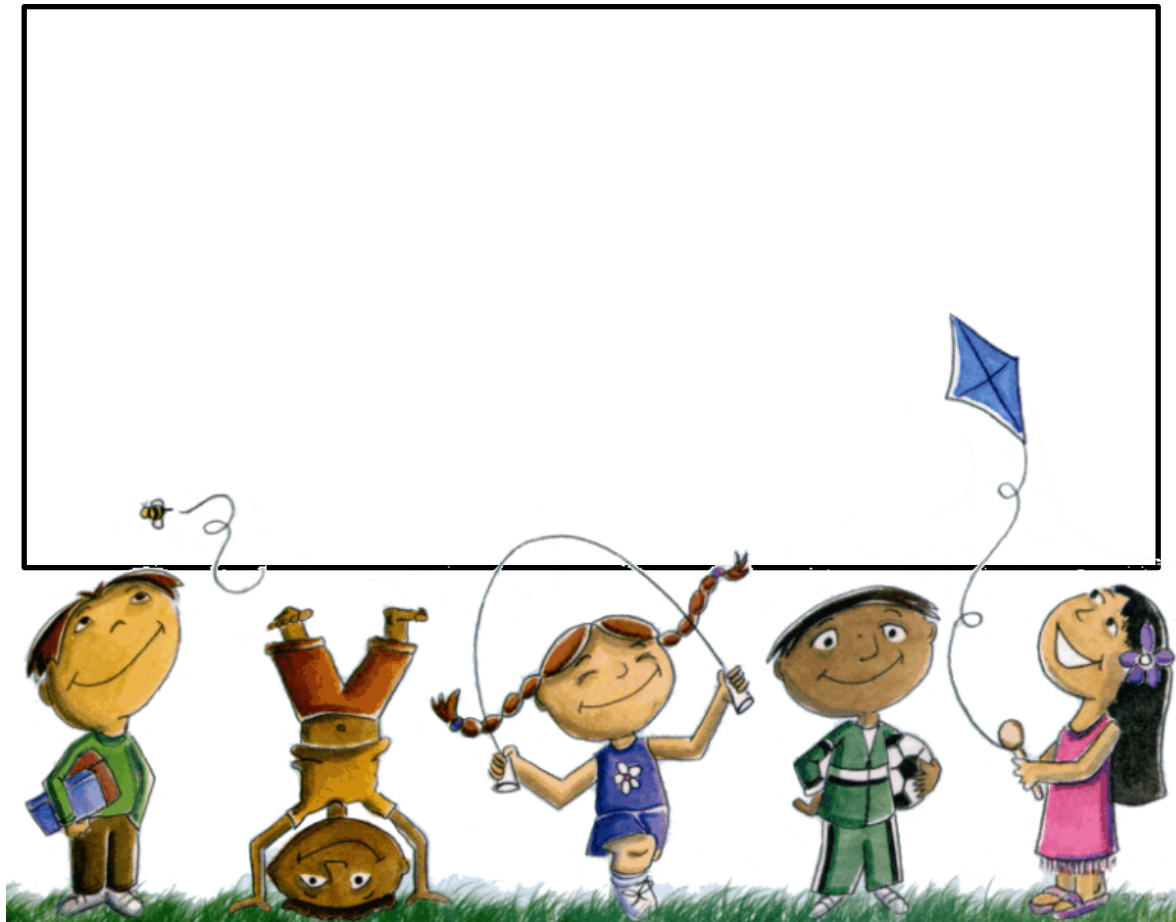
- Too much reassurance
- Modelling anxious behaviour
- Keep them away from situations/objects that may cause harm – a natural instinct

What will I take away from this workshop?

Go to www.menti.com

Code: 4966 0408

Think about one thing that you will take away:



Other resources you might find helpful

Books for children:

- *The Huge Bag of Worries* by Virginia Ironside
- *Ruby's Worry* by Tom Percival
- *The Koala Who Could* by Rachel Bright & Jim Field
- *My Anxiety Handbook* by Bridie Gallagher, Phoebe McEwen & Sue Knowles

Books for parents:

- *Helping your child with fears and worries: A guide self-help guide for parents* by Cathy Creswell, & Lucy Willetts
- *What Every Parent Needs to Know: Love Nurture and Play with Your Child* by Margot Sunderland

Websites:

- www.understandingchildhood.net
- www.familylives.org.uk
- www.youngminds.org.uk
- www.parents.actionforchildren.org.uk
- www.cosmickids.com





Thank you!

If you are worried about your child's anxiety you can email Claire Deegan to discuss further support or to arrange a brief chat with me

