Dorset Mental Health Support Team in Schools

NHS
Dorset HealthCare University
NHS Foundation Trust

HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH FEARS AND WORRIES

GROUP HANDBOOK

Helping Your Child With Fears and Worries Introduction

Our aim

The aim of our parent/caregiver group is to share Low Intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) strategies with parents/caregivers that can be used with your child to help overcome their difficulties with anxiety. This group is aimed at parents/caregivers of children aged 5–12 years whose primary presenting problem is anxiety.

What is CBT

Low Intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (LI-CBT) is a practical therapy which focuses on the here and now. It helps people to understand how their thoughts, physical symptoms, emotions and behaviours can all influence each other and can maintain difficulties in a vicious cycle. LI CBT helps families to learn strategies that challenge unhelpful thoughts and unhelpful behaviours to help break that vicious cycle. LICBT has been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety and help people change their lives for the better.

Why parent led

Research shows that working with parents/caregivers of younger children is more effective than working with your child themeselves as you:

- Are the expert of your child.
- Know the pace at which they learn.
- You have more opportunity to practice and reinforce the skills at tricky times.
- Will remember tools and strategies to keep them going.
- Working with parents/carers results in quicker and increased positive outcomes.

The intervention is based on the accompanying book - Helping Your Child With Fears and Worries 2nd Edition.

This can be purchased through Amazon, eBay, Waterstones or WHSmith, or as an audiobook.

The MHST are able to lend you a copy - please email us on dhc.mhsteam.bcp@nhs.net.

What to expect

Parent-Led CBT is a guided programme. To make the most of each session , it is important for you attend all sessions. Each week we will work through the 6 steps detailed below:

Step 1 – Learning about anxiety

Gaining understanding about your child's anxiety

Step 2 – Working out what your child needs to learn

Asking the right questions, in the right way, at the right time to understand what your child is thinking and feeling. This enables us to find ways to help your child move forward – through a change in mindset, through behavioural experiments ('having a go'), and by equipping them with the tools they need to navigate challenging situations (breathing, grounding, problem solving).

Step 3 – Encouraging independence

Using praise, reward and other strategies to encourage brave behaviour

Step 4 – Developing a step-by-step plan with your child

Helping your child to develop a plan for gradually facing their fears or to test out anxious predictions

There will be 1 week break to practice the step by step plan

Step 5 – Problem solving skills

Helping your child to become an independent problem solver

Step 6 – Review and endings

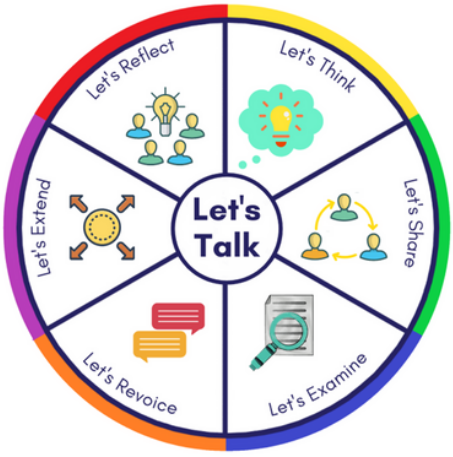
1-1 telephone call, check in, collect Routine Outcome Measures, goodbyes

What to expect

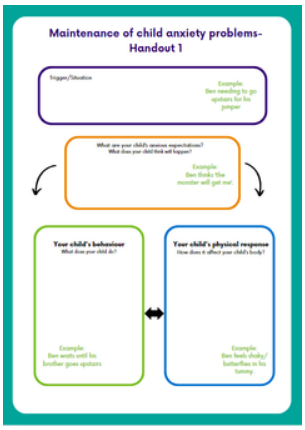
Parent-Led CBT is a guided programme. To make the most of each session, it is important for you have completed the pre-reading from the book.

Each session will consist of:

Before session – reading



In session – recap reading, discuss, reflect, set between-session tasks



After session – complete handouts

- Each week, we'll set reading for the week ahead. In each session, we'll recap the key messages from the book and highlight the actionable and practical skills we can take from each section.
- From session 1 onwards, you can use this handbook to record any reflections or practice.
- We'll track progress through wellbeing scales, anxiety symptom scales and goal scores during weeks' 1, 4 and 6.
- We are not the expert – you're the expert in your child! We will be using evidence based strategies, knowledge and ideas throughout the sessions.

Setting Smart Goals

We set goals to help us track and monitor progress. During this course we will be asking you, with your child, to set some goals.

What are the difficulties that led to you seeking help?

If you had a magic wand, what one thing would you want to change?

What would you like them to be doing that they currently not, because of worry?

What would make the biggest difference to your child's day-to-day life?

Specific

What do you want to happen?
What will help you achieve this?

Measurable

How will you know when you have achieved your goal?
How will you measure progress?

Achievable

How can it be achieved?
What are the steps you could take?

Realistic

Is this a worthwhile goal?
Is now the right time?

Timely

When does this goal need to be achieved by?

Homework

You will need this book throughout the course. If you would like to borrow this book please email us.

We do have a PDF of the first chapters, if you need this whilst awaiting the book please let us know.

dhc.mhsteam.bcp@nhs.net

Activity: Goals

Set a goal for what you would like to achieve during this course.
Use the SMART goal sheet on Page 5.

This weeks reading:

Chapter 1 -7
Pages 3 - 97

Space for notes:

Session 1
Learning about Anxiety

What is Anxiety?

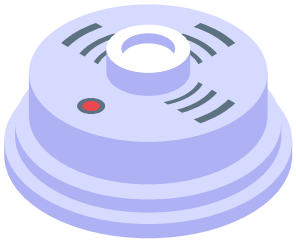
- Anxiety is a normal emotion that we all experience.
- Some anxiety is helpful, as it can keep us safe from harm or help us reach our potential. For example; we would not revise for a test without being worried we might fail.
- We actually perform better when we experience some challenge, as it makes us more alert and task-focused.
- Anxiety or excessive worrying only becomes a problem when it prevents people from doing what they want or need to do. For example; stops us from spending time with our friends as we are too worried about trying something new.
- Anxiety triggers a response in our brain called the flight, flight or freeze response, this enables us to respond to danger.

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

Things we might notice in flight, fright, freeze response.

Fight	Flight	Freeze
Yelling, screaming, using mean words	Wanting to escape, running away	Shutting down, mind goes blank
Demanding, controlling	Unfocused, poor attention	Verbally unresponsive, says 'I don't know'
Irritable, angry, furious, offended, aggressive	Anxious, panicking, scared, worried	Depressed, numb, bored
Hitting, kicking, biting, throwing, punching	Procrastinating, avoidant	Zoning out, day dreaming

What fight/flight/freeze responses do you notice in your child?



A good way to think of anxiety is like a faulty smoke alarm. Imagine you have a smoke alarm that is very sensitive, and goes off all the time even when there is no danger. When we experience anxiety, our fight, flight, freeze response is the same - it goes off even when there is no real danger, causing us to feel really anxious.

How does anxiety impact your child?

In school:

At home:

Socially:

What impact does your child's anxiety have on the family?

What causes Anxiety?

Anxiety often runs in families

- Research shows anxiety can be 1/3 genetics and 2/3 experiences and environment.
- We inherit psychological characteristics in the same way we inherit physical ones (i.e. quick tempered, laid back, more sensitive).

Difficult life event

Difficult/challenging experiences can impact on our emotional wellbeing and increase anxiety. Such as:

Children copy other people's reactions

Children learn from watching others around them. Like learning to speak, children pick up behaviours from others and may see situations as more threatening if others show anxious behaviours.

For example if a parent is frightened of spiders, screams and runs away. The child may learn spiders are scary.

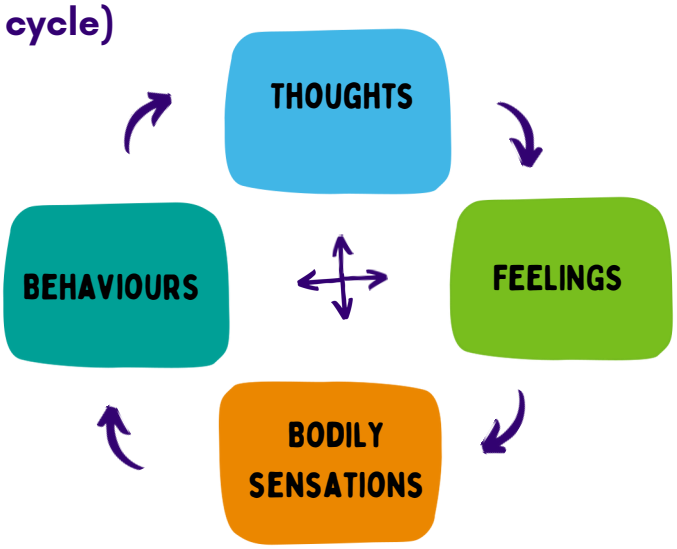
Are our responses helpful?

How we respond to worry can prevent children from developing the skills to manage their worries e.g. parent/caregiver's anxiety about a situation may influence the child's response, provoking a similar anxious response.

Make a note of anything that is relevant to your family.

What keeps anxiety going? (CBT vicious cycle)

- Anxious thinking
- Uncomfortable bodily sensations and emotions
- Anxious behaviour (avoidance, reassurance-seeking, safety behaviours)

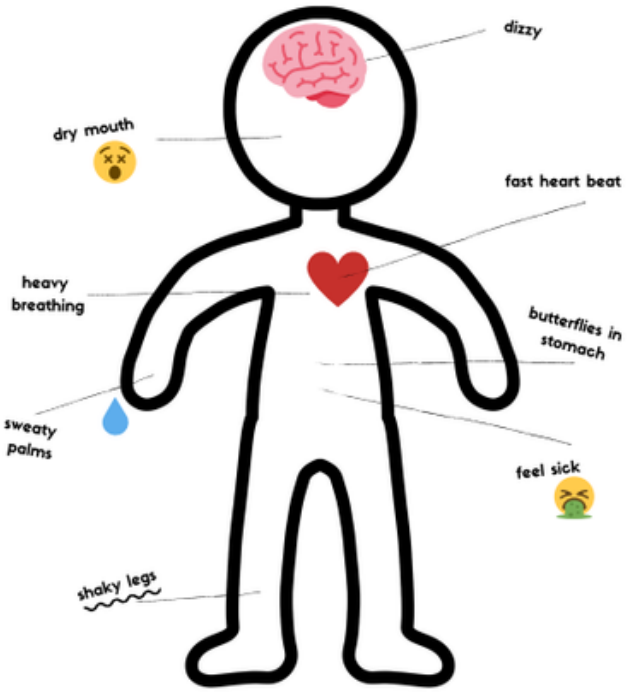


Anxious thinking tends to be an overestimation of perceived danger/threat (thinking it's going to be worse than it is), and an underestimation of our ability to cope with situations (beliving we won't be able to manage). Anxious children are often hypervigilant and on the look out for threat or danger. To try to releive the feeling of anxiety, people often avoid the situations that cause them anxious thoughts and feelings.

By avoiding the situations, we have missed the opportunity to learn the event is not going to be as bad as we predict, or that we are able to cope with it.

Bodily sensations

- Children can think these sensations mean that there really is danger, fuelling anxious thoughts.
- This can reduce confidence in their ability to cope.
- This can link into avoidance - these unpleasant feelings mean the child naturally wants to stay away from the thing that causes them.



Does your child complain of physical symptoms that may be linked to anxiety? Tummy aches, headaches, feeling sick, butterflies?

Activity: Complete this with your child - draw a person and encourage your child to draw all the bodily sensations they experience.

Anxious behaviour

- Avoiding a situation means a child doesn't get the opportunity to face their fears and learn to cope (or realise the anxiety-inducing situation wasn't as bad as they'd feared).

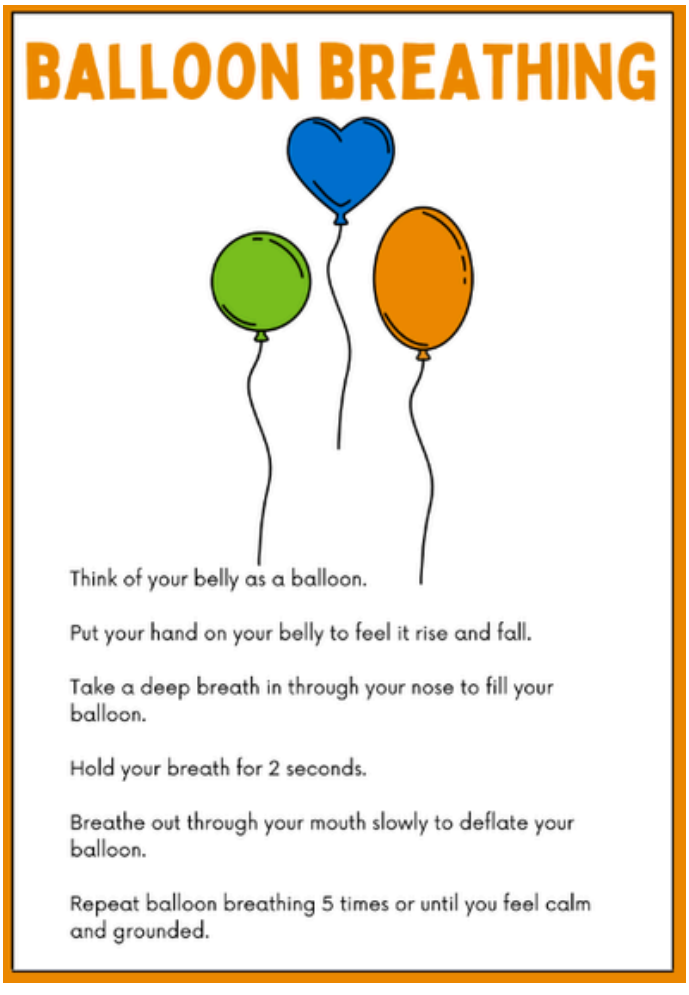
- Reassurance-giving is preventing children from new learning and they are instead reliant on others to provide safety.

- Safety seeking behaviours can keep fears going as the child will likely believe they're only safe in a challenging situation because of a specific behaviour or object.

In the moment strategies - breathing

Breathing is our super power. Teaching your children breathing techniques will help them manage their worries.

- Breathing sends a message to your brain that you are ok.
- It can decrease tension, stress and anxiety.
- It acts like a 'pause' or 'reset' button moving you out of the flight/fright/freeze response.



Home work

Activities:

- Body sensations - complete this with your child - draw a person and encourage your child to draw all the bodily sensations they experience when they feel anxious.
- Work through handouts:
  - Maintenance of child anxiety problems- handout 1 - page 13
  - Maintenance of child anxiety problems- handout 2a - page 14
  - Maintenance of child anxiety problems- handout 2b -page 15

Optional Reading:

- Chapter 13 - Managing Physical Symptoms of anxiety
- Chapter 14 - Managing your own anxiety

This weeks reading:

Chapter 8 - Step 2: What does your child need to learn

Space for notes:

Maintenance of child anxiety difficulties- Handout 1

Trigger/Situation

Example:
Ben needing to go upstairs for his jumper

What are your child's anxious expectations?
What does your child think will happen?

Example:
Ben thinks 'the monster will get me'.

Your child's behaviour
What does your child do?

Example:
Ben waits until his brother goes upstairs

Your child's physical response
How does it affect your child's body?

Example:
Ben feels shaky/ butterflies in his tummy.

Maintenance of child anxiety problems- Handout 2a

Trigger/Situation

Example:
Ben needing to go upstairs for his jumper

What are your child's expectations?
what does your child think will happen?

Example:
Ben thinks something will be up there like a monster

What is your child's behaviour?

Example:
He doesn't go upstairs
He asks someone else to go

How are these behaviours keeping the anxious expectations going?

Example:
He has no opportunity to test fear

What are your child's physical response(s)?

Example:
Ben feels shaky/ butterflies in his tummy.

How are these physical reactions keeping the expectations going?

Example:
These feelings are unpleasant. they make ben feel more scared

How are your child's physical responses and behaviours keeping each other going?

Example:
By not wanting to feel scared, so avoiding going upstairs alone

Maintenance of child anxiety problems- Handout 2b

Trigger/Situation

Example:
Ben needing to go upstairs for his jumper

What are your anxious expectations?
what do you think will happen?

Example:
He won't get it and he'll get in a state

What is your behaviour?

Example:
I quietly ask Ben's brother to so upstairs, so ben can follow him

How are these behaviours keeping the anxious expectations going?

Example:
Ben doesn't get to try going upstairs alone

What are your physical response(s)?

Example:
I get tense and start to stress

How are these physical reactions keeping the expectations going?

Example:
I want to protect Ben from his worry and make everyone calm, including myself

How are your physical responses and behaviours keeping each other going?

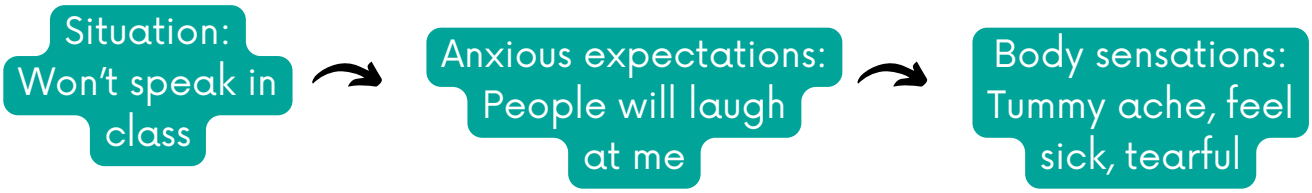
Example:
I'm not allowing Ben to conquer his fear

Session 2
What does your child need to learn?

It is important that we are asking the right questions, in the right way, at the right time to understand what your child is thinking and feeling. This enables us to find ways to help the child move forward. If we can challenge the mindset, through behavioural experiments ('having a go'), and equipping them with the tools they need to navigate challenging situations (breathing, grounding, problem solving). We can teach children to be in control of their emotions.

What are anxious expectations?

Anxious expectations are what we think/worry is going to happen
Example:



Asking questions, not giving answers or reassurance

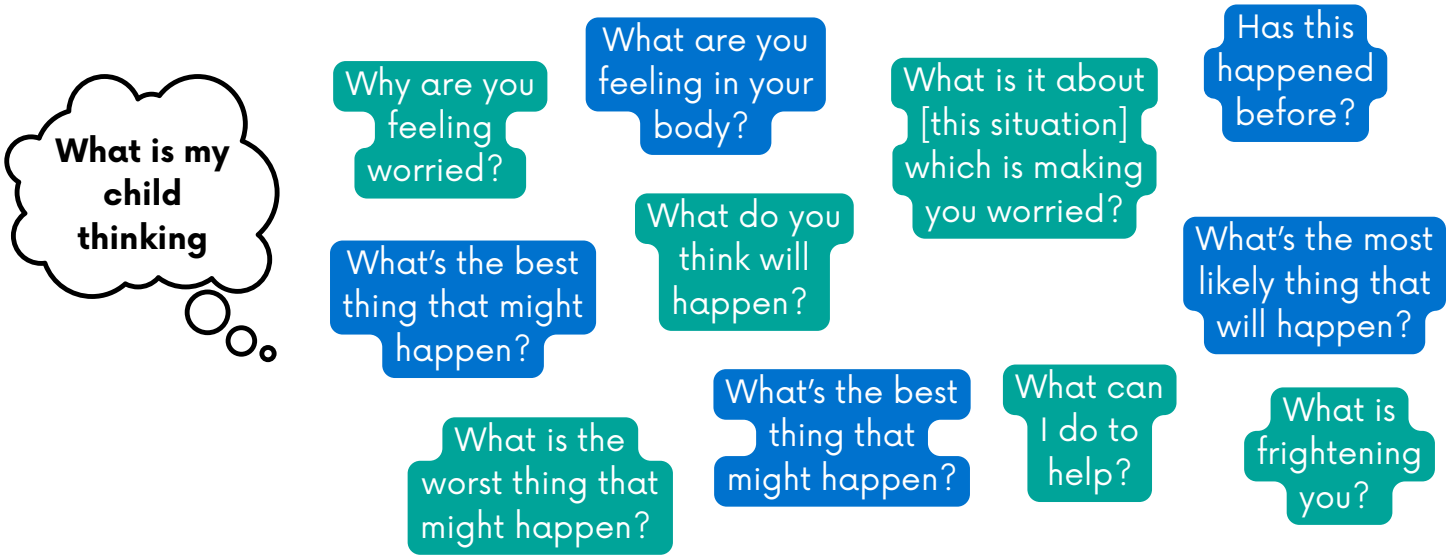
Asking questions – being curious:

- Some children may find it difficult to explain or even understand what they think will happen when faced with their difficult situations.
- If we can understand the child's thoughts, from their point of view, it can be helpful so we know what they need to learn in order to overcome anxiety.
- As adults and caregivers, we naturally tend to make assumptions, give answers, and reassurance but this can sometimes be unhelpful as our child then becomes reliant on us to provide the answers/reasurance, and does not learn to do this themselves.

Asking questions rather than giving answers:

- Helps children to think for themselves.
- Puts children in control.
- Prevents children feeling 'silly'/'wrong'.
- Helps children to start practicing getting used to there being some uncertainty (i.e. problems aren't necessarily swiftly resolved).

What are my child's anxious expectations?



Ways to explore your childs anxious expectations?

Empathising	Empathising is validating and helps children feel heard and seen. It lets them know that you are listening. The worry might seem small but for them it feels huge.
Normalisation	Normalising helps children feel less alone and more understood. We all worry, and where it is appropriate, you can let them know you worry too, share you experience and let them know its normal.
Checking understanding	Checking understanding feels validating and helps the child process what they're talking about. It's also helpful for us to identify and clarify what a child needs to learn, and gives them a chance to correct you if you if you have not fully understood.
Making suggestions	Sometimes, a child simply doesn't know what's making them anxious. After initial explorations, you can start making suggestions. 'I wonder if.....'
Pick your moment	Its important to pick the right moment to start unpicking the worry.
Praise	Keep it fun and rewarding where possible, praise them for sharing, this will encourage them to share again.

Alternative ideas

Many children find it difficult to verbally tell us what they are worried about. Here are some ideas which might be helpful.

Play

Using play is a useful way to open up conversations with your child. You might find you get a clear idea this way. For example; if you child is upset when going into school, act this out with toys asking questions like 'how are they feeling at the moment?' 'What are they worried might happen?'

Art

Art can be a great way to open conversation. You could use comic strips for your child to draw what they might be worried about or what they think might happen.

Books

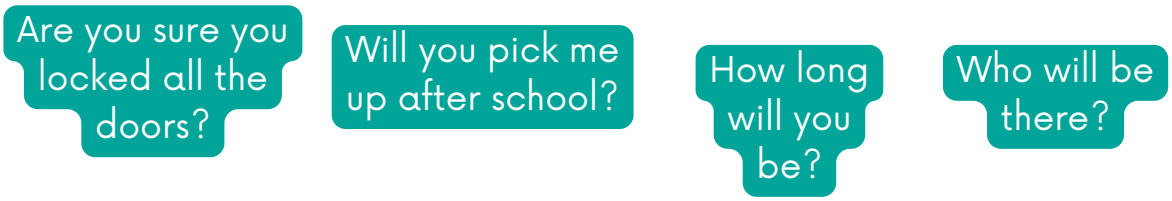
Books are another great way to start talking about how we are feeling. Whilst you are reading the book you can ask questions 'have you ever felt like this' or ' I feel like this sometimes, do you?'

There are so many great books available. Our favourites are:

- Ruby's worry- sharing hidden worries.
- Conker the chameleon - talking about feelings
- The Invisible string - about separation anxiety

Reassurance

When your child is feeling anxious, they will turn to you for help in feeling better. The might ask you lots of questions, or ask the same question over and over. Whilst giving reassurance is a natural parental instinct, it can prevent children from learning that they can cope.



Why is it not helpful?

- Children who are anxious become very reliant on reassurance from others. No matter how much reassurance you provide, they will always want more.
- Reassurance is like a plaster. It can help in the short term; however they're not solving the problem or building their own coping skills.
- Reassurance takes the opportunity away from the child to learn to self-reassure. We can change reassurance to make it more constructive and helpful to promote new learning.

What can we do instead?

1. Identify when it is happening; there is a big difference between seeking information and seeking reassurance.
2. Take a gradual approach; slowly decrease the amount of reassurance provided.
3. When giving helpful reassurance, it's more about acknowledging the worry or uncertainty and helping someone to reduce or manage that distress.

Less helpful	More helpful
It's not hard, you can do it!	That does sound hard. But I know you can do hard things.
Nothing bad will happen	If that does happen, what will you do to help yourself?
You'll be fine	You can cope with this. Let's practice our breathing and positive self-talk.
The answer is....	I think you know the answer to that, why don't you give it a go?
You're smart, you'll pass the test	You've studied a lot and I think you'll do just fine. Is there anything we can do to help you feel more prepared?
Be careful, you won't be able to climb back down	Pay attention to where you are. How will you come back down if you go higher up?

In the moment strategies - Grounding Techniques

When we are either worried about something that has happened in the past, or worried about something that is going to happen, grounding strategies can be helpful to bring us back to the here and now.

Shapes

What shapes are around you?
How many squares are there? How many circles or triangles?

Colours

What colours are around you?
How many reds are there? How many blues/greens/yellows?

Nature

Look around you.
What can you see, what can you smell, what colours are there in the trees/plants?

A-Z

Can you name one animal beginning with each letter of the alphabet? How about a type of food? A country? A film or a fun activity you like?

Breathing

Try Box Breathing
(In for 4, hold for 4, out for 4, hold for 4), or 2, 4, 6 or Balloon Breath

5, 4, 3, 2, 1

5 – things you can see
4 – things you can feel
3 – things you can hear
2 – things you can smell
1 – deep breath

Homework

Activities:

- Work through handouts:
  - What are my child's anxious thoughts- Handout 3 - Page 22
  - What are my child's anxious thoughts- Handout 4 - Page 23

This weeks reading:

Chapter 9 - Step 3: Encouraging independence and 'having a go'

Space for notes:

What are my child's anxious thoughts- Handout 3

What is happening?

Example:
Ben won't go upstairs to get his jumper.'

What is my child thinking?

- Why are you feeling worried?
- What is frightening you?
- What do you think will happen?
- What is the worst thing that might happen?
- What is it about [this situation] that is making you worried

Example:
I'm worried the monster will get me.
I think it will take me away from my home.
That I'll never see you again.
I'd be so scared if I was alone without my family.'

My responses

- Be curious
- Help your child feel understood- empathising
- Help your child feel normal
- Make suggestions
- Check you have understood
- Label emotions
- Pick your moment
- Make it fun or rewarding
- Prevent your child feeling 'silly'or ;wrong'
- Help your child practice
- getting used to there beingsome uncertainty

Example:
'That sounds frightening.
Lots of children have fears about monsters and things.
Are you saying you're afraid of being taken away by the monster?
Well done for being so brave by telling me all these things'

What are my child's anxious thoughts- Handout 4

Goal/situation

Example:
Ben won't go upstairs to get his jumper.'

What does my child expect will happen ?

Example:
I'm worried the monster will get me.
I think it will take me away from my home.
That I'll never see you again.
I'd be so scared if I was alone without my family.'

What does my child need to learn

Example:
'That sounds frightening.
Lots of children have fears about monsters andthings.
Are you saying you're afraid of being taken awayby the monster?
Well done for being so brave by telling me allthese things'

Session 3
Encouraging independence

Anxious children often expect that they will not cope in new, challenging or anxiety provoking situations. We all learn through our experiences: we learn that setbacks and discomfort pass, things are not always as we expect, and that persistence helps us to overcome challenges. Whilst it may be a natural desire to make life easier for an anxious child, it is important they have enough opportunities to develop independence and learn they can cope and succeed even if things feel hard or don't work out the first time.

When thinking about anxiety, we don't necessarily need to encourage a child to become independent in the area where they're already struggling. It can be more helpful to start with day-to-day activities than anxiety-provoking activities. This will still give your child the sense of being able to do new things, help them to feel independent and in control, and experience new learning.

What does your child rely on you to do that they could actually do themselves?

Age-appropriate tasks

What could your child start to do that they are not doing at the moment?

Child's developmental stage	Tasks they could be doing independently
6–7 years	Brush teeth Brush own hair Set table Tidy own bedroom Collect post from communal area Vacuum family room Feed pets Put on coat and shoes
8–10 years	All the above plus: Take rubbish out Water plants Care for own vegetable patch Make a purchase in a shop Prepare a simple meal (e.g. sandwich) Wake up with alarm clock Make bed Prepare breakfast
11–12 years	All the above plus: Take care of personal belongings Take short trips on public transport Plan where family will go on a day out Look up some information for the family on the internet

Top tips for increasing independence

Show confidence	Hold back and let your child have a go! Convey confidence as much as possible. Even if they don't complete the independence task perfectly, praise the effort and 'having a go' rather than the outcome.
Praise/reward	Labelled, specific praise for having a go or positive outcomes – it's easy to give attention to anxious behaviour but this reinforces it, so we want to reduce focus on anxious behaviours and emphasise and reward non-anxious and brave behaviours.
Normalise	Share your own struggles (e.g. when I was younger, I found it really hard to learn to ride a bike; I found it helpful to keep practicing and get my dad to push me until I could do it by myself) (normalisation).
Build up slowly	Start small and don't rush, we will be discussing this in future sessions.
Give choice	Get your child involved in choosing what tasks they want to do themselves.
Keep a record	Keep a record on handout 5 of the independent tasks and attempts at completing these. This should help you identify and remember what's helpful for your child and what's less helpful when it comes to encouraging independence.

Encouraging 'have a go' behaviour

- Once a child becomes more independent in everyday situations, we hope they start to develop beliefs around coping with challenges and doing things by themselves.
- Alongside this, we can start to help the child to overcome difficulties related to their anxieties.
- This will involve creating opportunities for them to learn new information that will help them overcome their fears, predictions, or anxious behaviours.
- In order to learn new things about situations they fear, they will almost certainly need to be supported to take part in things that currently make them feel anxious and to 'face their fears' rather than avoid them.

Encouraging 'have a go' behaviour

Can you think of things your child currently does despite feeling anxious?

Are there ways that you could give this more attention or praise?

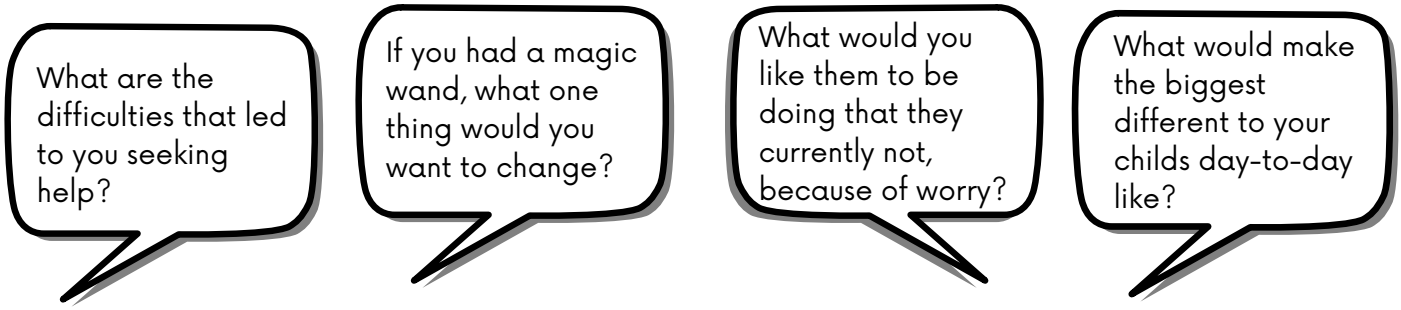
Can you think of a time when your child has been brave or had a go at something that worried them?

Can you think of any ideas that might help a child take notice of their accomplishments?

Noticing others having a go

Setting Smart Goals

Now you have learnt about what anxiety is, and what your child needs to learn, try to set some goals alongside your child.



Specific	What do you want to happen? What will help you achieve this?	
Measurable	How will you know when you have achieved your goal? How will you measure progress?	
Achievable	How can it be achieved? What are the steps you could take?	
Realistic	Is this a worthwhile goal? Is now the right time?	
Timely	When does this goal need to be achieved by?	

Homework

Activities:

- Work through handouts:
  - **Encourage Independence - handout 5 - page 28**

This weeks reading:

Chapter 10 - Step 4: A step-by-step approach to overcoming fears and worries

Space for notes:

Encourage Independence Handout 5

It can be beneficial to encourage independence with your child as this helps to build their confidence and learn that they are able to cope.

Independent Activity	When did my child try this?	What tips for success did I use?	How did it go? What did my child do?
Making a sandwich	Saturday Lunchtime	• Positive encouragement' You can do it.' • Took an interest • Made my sandwich alongside • made my son aware that mistakes happen • Celebrated success	It went well. He made a hole in the bread when he buttered it but he carried on and succeeded. He was really pleased with himself.

Session 4
Developing a step-by-step plan

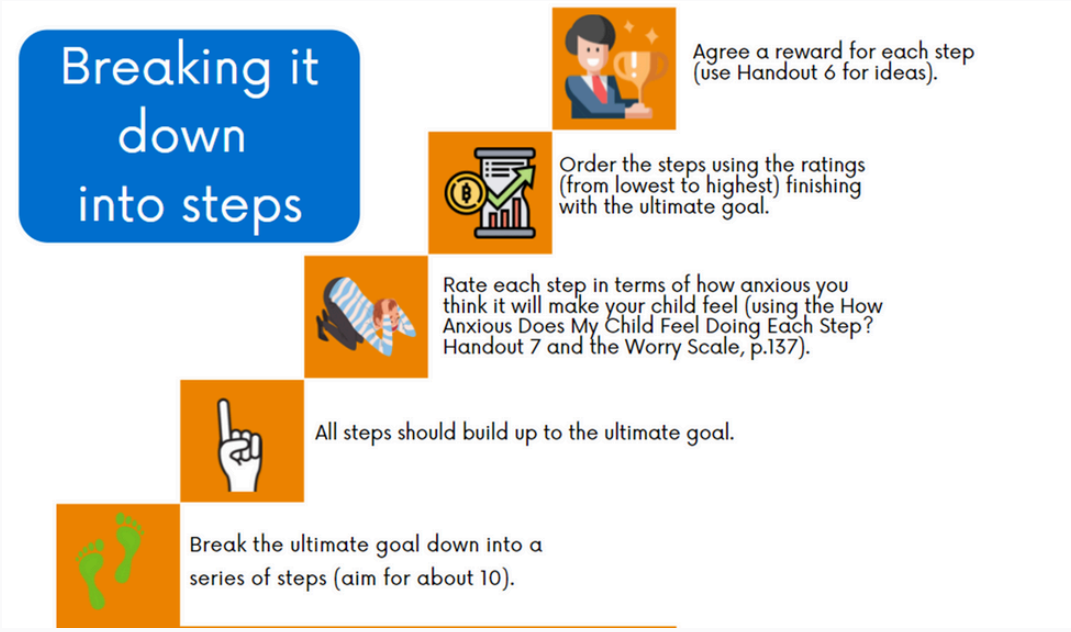
In CBT, we believe that anxieties won't go away until we can face up to them and work through them. Avoiding things or employing safety behaviours means we'll never find out if realities are as bad as we expect.

The phrase 'face your fears', as it turns out, is quite legitimate. The only way of overcoming our fears is to do the things that make us feel scared – in a calm, controlled way.

If someone feared snakes and we threw them into a snake pit, this would be 'exposure', specifically, 'flooding'.

If someone feared snakes and we showed them a picture of a snake, then a toy, then they held the toy snake, saw a real snake, and eventually held a real snake this would be 'graded exposure'.

- We recommend starting slowly and gradually and taking it step-by-step with the plan.
- Come up with an ultimate goal (the thing you're aiming towards by the end of the plan) which is achievable and realistic ('Ultimate Goals' p.132-p.133).
- Come up with an ultimate reward for the ultimate goal to praise effort (p.134).
- It's important the child is involved in this process – agreeing the ultimate goal and reward (keep this fun and creative).
- Involve your child to break down the ultimate goal into smaller more manageable steps - this is your step-by-step plan.



Putting it into practice

Which step will your child try first and what will the reward be?

Remember

- The first step should be achievable, something your child may have already done once or twice.
- Praise your child for any attempts/effort at a step.
- Repeat each step until your child has had a chance to learn something helpful to help them get closer to the goal.
- If necessary, break a step down into smaller steps.
- Look out for safety behaviour.
- Problem Solve any difficulties you child faces with a step.

Keeping track of progress

Facing fears allows us to gather information about what our child expects to happen vs what actually happens.

Treating each step like an experiment allows grown ups and children to think about what they have learnt from completing each step.

Predictions should be made before each step, and reviewed after each attempt.

Questions before a step:

What is it about this situation that worries or scares you?

What would be your worst case scenario? How likely is that to happen?

What do you think might happen?

Questions after a step:

What happened? How did you cope? Did you cope better than you thought?

Did your prediction come true or did something else happen?

Have you learnt anything from doing the step?

Developing a step-by-step plan

Fears need to be faced gradually which builds up confidence, resilience and increases our motivation.

Creating a step-by-step plan

1. Decide on the ultimate goal.
2. Break it down into smaller, more manageable steps (up to 10 steps).
3. The steps will then be ordered from least to most anxiety provoking. To help work out how to order the steps, you can ask your child how scared they would be completing each step out of 10 (10 being really anxious).
4. Order the steps in number order (Ultimate goal at the top). This is your step-by-step plan.
5. Agree a reward for each step.
6. Be creative; you could decorate the plan.

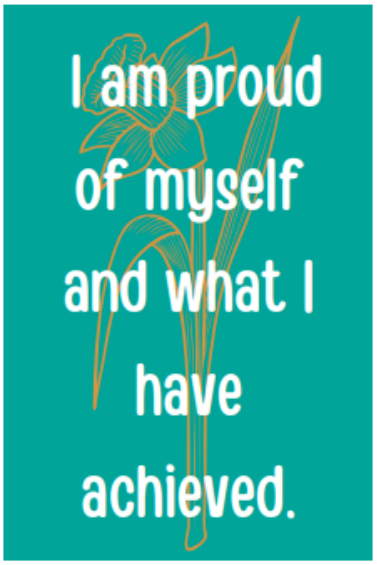
Implementing the step-by-step plan

1. Start with the least anxiety provoking step.
2. Use your in the 'moment strategies' to manage any anxiety.
3. Reward as soon as possible.
4. If child is unable to complete step, praise them for trying.
5. Repeat the step until it has reduced to at least 4/10, before moving up.
6. If the next step is too big, break the step down even smaller.

Example:

Ultimate Goal - To be upstairs alone for 20 mins	10 /10
Step 5 - To stay upstairs for 15 mins	10 /10
Step 4 - To stay upstairs for 10 mins	9 /10
Step 3 - To stay upstairs alone for 5 mins	8 /10
Step 2 - To go up to top of stairs then down	7 /10
Step 1 - To go half way up the stairs and back down alone	5 /10

In the moment strategies - Positive self talk



Add your own

Homework

Activities:

- Work through handouts:
  - **Step-by-step plan ideas/draft - Handout 6 - Page 34**
  - **Step-by-step plan - Handout 7 -Page 35**
  - **Reviewing the step-by-step plan - Handout 8 - Page 36**

This weeks reading:

Chapter 11 - Learning about problem solving

Space for notes:

Step-by-step plan ideas/draft
Handout 6

Possible steps	How anxious will my child be out of 10? (10 being really anxious).
Ultimate goal:	

Step-by-step plan!
Handout 7

Step	Prediction	Reward
Ultimate goal:		

Reviewing the step-by-step plan
Handout 8

Date/Time Step tried	Child's prediction	What strategies did I use to help?	How did it go and what did my child learn?

Session 5
Problem Solving

Problem solving is an important skill for children to learn.

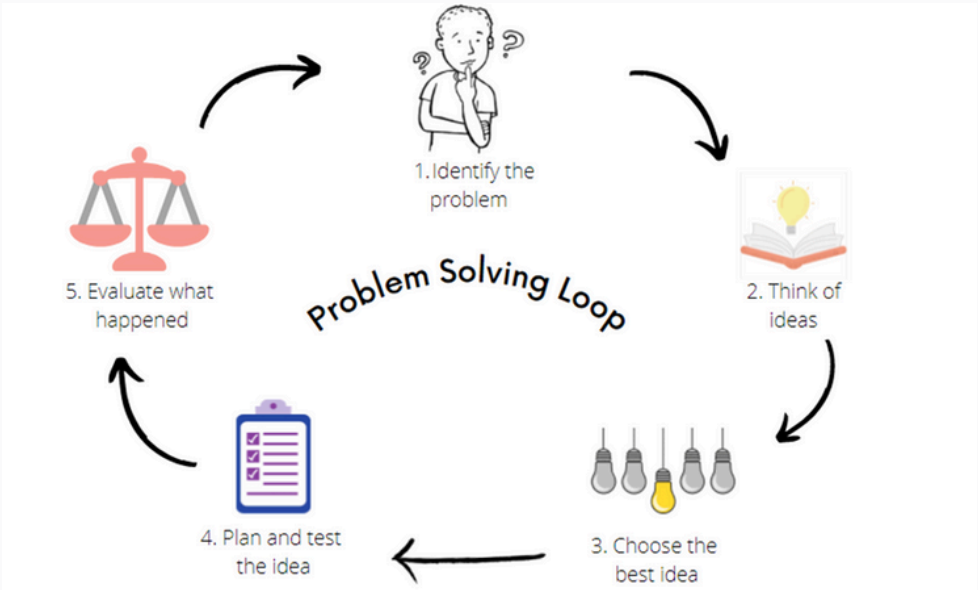
Evidence shows that anxious children often have either difficulties with problem solving or perceive themselves to have difficulties with problem solving.

Anxious children aren't usually anxious for no reason at all. Whilst everyone has irrational fears at one time or another, children with anxiety might have real, practical problems that they are not able to deal with.

We want to help children to be able to recognise when there is a 'real life problem' and to feel confident in solving that problem.

We can support children to use problem-solving skills by asking questions not giving answers. It can be temping to solve a child's problem for them, especially when they're anxious – parents/caregivers want to do all they can to stop their child becoming upset. But if a child is going to feel confident that problems can be solved, whether you are there or not, they need to learn for themselves. This certainly does not mean that they can't ask for help – asking for help is a skill all on its own, and a very important one! Asking for help is often a good strategy – but it needs to be your child who is able to independently consider this as an option and action it.

Problem solving steps



PROBLEM solving

1. IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM (Be specific)

2. IDENTIFY POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS (Brainstorm)

3. PROS & CONS OF SOLUTIONS (Doable? Practical?)

4. SELECT SOLUTION

5. PLAN SOLUTION

(What? Where? When? Who with? What steps to follow?)

6. TRY IT OUT

7. REVIEW

(How did it go?)

Keeping things going

Over the past weeks we have looked over a number of strategies for you to support your child and young person with their fears and worries.

Every young person is on their own journey, so it is normal at the end of the sessions for everyone to be different points. When we are facing fears it is a gradual process and the problems are unlikely to go away overnight. It takes perseverance to keep working towards overcoming fears and worries.

We encourage families to keep practising the skills you have learnt.
If you are struggling to keep things going, read Chapter 15: Keeping things going.

Problem	Tips for finding a solution
I don't have enough time to do the excerices	Try 'problem solving'
It's quicker to just do something for my child	Focus on the long term gains.
I don't know when to push my child, is he anxious or not interested?	Is there a strategy that you could use whatever the reason? (reward)
I'm not there at the times my child worries	Try 'problem solving'
I find it hard to keep motivated to keep 'pushing' my child	See chapter 14 on managing own anxiety; or problem solving

Reflection of the course
Handout 9

Things I have done that have been helpful for reducing my child's anxiety?
Things for me and my child to continue to work on.
Notes

In the moment strategies - Self soothe/sensory tool kit/wellbeing toolkit

It is really important to look after our mental health and wellbeing. We all experience different emotions and some can feel more difficult. It is normal for our mood to go up and down and we can learn tools to help ourselves in these times. A wellbeing toolkit can be used when we feel anxious, angry, low or overwhelmed.

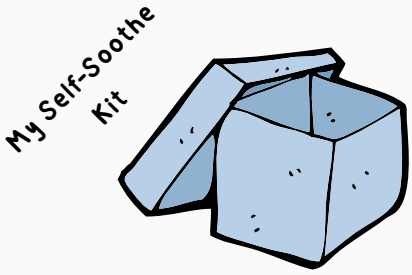
WHAT IS A WELLBEING TOOLKIT?

A wellbeing toolkit contains different items and tools to help calm you down, manage your feelings and focus on the present moment.

If you find yourself feeling sad, anxious or overwhelmed you can turn to your toolkit to help you feel more relaxed.

3 STEPS TO GET STARTED

1. Choose a box or bag
2. Make a label for your toolkit
3. Decorate your box or bag



My Calm Down Box

WHAT SHOULD BE IN MY WELLBEING TOOLKIT?

SMELL

- Scented lotion e.g hand cream
- Candle
- Lipbalms
- Spray
- Mints

SOUND

- Playlist and earphones
- Bells
- Nature sounds app on phone
- Shell

TOUCH

- Playdough
- Fidget toy
- Stress ball
- Squishy toy
- Bubble wrap
- Cuddly toy
- Feather

SIGHT

- Photographs
- Colouring
- Postcards
- Affirmation cards
- Glitter jar

TASTE

- Mints
- Sour sweets
- Water
- Hot chocolate or tea
- Chocolate

TIPS

- Get creative - you could decorate the box with positive and inspiring messages or images
- Keep your toolkit somewhere you can easily get it
- Experiment with items - find out what is most effective for you
- It might be helpful to share your toolkit with a family member or somebody at school so they can support you with it

Additional Support

School attendance difficulties

Children with anxiety often feel nervous about attending school.
We hope that this course has helped you to explore what your child is finding difficult. There is further information in the book.

Additional reading: Chapter 20 School attendance difficulties

Overcoming worry

For additional strategies - Overcoming worries

Additional reading: Chapter 12 Overcoming worries

Managing sleep

A child who is not sleeping well can affect the whole family. Problems at night time are extremely common among anxious children. There is again more support in the book.

Additional reading: Chapter 18 Sleep problems.

Useful resources:

https://contact.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Helping-your-child-sleep.pdf

Managing sleep - worksheet

Brainstorm some ideas below

STEP BY STEP PLAN TO IMPROVE SLEEP

Choose one of your ideas to focus on first and create a plan to follow:

Idea:.....

What do I need to make the change happen?

When shall I make the change?

How can I make this happen?

Who do I need to help me?

How did it go?

Does anything else need to happen?

@DORSETMHST

SCAN ME FREE RESOURCES