

Anxiety

Anxiety is something that is part of me but it's not who I am

What is anxiety and when does it become a problem?

Anxiety is a normal emotion that can be useful, keeps us safe and can enhance performance, it becomes a problem when it is more severe or frequent and interferes with a child's everyday life or stops them taking part in things they would like to try.

There are 3 parts of anxiety

- Anxious thoughts
- Feelings in our body
- Anxious behaviour

Three different ways anxiety can affect a child's life:

- Social life, it can limit a child's social life and cause problems with friendships.
- Academic performance, it can affect a child's participation in class and groups and reduce academic achievement.
- Mood, anxiety makes it more likely that a child can become depressed.

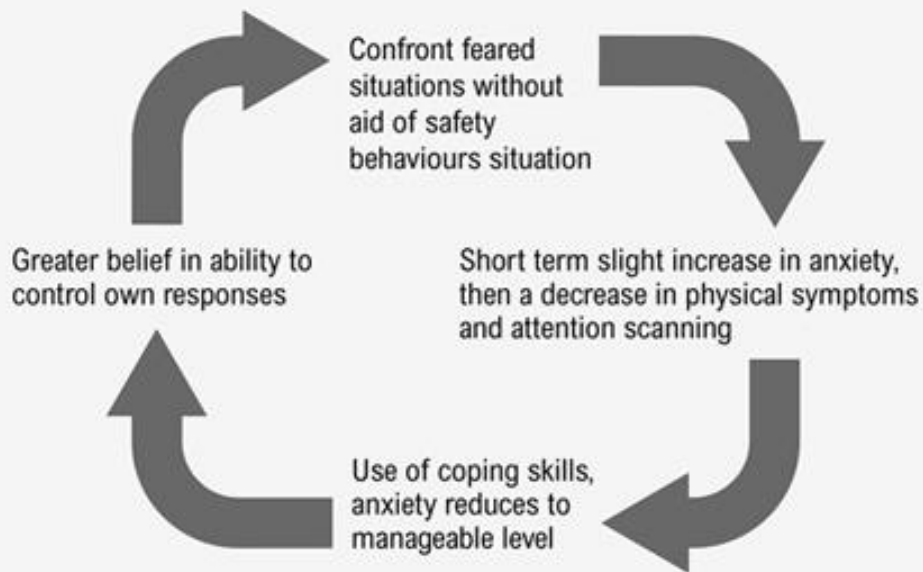
Causes of childhood anxiety

- Genes, predisposition to anxiety, depression
- Anxiety runs in families
- 1/3 of anxiety caused by genes (so it's mostly caused by environment)
- Inherent particular characteristics (not necessarily of just anxiety i.e. sensitivity)
- Adverse life events
- Stressful events have more of an impact on anxious children
- Learning by example
- Picking up fears from parents or others
- Learning from others reactions
- Other reactions to a child when they are anxious
- Coping experiences
- Not having then opportunities to learn how to cop

Role models

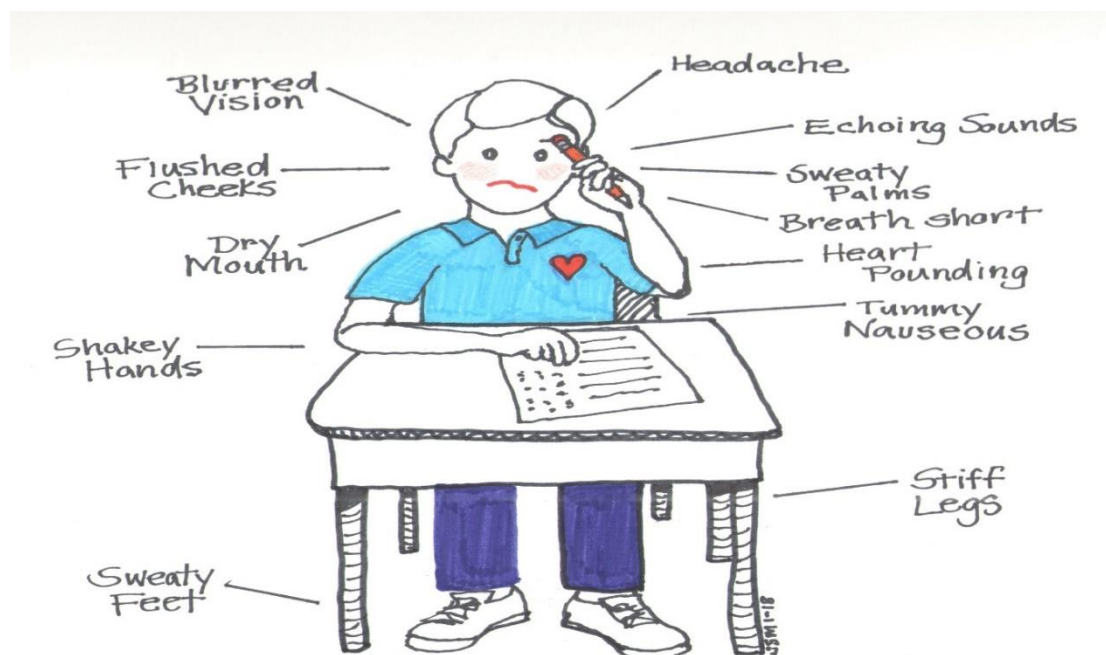
It's important for children to know there are no wrong feelings or emotions it's how we deal with those difficult feelings that's important. As parents we are our children's biggest role model and the way we model our emotions and feelings can affect how they deal with their own. For example, if you are sad, do you hide your emotions away or put a mask on, or do you allow your children to see you cry and verbalise why you are upset?

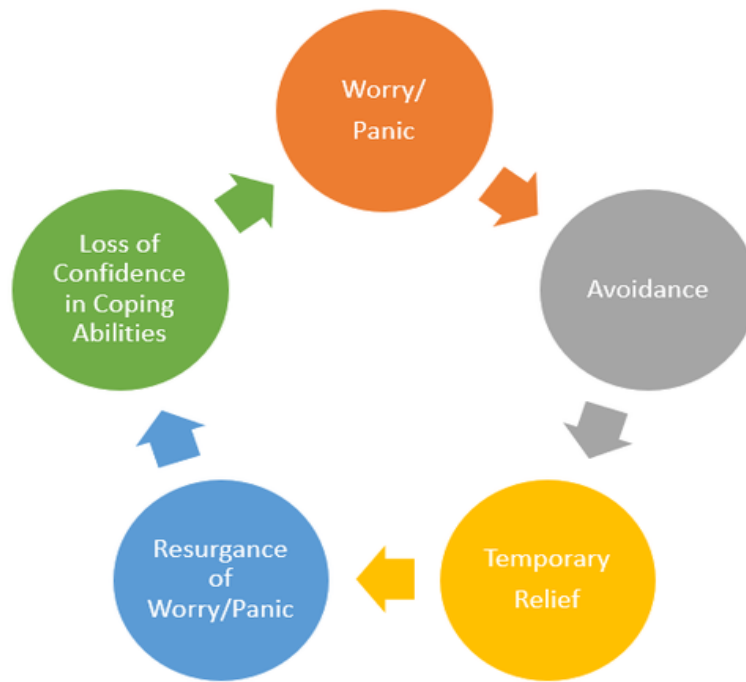
Reversing the vicious cycle of anxiety



Recognising Physical Symptoms.

To help your child recognise physical symptoms, draw a picture of a body and ask your child to identify where they feel anxiety in their body. Prompt your child if necessary, with an example "When I get anxious I get a funny fluttery feeling in my tummy". "What happens when you feel anxious?" they can then draw on the picture where their anxiety is usually felt, this can often be in more than one place.





School anxiety

School anxiety is a common issue. There are many causes of this and there are lots of ways that parents and professionals can help.

Causes of school anxiety:

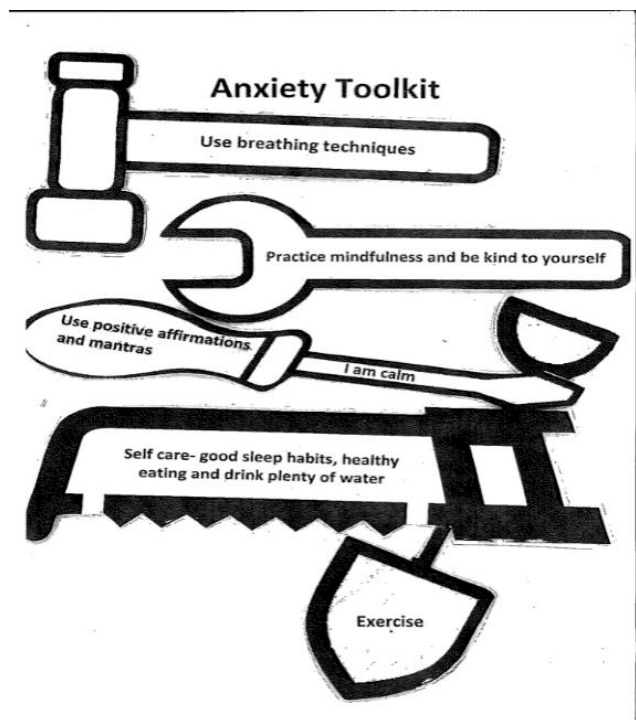
- Fear of failure
- Lack of preparation
- Pressure from others/self
- Challenges with peers

What maintains anxiety and makes it worse

- Reassurance- too much reassurance can stop children from having confidence in their own abilities
- Avoidance- when a young person avoids a situation it makes it worse in the long run. Avoidance reinforces that a situation is threatening. Gradual exposure can support if this feels overwhelming.
- Safety behaviours- negative safety behaviours such as avoidance
- Caffeine/ energy drinks
- Drugs/alcohol
- Parents anxiety
- Language
- Poor sleep
- Poor diet
- Excessive use of electronic devices
- Negative automatic thoughts
- Anxious thinking

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Ways to help your child

- Speak with the school for advice. They might have a support system in place or be aware of a key piece of information you are missing.
- Extra time around transitions
- Frequent check ins
- Not having to read or present aloud to peers
- One notecard for important facts and information
- Reasonable time limits for homework- get your child to stop at a certain time.
- Record class lectures
- 'Cool down' passes
- Break down assignments into small parts
- Preferential seating in class and assemblies (this could include the back, front or near the door of a room)
- Help after illness: feeling like they are behind can increase anxiety
- Clear communication about changes such as substitute teachers
- Having a key adult to speak with in school
- Set small goals
- Create sensory boxes

8 WAYS A CHILD'S ANXIETY SHOWS UP AS SOMETHING ELSE

1. Anger

The perception of danger, stress or opposition is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.



4. Chandeliering

Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.



2. Difficulty Sleeping

In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.



5. Lack of Focus

Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.

FOCUS

6. Avoidance

Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.



7. Negativity

People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.

3. Defiance

Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child's defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.



8. Overplanning

Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.



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