Parent Coffee Morning

Mental Health Support Team

NHS

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAMS

What is anxiety?

- A natural evolutionary response
  - Fight/Flight/Freeze
- Experienced by everyone
- It is meant to be helpful
- Causes changes to our thoughts, feelings and behaviours
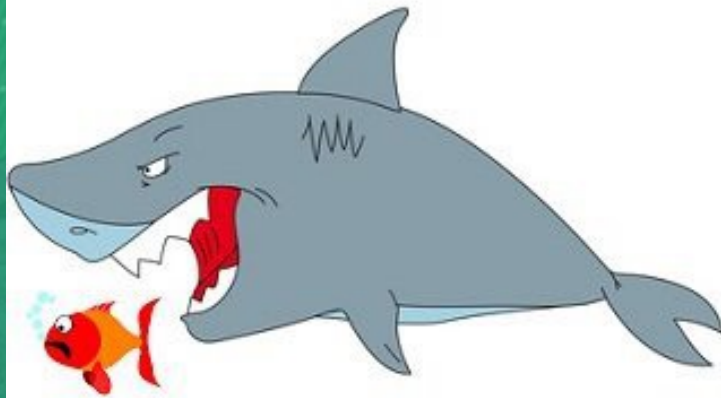
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Fight, flight or freeze

When we are in an anxiety-provoking situation, our in-built alarm system goes off, which tells us to fight, flight or freeze to keep ourselves safe.

However, it can also be set off when we are not in danger.

FEAR

Stress Response from Immediate Danger!

ANXIETY

What if the big bad fish comes out today???

Stress Response just from your Thoughts!

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Common Symptoms

Physical
Headache
Tummy ache
Sweaty palms
Heart beating faster
Dry mouth
Feeling sick

Behavioural
Avoidance
Being quiet/withdrawn
Being more chatty
"Acting up"
Crying

Emotional
Worried
Upset
Stressed
Angry
Numb
Confused

Thoughts
Worries or negative thoughts about the anxiety-provoking situation, about their ability to cope, or about other peoples' perceptions

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Different Types of Anxiety

Anxiety doesn't come in one shape or form but there are some more common types of anxiety.

- Separation Anxiety – being anxious to separate from a care giver
- Social Anxiety – being anxious that they will be perceived negatively by others
- Worries/ Generalised Anxiety – lots of different topics and usually 'what if?'

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What makes a child vulnerable to anxiety?

- Genes (around one third)
- Life events or experiences
- Learned behaviour
- Temporary circumstances

(or a combination of these)

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When does anxiety become a problem?

It is common for younger children to feel anxious around drop-off. There may be many factors leading them to feel anxious, such as separating from their care giver.

But if the anxiety is causing distress that gets in the way of every day life, stops them from taking part or attending school, this may be a sign to try some additional strategies.

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What keeps the anxiety going?

- Avoidance
- Safety behaviours
- Reassurance
- Missed opportunities for coping
- Lack of confidence – specifically in their ability to cope
- Lack of independence
- Worries becoming stuck

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The Cycle of Avoidance

Something is making me anxious

I'm worried

The anxiety feels worse because we have not learnt to cope with it

I'm even more stressed out now

Worry goes unchallenged and we don't know what to do about it

I should avoid my worry

Oh no, it's happening again

The trigger may never go away, but we can change how we manage our feelings about it

This is hopeless

Whew, I avoided it

Avoidance causes short term relief reinforces the anxiety but eliminates a learning opportunity

How can I help my child?

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Help your child understand

- Help them to understand what they are feeling
  - Naming emotions
  - Make suggestions
  - Talk about your own emotions
- Let them know that anxiety is a normal emotion
- Empathise, e.g. 'I can see you are feeling…'

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Reducing Reassurance

- Try to avoid jumping in to reassure or problem solve
- Ask questions
- Focus on positives, e.g. 'It sounds like there are lots of fun things happening at school today'
- Support your child to learn they can cope, e.g. 'You were worried yesterday but had a good day, maybe that shows us today will be good too'

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Take Steps to Improve Confidence and Resilience

- Encourage independent behaviour
- Encourage them to try new or challenging things
- Use praise and rewards for brave behaviour
- Encourage your child to break the avoidance cycle

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What would this look like at drop off?

- Letting them know you understand
- Validating that their experience is real
- Focusing on the positives, e.g. 3 good things
- Checking in with your own emotions
- Avoiding giving an 'escape route'
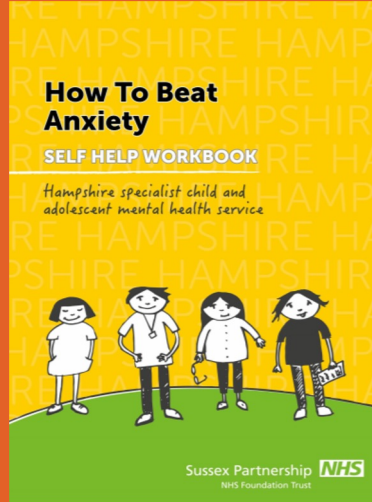
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Even if you don't think your child is anxious now, you can begin using these strategies to prevent the onset of anxiety, and promote their confidence and resilience.

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Helpful Resources

Apps:
Mindshift
Headspace
Self help for anxiety management (SAM)
Worry Box
Clear Fear

Hampshire CAMHS How To Beat Anxiety Workbook – www.hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk

Books:

Helping Your Child with Fears and Worries by Cathy Cresswell and Lucy Willetts
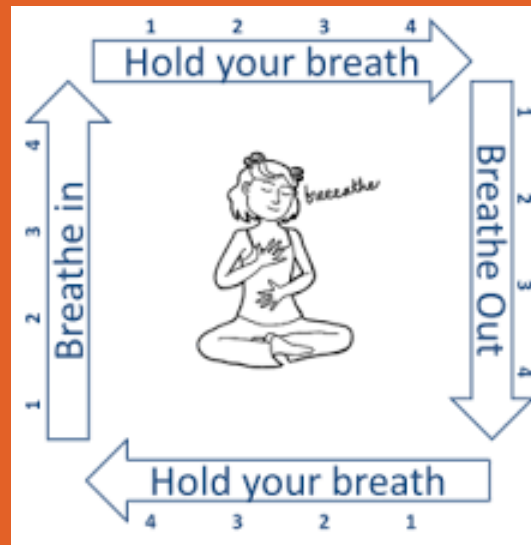What To Do When You Worry Too Much by Dawn Huebener

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Helpful Resources: Activities

Worry Jar/Monster

Breathing Techniques

Self-Soothe Box

https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/video/5-of-7-make-your-own-self-soothe-box/

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