

## Managing anxiety Skills – Helpful tools to help adults and children

### **Definition of Anxiety**

A feeling of worry, nervousness or unease about something with an uncertain outcome.

It is used as a mechanism to protect against danger- Fight, flight or freeze

Anxiety can be helpful for job interviews, exams etc,

- Helps us focus
- Prepares us for peak performance

### **Four elements sign and symptoms**

#### **Psychological Symptoms**

- Worrying
- Sleep disturbance i.e nightmares, tiredness
- Being irritable, impatient, angry
- Being unable to concentrate, remember detail, confusion, racing mind or blank mind
- Confusion
- Feeling out of control of your own actions or detached from your surroundings
- Restlessness, feeling on edge
- Unrealistic or excessive fear and worry

#### **Physical Symptoms**

- Discomfort in your abdomen, diarrhoea, nausea, vomiting, dry mouth
- Chest pains, rapid heartbeat, flushing, palpitations, shortness of breath
- Dizziness, headache, sweating, tingling, numbness
- Needing to urinate more often than usual, may start wetting the bed
- Shaking, muscle aches/pains, restlessness
- Changes to eating patterns

#### **Behaviours Symptoms**

- Avoidance
- Repetitive compulsive behaviour
- Urges to escape a situation, distress in school situations
- Reassurance seeking
- Tantrums and irritability
- Perfectionism tendencies – spending more time doing school work or say there isn't enough
- Complaining of physical illness as a way to avoid situations
- Withdrawing from situations
- Emotional – being tearful or clingy, saying they don't want to go to school

## **Impact of Anxiety**

- Poor attendance
- Isolation
- Loss of friendship
- Future prospects
- Missing education

## **Causes of Anxiety**

- Genetics
- Life events
- Learnt behaviours
- Missed opportunities to cope and develop resilience

## **How do we tackle unhelpful anxiety?**

- Cognitive behaviour therapy
- Graded exposure techniques
- Challenging safety behaviours
- Avoiding our behaviours that keep anxiety going in others

## **What keeps anxiety going?**

- Avoidance – reinforce fear and doesn't give the opportunity to develop coping strategies
- Reassurance – prevents children from learning they can
- Cope independently – it doesn't work long term
- Misinterpreting normal bodily responses as actual threats
- Anxious thoughts

## **Common Safety behaviours**

- Avoidance – so not going somewhere i.e. school
- Escape – being there but then leaving as soon as anxiety arises
- Subtle avoidance – distraction this can include such things as counting in your head, calming breaths, having somebody with you averting eyes

## **How can we help?**

Encourage children to face your fears, it is normal to avoid your fears, however small exposure to your fears can help you overcome fears

1. Set a goal
2. Make a list (What have you been avoiding?) Reorder your list  
(0) Being no fear (10) being very scared
3. Ask questions to get the young person thinking logically

4. Don't rush, give them time and reassurance that you are there saying things like 'I am here for you' 'we can do this together'.
5. Reward them
6. Teach breathing techniques - in for 7, out 11- slow deep breathing. To help with breathing techniques you could count for the child whilst they do the breathing, for example, count 1,2,3 and the child breaths in and then 1,2,3 whilst the child breaths out to regulate their breathing.
7. Holding a light object in front of their mouth such as paper or a feather can help with breathing. Trying to limit the movement of the object as much as possible to slow down breathing.
8. A child could draw an object, for example a flower, and label each petal, breath in, 1, 2, 3, breath out, 1, 2, 3, and they go round the flower until they reach where they started.
9. Provide anchor - what can you see, hear, and touch? Sit on the floor, back on the wall, knees up to the chest.
10. Journaling - 3 positive things about the day and worries.
11. Positive talk about themselves. They could state 3 things that they think they are good at or like about themselves each morning. They could say 3 things about the person they sit next to etc.
12. Help the child understand their reaction and normalise those reactions.
  - \*Acknowledge their feelings
  - \*Be sure to fully understand what the worry actually is. Use **what** and **how** questions? Avoid **why?**
  - \*Ask questions to get the young person to relay their own fears
13. Positive wellbeing - exercise, eat well, do something nice for yourself, do something nice for others, socialise, good bedtime routine.
14. Imagining their favourite place or a place that makes them feel safe.
15. Something for them to fiddle with or hold in their hands such as, a squashy ball or something that has a switch or a movable component. (sensory/fidget toys)
16. A blanket to wrap up in can help with grounding and making them feel safe.
17. Discussing their worries. For example, if they are worried about a test, ask them what they think would happen if it went badly, then what would happen after that and so on. Reassuring them that the worst case scenario isn't as bad as they think. If they did badly in the test what would happen etc.
18. If a child tends to worry about future events, limit the time period between where they are told and when it is actually happening where possible. It can be that the anticipation of the event occurring is what causes the anxiety to occur.
19. A worry box, and when they write something to go in the worry box, that removes it from their mind, they don't need to think about it anymore. You could characterise the box, 'the worry fairy' 'the worry monster' etc. So the child is giving their worry to the worry fairy. If it is a class worry box, it can help to sometimes read out the worries and the class discuss together, keeping the worry anonymous.