

WHAT IS ANXIETY AND WHEN DOES IT BECOME A PROBLEM?

- Anxiety is a normal emotion
- It can be helpful and enhance performance
- Anxiety becomes a problem when it is more severe or frequent and interferes with a child's everyday life



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How anxiety can affect children's lives?



Social



School



Mood

Exercise: What have been the biggest problems caused by your child's anxiety?

WHAT CAUSES ANXIETY?



- It can be useful to explore the different things that may have played a part in your child having difficulties with anxiety.
- There is unlikely to be a single cause for your child's problems with anxiety.

Exercise: Write down the things you think may have played a part in your child having problems with anxiety?

WHAT THEY ARE BORN WITH



- Anxiety runs in families
 - But only a third of what makes a child anxious is explained by their genes
 - Children are not born with anxiety, but might be more at risk of anxiety, for example, by being more sensitive
- Has your child has always been sensitive?
 - Does anyone else in your family experience anxiety or have they experienced anxiety in the past?

DIFFICULT LIFE EVENTS

- Stressful events may affect anxious children more

- Has your child experienced any stressful or upsetting life events?
- If so, do you think it has affected them?



DO I NEED TO KNOW WHAT CAUSED MY CHILD'S ANXIETY?

- Although it can be helpful to understand what may have caused your child's anxiety problem, this is not essential if those things are not happening now.
- It is much more important to understand what is keeping their anxiety going.



WHAT ELSE KEEPS ANXIETY GOING?



Anxious thinking

Body symptoms

Anxious behaviour

ANXIOUS THINKING



- This is when a child thinks something bad is going to happen and thinks they will be unable to cope
- Look out for evidence to support this

Do you have an idea of what your child's anxious thoughts are when they are in a challenging situation?
What do they think will happen?

BODY SYMPTOMS

Children can think these feelings in their body are a sign that something bad is happening

This can reduce their confidence in coping with challenges

As these feelings are often unpleasant it can also increase avoidance

- Does your child complain about how their body feels?
 - How do they react to these feelings?
- Does this affect what they think about the situation and what they do?

ANXIOUS BEHAVIOUR

Avoidance keeps fears going as children never learn if bad things happen or not.

Avoidance also means they don't get the opportunity to develop coping skills.


Safety-seeking behaviours are things the child does to keep themselves safe. They can keep fears going if the child believes they only coped because they did the safety-behaviour.

Reassurance can prevent children from learning that they can cope without the help/support of others.


What does your child do when they are feeling anxious or worried?

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR TREATMENT?

- Children's thoughts and behaviours are influenced by other people around them.
- This means that adults can influence more positive ways of coping.



Anxious thinking



Anxious behaviour

SETTING GOALS



WHY SET GOALS?



Goals help create a focus for you and your child.

It is important to develop goals that are realistic and achievable.

SMART GOALS

It is important that the goals you set are **SMART**

Specific

Measurable

Achievable

Realistic

Timely

EXAMPLES

Not a SMART goal:

“For my child to be less anxious sleeping over at other people’s houses”

A SMART goal:

“For my child to be able to go to a sleepover at their best friend’s house and stay until the morning.”

QUESTIONS TO HELP WITH SETTING GOALS

If you had a magic wand that meant that when you wake up tomorrow your child does not have any problems with anxiety, what would be different?

What changes would you, or someone from outside your family, notice?

How would we know there had been a change?

Is there anything your child currently has to do because of their anxiety?

Is there anything they are unable to do because of their anxiety?

REASSURANCE

Reassurance is a natural response, and in some situations, it may reduce distress in the short-term.

Anxious children often seek out reassurance however, it often does not help them to feel less anxious in the long run.

Reassurance can be addictive: the more a child gets reassurance, the more they will want it/think they need it.

Cutting out reassurance (by responding differently) can be attempted gradually and in a way that feels comfortable.

SEEING DANGER EVERYWHERE



Anxious children are often on the lookout for danger

They may think they won't be able to cope with what happens

Unhelpful thoughts can make children more anxious and feel less able to cope

Asking questions, not giving answers



- Some children may not be able to explain what they think will happen in situations they fear.
- If we can understand a child's thoughts, we can understand what they need to learn to overcome their problems with anxiety.

Possible Questions

- **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?**

LEARNING THROUGH EXPERIENCES



We all learn through our experiences including that setbacks happen and difficult feelings do pass. Typically, if we keep trying, we are likely to overcome challenges.

However, anxious children often fail to learn new helpful information as they often avoid trying new, challenging, or anxiety provoking things

So, we must make sure to give them opportunities to develop independence, test things out so they can learn that they can cope, and succeed, even if it doesn't always work out well the first time

Learning through experiences

BUILDING INDEPENDENCE



- It is important that children learn to become independent in order to overcome their anxiety and to increase their sense of achievement.
 - They need to learn that they may be able to fight their own battles, without an adult coming to the rescue and have the opportunity to have a go for themselves.
- Do you find yourself stepping in to help your child a lot? How could you encourage your child to do things for themselves and to feel more independent?



REWARDS

The most useful way to encourage children to have a go at testing their fears is through rewards, to acknowledge the effort they have made to overcome their anxiety.

Rewards don't need to be expensive or cost money but should fit with the achievement that a child has made.

LEARNING TO FACE FEARS



- Fears won't go away unless we actually stand up to them.
- Avoiding things means we never find out whether they were really as bad as we thought and never find ways to deal with them.
- The only way of overcoming fears is to do the things that make us scared.

Have you tried to help your child to face fears already?
What happened?



A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH



Fears are faced gradually.



Decide on which fear to face first.



Come up with an ultimate goal (the thing you are aiming for at the end of the step plan) which is achievable and realistic



Come up with an ultimate reward for the ultimate goal

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 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-seeking behaviours.
- Problem solve any difficulties your child faces with a step.

UNPLANNED EXPERIMENTS



Unplanned experiments can be useful opportunities to learn new information or build on what they have learned



Be on the lookout for other opportunities for your child to face fears, where possible alongside the step plan, e.g. at the park, in a café, or at a relative's house



If you manage to do unplanned experiments – make sure to ask your child what they think will happen and offer a reward/encouragement



Check afterwards what happened and what your child learned

PROBLEM SOLVING

Problem solving can be helpful when your child faces real-life problems that make them feel anxious, e.g. child is worried about attending school because a child won't let them join in games

Children who are highly anxious often feel like they are not in control of challenging situations and are not confident in their ability to problem solve.

However, when we test their actual problem solving abilities they can do this- they just don't think they can.

This leads them to seek help from others to solve problems.

It is important for children to become independent and confident in their own ability to deal with problems that they encounter.

HOW TO DO STEP-BY-STEP PROBLEM SOLVING?



- What is the problem?
 - Ask the child to describe what the problem is.
- Weird and wonderful solutions
 - Ask the child to list as many different ideas as possible about what they might do to solve the problem.
- Which is the best solution?
 - Ask the child what might happen if they carry out each solution
 - Ask the child whether each solution is doable
 - Ask the child to rate the best solutions
- Encourage the child to make a decision and have a go!
- Ask the child how it went. Praise the child for their efforts

PRACTICAL PROBLEMS YOU MAY FACE



1. I don't have enough time to do the exercises.
2. It is quicker (easier) to just do something for my child, rather than try to get them to do it them self.
3. I don't know when to push my child. Are they anxious or are they not interested?
4. Other family members have different ideas about what is the right thing to do.
5. When my child 'acts up' I don't know if this is because they are upset or being difficult.
6. I'm not there at the times that my child worries.
7. It seems unfair to my other children to be rewarding one child for doing things they do all the time.
8. We know what our child needs to do to overcome their fears, but those situations don't happen very often in everyday life.

PERSONAL PROBLEMS YOU MAY FACE

I find it hard to keep motivated to keep 'pushing' my child.



I can't help worrying about how my child will be able to manage if I give them a push

It is hard to push my child to do something, when there are other members of the family who have the same problem and are not doing anything about it.

KEEPING THINGS GOING



Important to keep practicing the skills learned.



From time to time, you will need to review your own reactions and check whether you are providing more reassurance than you would like or allowing your child to avoid feared situations.



You should continue to be open and show your child how you test out fears (where appropriate)



You should set goals that have yet to be reached and review them as each one is achieved.



You should set aside some time each week to review your child's progress.

KEY STRATEGIES

