

Anxiety Management for Children and Young People Parent Booklet



Produced by the Dublin
West Primary Care
Psychology Service

WELCOME!

Introduction

Dear Parent/guardian,

The Primary Care Psychology Service is pleased to welcome you and your child to this 'Anxiety Management' programme. The programme is broadly based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and provides children with the tools they need to cope during times of anxiety. The information is supported by visual materials as well as lots of fun and interactive activities for you and your child to do together.

The aim of the programme is to help your child learn important skills and techniques to cope with and manage anxiety.

Included in this programme is a parent booklet and a child booklet which are to be used alongside each other. The parent booklet provides information for parents on anxiety, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and ways in which you can support your child to manage their anxiety. The child booklet provides fun and interactive activities for you and your child to complete together and tools for managing their anxiety.

It is important for your child to practice the skills they learn throughout the programme and for you to support them in doing this as without you there is no success! Every step they take along the ladder to their goals, no matter how small, should be encouraged and praised.

Contents of the programme:

- Understanding anxiety
- Learning to feel confident and brave
- Tackling avoidance – Taking on new challenges
- Examining and challenging our thinking
- Paying attention to our thoughts
- Tools to help ourselves and others
- Relaxation activities

Please let us know if you have any questions or feedback.

Kind regards,

The Primary Care Psychology Service

What is Anxiety?



Anxiety is a normal feeling experienced by everyone on a daily basis. It is an evolutionary aspect of development essential for keeping us safe when we are in danger. This is done through our “*fight or flight*” response. The “*fight or flight*” response is a physiological response that prepares our bodies and minds to fight, flight (run), or freeze in a situation. This response demands a lot from our bodies’ resources and can be felt as rapid breathing which increases our oxygen levels, rapid heart rate which diverts blood to our brains and muscles, or loss of appetite, as non-essential systems in that moment slow down so that our bodies can focus on more immediate things like getting to safety.

Using our bodies and voice to feel confident and brave (pg 6)

Try this at home!



Talk to your child about how when we are in a new or challenging situations we can use our voice and body to make us feel brave. Can they think how?

1. Talk in a brave voice
2. Looking people in the eye
3. Smiling more often
4. Standing up tall



Show your child how to do this and ask them to do the same. Practice using these techniques when your child is relaxed and feels safe and encourage them to use them when they need to feel brave.

What's in our toolbox?



Talk to your child about their understanding of anxiety (pg 1).



Talk about our "fight or flight" response, how it feels in the body and how it is important for keeping us safe but sometimes stops us trying new things (pg. 2.)

Lets play!



Together find 3 differences and 3 things the same between each other.

What makes you different?

What makes you the same?

We are all different in many ways, but there are some ways we are the same. People act and feel differently about the same situation because we are all different; this is because we all see situations in our own way! This doesn't always mean that one person is right and another is wrong, it just means we are all individuals. Remembering that we are all different can help us to understand our own and other people's feelings better.

Listening to our bodies

Talk to your child about our body's different ways of feeling when we feel different emotions –

When you are scared, does your body do anything different to usual?

What about when you're sad? How about when you're angry?

Sometimes we might have really strong feelings and because we do not know what is happening, we do silly things. Usually our body sends us messages to help us. It might be telling us to relax, or calm down, or walk away. We just have to listen carefully.



Talk about and draw where we can feel different emotions in our bodies (e.g. excitement in our tummies, hands sweating when we are nervous, heart beating fast when we are scared, relaxed muscles when we are calm) (pg. 3).



Look at our feelings thermometer to identify what it looks like as our "temperature" rises (eg. what does it look like when we are relaxed and calm? What does it look like as we become more upset or worried?) (pg. 4).

Lets Play!

“Welcome to Mythbuster: The Game Show with your host X. Today’s category is about understanding what it means to be worried. Our team have to work together to figure out what’s TRUE or FALSE about feeling worried or anxious”



Worry is normal (True). Everyone experiences anxiety at times. For example it is normal to feel anxious before getting on a rollercoaster or before doing a test.

Worry or anxiety can be felt in the body (True). Our bodies show signs when we are worried such as increased heart rate, sweating palms, shaking, difficulty breathing.

Adults don’t feel worried (False). Everybody feels worried sometimes.

Celebrities don’t experience worries (False). Even famous people have worries.

If I avoid something that makes me worried, it will go away (False). Avoidance just increases the anxiety over time.

Being anxious means you’re weak (False). It’s ok to feel worried and anxious and being brave means being able to talk and think about your worries.

There are ways to manage worries and cope with them (True). We can learn strategies to cope with worries.

What's in our toolbox?

Tool 1- Relaxed Breathing (pg. 9)

When we are anxious or threatened our breathing speeds up in order to get our bodies ready for danger. Relaxed breathing (sometimes called abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing) signals to the body that it is safe to relax. Relaxed breathing is slower and deeper than normal breathing, and it happens lower in the body (in the belly rather than the chest). See page 9 for how to do relaxed breathing.



Feelings in the body and how Thoughts, Feelings, and Behaviour interact

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

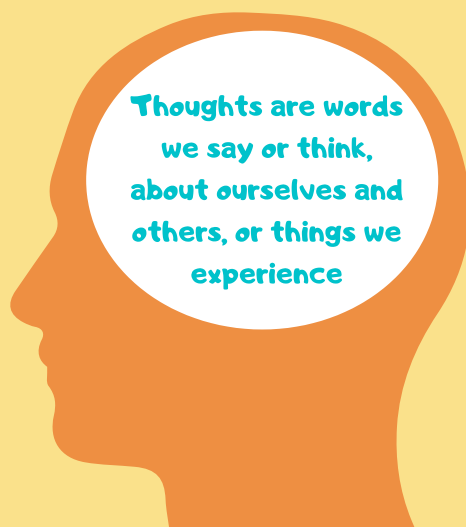
CBT is based on the idea that how we think (our thoughts), how we feel (our emotions), how we act (our behaviour), and physical responses all interact together. It states that our thoughts can influence our feelings, behaviour, and physical responses. With children we use the "Hot Cross Bun" to show how for any situation what we think, feel, and do are all connected to our emotions (pg. 12).



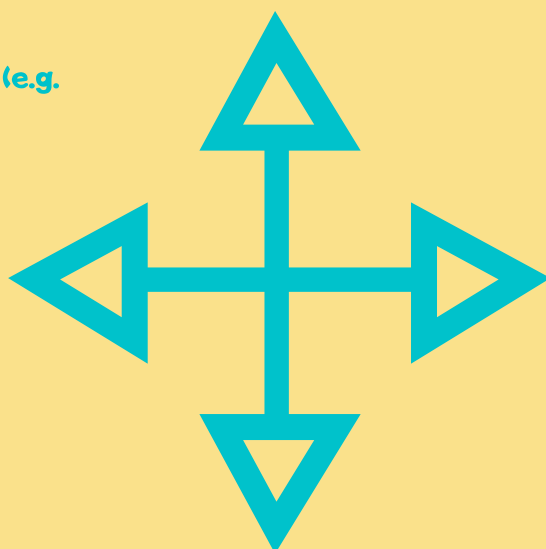
Unrealistic, negative thoughts can cause a person to become distressed. If a person is distressed, the way they interpret a situation might be more negative, which in turn might negatively affect their actions.

CBT helps people by making them aware of their own negative thoughts and behaviour patterns which reinforce their distorted thinking. It helps people to develop alternative ways of thinking and behaving, which overall helps to reduce anxiety.

Explaining Thoughts, Feelings, Behaviour,^{6.} and Physical responses to your child



Behaviour is the things we do (e.g. running away)



Feelings or emotions are being happy, sad, worried, scared etc.



Physical responses are how are body feels (e.g. tired, hot, sick, etc)



What's in our toolbox?



Look at the hot cross bun on pg 12 with your child. Think of a situation your child enjoys (e.g. going to a party). What thoughts (e.g. "this will be fun"), feelings (e.g. happy, excited), behaviour (e.g. getting ready to go), and physical responses (e.g. butterflies in the tummy, lots of energy) might your child have in this situation?



Look at the "negative situation" hot cross bun example with your child (pg. 13). Talk about how thinking something ("I can't do this") impacts on our feelings (feeling anxious), our behaviour (don't eat breakfast), and our physical responses (feeling sick).



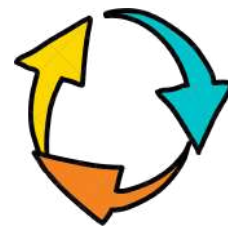
Can your child think of a time when they felt anxious? What thoughts did they have and how did this impact on their feelings, behaviour and physical responses? Try fill in the hot cross bun on pg. 14.



Remind your child that everyone worries now and then, no matter how strong or brave we are. Sometimes worrying or being afraid can be good for us and helps us to stay safe and healthy. There are things we can do when we feel anxious to help us feel better. Talk about and practice some of the things your child can do when they feel anxious (pg. 16)

The Anxiety Loop

This is a cycle where an anxious thought can lead to a person feeling anxious, which in turn leads them to doing an anxious behaviour (e.g. staying in their room, not speaking in class, etc.). This leads them to the belief that this behaviour protects them, which in turn leads to more anxious thoughts if they don't do this behaviour.



Avoidance

Sometimes anxiety makes doing things very difficult or stops us from doing things altogether. We call this avoidance. If we avoid the things that make us anxious it can make us feel a bit better for a while but really it makes the anxiety grow bigger. We need to take charge of the worry and work on taking small steps to facing the things that make us anxious.

An example to explain how avoiding things can make anxiety grow bigger

Lets say you are feeling anxious about school. You might feel like this because of things going on at school, such as problems with friends or not understanding school work, or because of things going on outside school, such as a parent being sick or birth of a new brother or sister. Sometimes you might feel like staying at home is the best thing to do as it makes you feel better. But the more time you miss out of school the more you miss out on lessons and the learning gets harder. You also miss out on seeing friends and keeping friendships gets harder. This can make you feel even more anxious about school. So we can see that avoiding the things that make us anxious can make the anxiety grow even bigger.



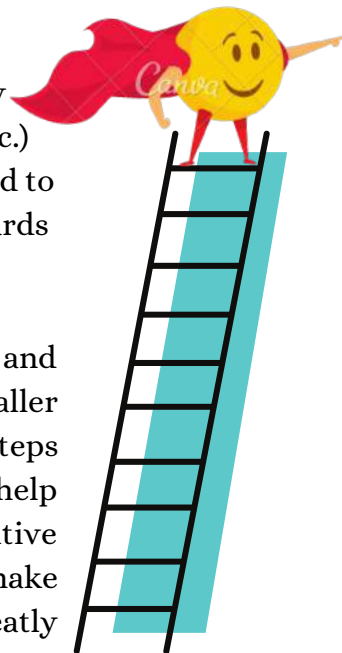
Talk to your child about what they can do if they feel like this?

Talk to somebody. This might be parents, an adult at school, other family members. It is important to let somebody know so that they can get help to make it better rather than let things get worse and get stuck. Use the support tree on page 28 to make a list of the people your child can go to for help.

Stairway to Bravery

The Stairway to Bravery involves identifying a goal that causes anxiety (e.g. visiting a school-friend's house, giving a presentation at school, etc.) and breaking it down into smaller, achievable steps. This helps the child to view more than just the anxiety-provoking situation and to build towards it by taking less stressful steps towards it.

Ask your child to think of a goal that they would like to work towards and use the stairway to bravery on page 11 to break this goal down into smaller steps. Some goals might need to be broken down into lots of smaller steps and that's okay! A crucial aspect of this which parents/guardians can help with is encouragement at **every** step of the process. Positive reinforcement through verbal praise and other incentives can really make a child feel good about this cognitive/behavioural change and greatly helps to progress with each step.

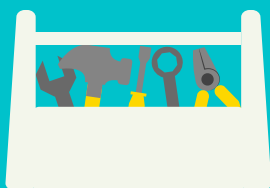


Tool 2- Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing a group of muscles as you breathe in, and then relaxing these muscles as you breathe out. Each of these muscle groups are worked on in a specific order.

This method helps your body to feel physically relaxed, which reduces feelings of anxiety. With practice, you can get better at this skill over time and be able to use this method to reduce stress.

When we teach this skill we usually use a script or audio recording to help children tense all of the muscle groups in order. This technique can also be used to help people to sleep. (See page 12 for script).



Examining and Challenging our Thinking



Red and Green thoughts

We've all been in positions when our thoughts get in the way of things we want to do. Sometimes negative thoughts trickle into our minds, which can lead to anxiety, decreased confidence, and avoidance. Yet, we can stop this negative cycle. Think of your thoughts like a traffic light with green and red thoughts.



Red thoughts STOP us from feeling good or doing things we want to do. They are unhelpful and can make us feel sad, worried and sometimes more upset than we need to feel. For example “**I can't do it**”, “**everyone will laugh at me**”, “**what if it goes wrong**”. But just because these red thoughts pop into our heads doesn't mean we have to believe them. We can actually learn to challenge red thoughts.

Green thoughts make us **GO** and are positive, helpful, and make it easier to do the things we want to do. These thoughts help us cope and feel more optimistic. It is important that green thoughts are also realistic. For example, "I'm the worst on the team" should not just be turned into "I'm the best player". Rather, some more realistic alternatives might be: "**I'm getting better the more I practice**" "**I'm good at lots of other things - I don't have to be the best at everything, that's impossible**", “**my friends and family love me no matter what**”. Green thoughts are not about lying to ourselves, but rather they help us to think about things in a more helpful, balanced way.

Remember thoughts are like our control centre, they can control our feelings and behaviour. If we can remember to question and change our thoughts, we have more control.

Learning to identify Red and Green thoughts

Read the thoughts below and ask your child if it is a **red** or a **green** thought:

"You're going to do badly".

"I'm going to do my best, my teacher and mam/dad always tell me my best is good".

"You're going to panic".

"I can take a deep breath".

"My teacher is going to be really angry".

"My teacher never gets angry if I try my best".

Use page 21 to think of more red and green thoughts.

Examples of Red and Green thoughts

Situation	Assumption (red thought)	Option (green thought)
Being invited to a party	The last time I went to a party, I had a bad time and I'm going to have a bad time at this party too.	This is a different party with different people. I will go and check it out. And hey, there's always snacks and cake.
Being asked to speak in front of the class	I hate speaking in front of the class. I might say something dumb or embarrassing.	Everyone is nervous speaking in public. If I say something wrong, I'll just laugh at myself and act like it's no big deal.
You're out driving and get stuck at a traffic signal	Did my car come with some magic signal? I ALWAYS catch all the red lights!	This gives me a moment to take a few calm breaths and be mindful. I have been so busy today.
Mom is late getting home	She must have been in a car accident!	There must be a lot of traffic or she had to stop at the store. That's what happened last time.
I need to make a doctor's appointment	Dr. Paul is always overbooked and I end up waiting for so long in the waiting room. It's such a waste of time.	I will ask for a morning appointment and that way, hopefully she won't be too far behind. I will bring a good book, just in case.
Going to a new class where I don't know anyone	What if I can't think of anything to say? What is everyone knows each other already?	There's nothing wrong with taking a minute to collect my bearings. I don't have to be super witty or funny all the time. I can be a good listener and ask questions.

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Tool 3- Visualization/ Imagination

Visualization tasks are a helpful tool to help children to calm themselves down or to feel more confident by imagining something powerful in their head for a few minutes. There are different types of imagination exercises that we can use such as mental vacations and confidence builders. They usually involve someone reading aloud from a script, which the child can then follow. (See pg. 25 for script).

REMEMBER!

We feel different emotions in our bodies. Help your child to notice when they are feeling anxious and how this feels in the body.

Anxiety is normal and everyone feels anxious sometimes no matter how strong or brave they are. Anxiety comes from our "fight or flight" response and helps keep us safe and healthy but sometimes stops us from doing things.

There are things we can do to help us feel better when we feel anxious. Practice these tools with your child and encourage them to use them when they feel anxious or worried.

Our thoughts, feelings, behaviour, and physical responses all interact with one another. Use the Hot Cross bun with your child to identify how their red thoughts in a situation impact on their feelings, behaviour and physical responses. Help them to challenge these red thoughts and turn them into green thoughts. Use these green thoughts to talk back to their worries.

Avoiding the things that make us anxious can make us feel better for a while but really just makes the anxiety grow bigger. Encourage your child to talk to someone when they feel anxious to help them find ways to feel better.

The stairway to bravery allows us to break goals down into smaller, more achievable steps. Use the stairway with your child to work towards their goals. Encourage and praise your child for each step they take towards achieving their goals no matter how small!