

# Understanding and Responding to Anxiety



Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2023

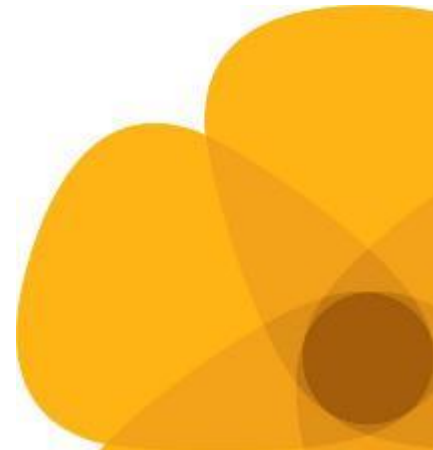
Hayley McGlashan and Sarah Keast

Primary Behaviour Service



# House keeping

- Phones on silent please.
- Feel free to ask questions as we go.
- Confidentiality is paramount.
- Beacon House.



# Anxiety

## Aims of the session:

- To understand what anxiety is.
- To talk through some top tips for responding to anxiety.



# What is anxiety?



- A normal response to something dangerous or stressful...
- When we detect a 'threat', our nervous system releases stress hormones including adrenaline and cortisol.
- These produce physiological changes which help us 'deal with' the imminent danger.

# Fight, Flight, and Freeze Responses

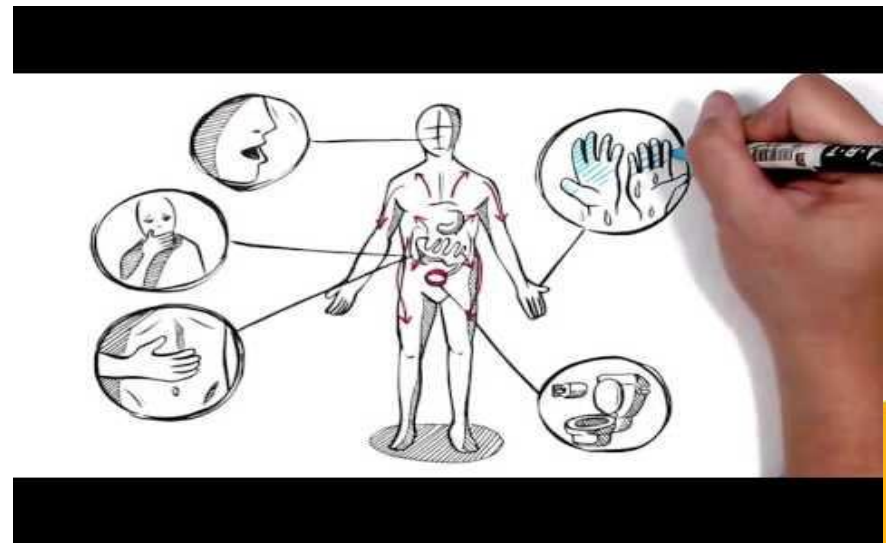
Younger Children

You Tube: Anxiety Canada



Older Children

You Tube: Braive



# How common is anxiety?

- Approximately 1 in 10 young people aged between 5-16 years have a diagnosable anxiety disorder.
- Approximately 50% of children referred to school counselling/play therapist for stress related anxiety.
- Children who are on social media for more than 3 hours a day, are three times more likely to have mental health problems including anxiety (Office for National Statistics 2015)



# Anxiety is made up of four parts

- **Thoughts** (e.g. “I’m not safe”; “I’m not good enough”);
- **Emotions** (e.g. fear, worry, panic);
- **Body symptoms** (e.g. sweating, fast heart rate, feeling faint, sleep problems)
- **Behaviours** (e.g. high avoidance; clinging to parent; turning to risky behaviours to cope)

Anxiety tends to get stuck in a vicious cycle; the more the child avoids the feared ‘thing’, the scarier that ‘thing’ becomes.





  
**Beacon House**  
Therapeutic Services and Trauma Team

## The Anxiety Cycle

**TRIGGER**



**Thoughts**

"I'm not good enough"  
"No-body likes me"



**Behaviour**

Avoidance, withdrawal,  
aggression

**Feelings**

fear, worry, anger

**Body**

Sweating, faint,  
fast heart rate



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# When does anxiety become a problem?



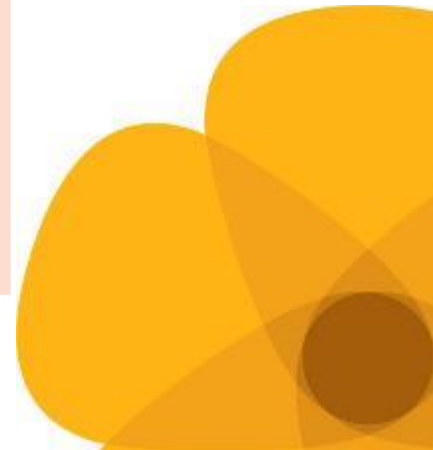
There is a fear or worry about a particular event or multiple areas of life, and it is:

Excessive compared to that experienced by peers (age-inappropriate)

Leads to avoidance of events

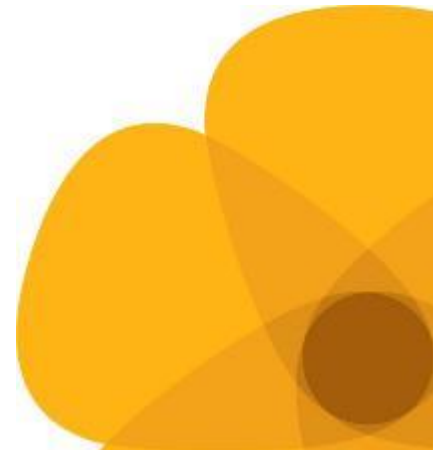
Causes significant distress and/or significant interference in daily activities

Persistent, lasting 6 months or more.



$$E + R = O$$

**EVENT + REACTION = OUTCOME**



# What do children worry about?

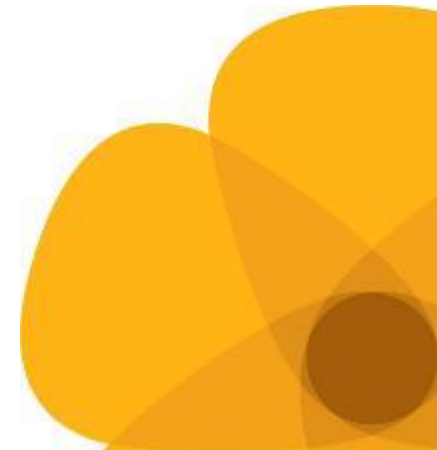
- Studies repeated from 1930s to 2009 show similar trends
- Early on, the focus is survival
- At birth – falling (the Moro reflex)
- From about 8 months – separation anxiety



# What do children commonly worry about?

3-6-years

- Disasters, monsters, imaginary creatures,
- Things under the bed,
- Things outside,
- Unfamiliar noises,
- Shapes of shadows; nightmares can start.
- Food and eating
- Toileting



# What do children commonly worry about?

## 8-12 years

- School performance, especially around tests and being 'picked'
- Parents divorcing or a parent dying
- Crime, 'baddies', burglars
- Peer rejection or being excluded
- Being bullied
- Themes related to what's in the news

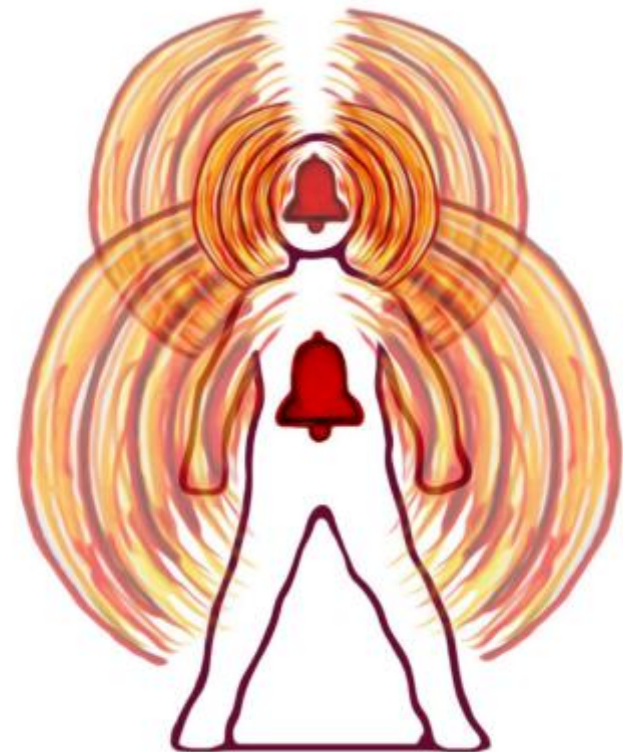




## What you might see or hear...

Anxiety doesn't always look like worry or fear;  
it might be **FIGHT AND FLIGHT AND FREEZE**

- My tummy hurts
- I need the loo (every 5 minutes)
- I'm hungry (all the time or at trigger times)
- Chewing cardigan, biting nails/fingers
- Aggressive/defensive talk
- Avoiding demands and withdrawing
- Patterns of reacting to or avoiding specific activities, lessons or people



# 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.



## 2. Difficulty Sleeping

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



## 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.



## 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.



## 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.



## 4. Chandeliering

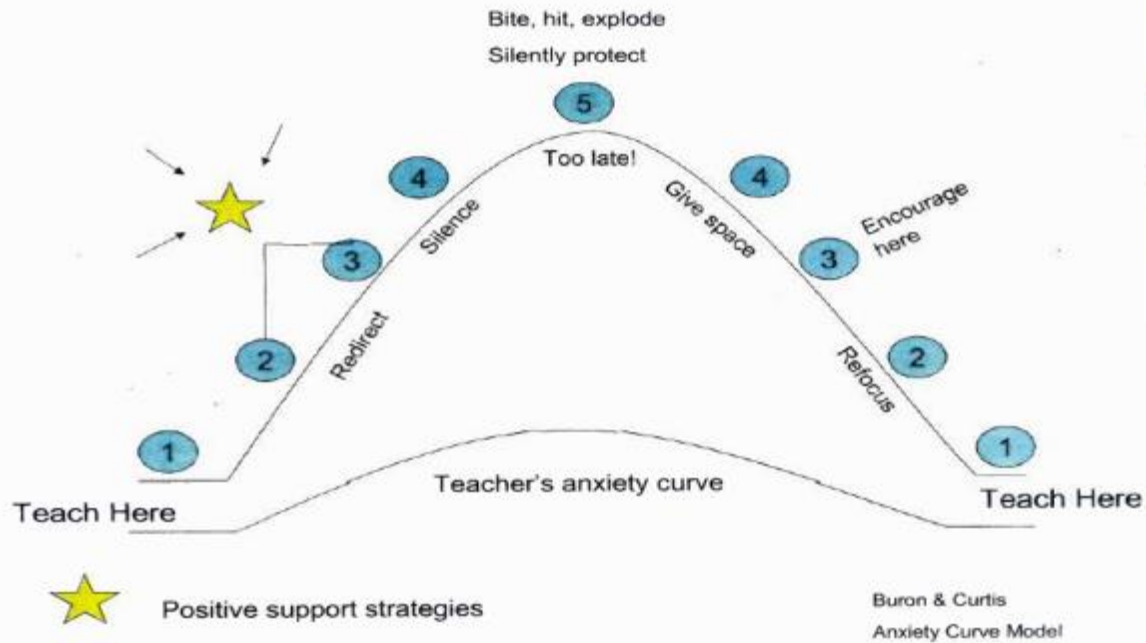
Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.



## 7. Negativity

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

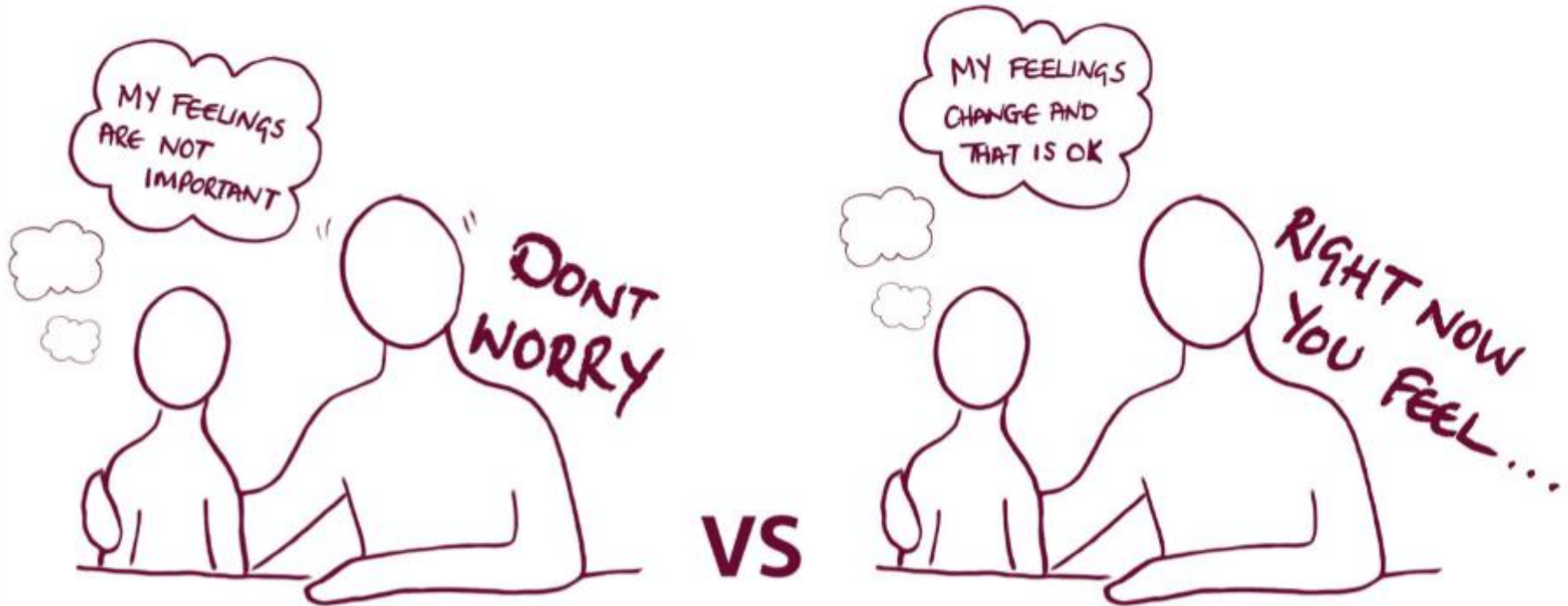
## The Anxiety Curve





# Top Tips





## Feelings Come & Go





## Priority: Calm the body

- Deep breathing (use eye contact & touch)
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Rhythmic movements (walking, running, rocking, jumping, stomping, tapping, trampolining)
- Pushing/pulling (press ups, tug of war)



## EXPLORING WITH YOUR SENSES

If you have a special grounding object, hold it during this activity. It will help charge it up with more calming power!



5 THINGS YOU CAN SEE



4 THINGS YOU CAN FEEL



3 THINGS YOU CAN HEAR



2 THINGS YOU CAN SMELL



1 GOOD THING ABOUT YOU

**Mindfulness  
to the 'here  
and now'**



# Finger Breathing



# Alternative breathing techniques:

Blowing Bubbles



Mindful Breathing



**Just One Breath BREATHING ACTIVITY**

Find a quiet place, sit comfortably, and set a timer for one minute.

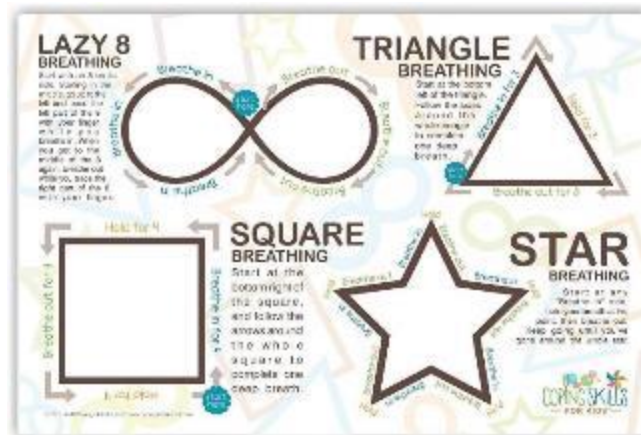
Breathe deeply in and out while paying attention to any sensations you notice or sounds you hear.

Take another slow deep breath, imagine the air moving down into the lungs and back up.

Take one more deep breath and hold for a moment, then release it.

Big Life Journal - [biglifejournal.com](http://biglifejournal.com)

Belly Breathing

**LAZY 8 BREATHING**  
Start at the top of the 8 and breathe in as you go down the left side, across the bottom, and up the right side. Breathe out as you go down the right side, across the bottom, and up the left side.

**TRIANGLE BREATHING**  
Start at the top of the triangle and breathe in as you go down the left side, across the bottom, and up the right side. Breathe out as you go down the right side, across the bottom, and up the left side.

**SQUARE BREATHING**  
Start at the top of the square and breathe in as you go down the left side, across the bottom, and up the right side. Breathe out as you go down the right side, across the bottom, and up the left side.

**STAR BREATHING**  
Start at any point of the star and breathe in as you go down the left side, across the bottom, and up the right side. Breathe out as you go down the right side, across the bottom, and up the left side.

Pom-Pom Races or Mazes



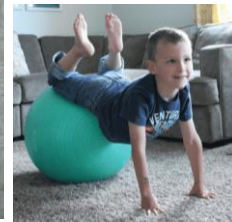
Shape Breathing

Blowing Pinwheels



# Regulation Activities:

Sensory Activities such as Orbeez or Kinetic Sand



lifting, pushing, pulling,  
jumping or pressure

Yoga such as Cosmic Kids

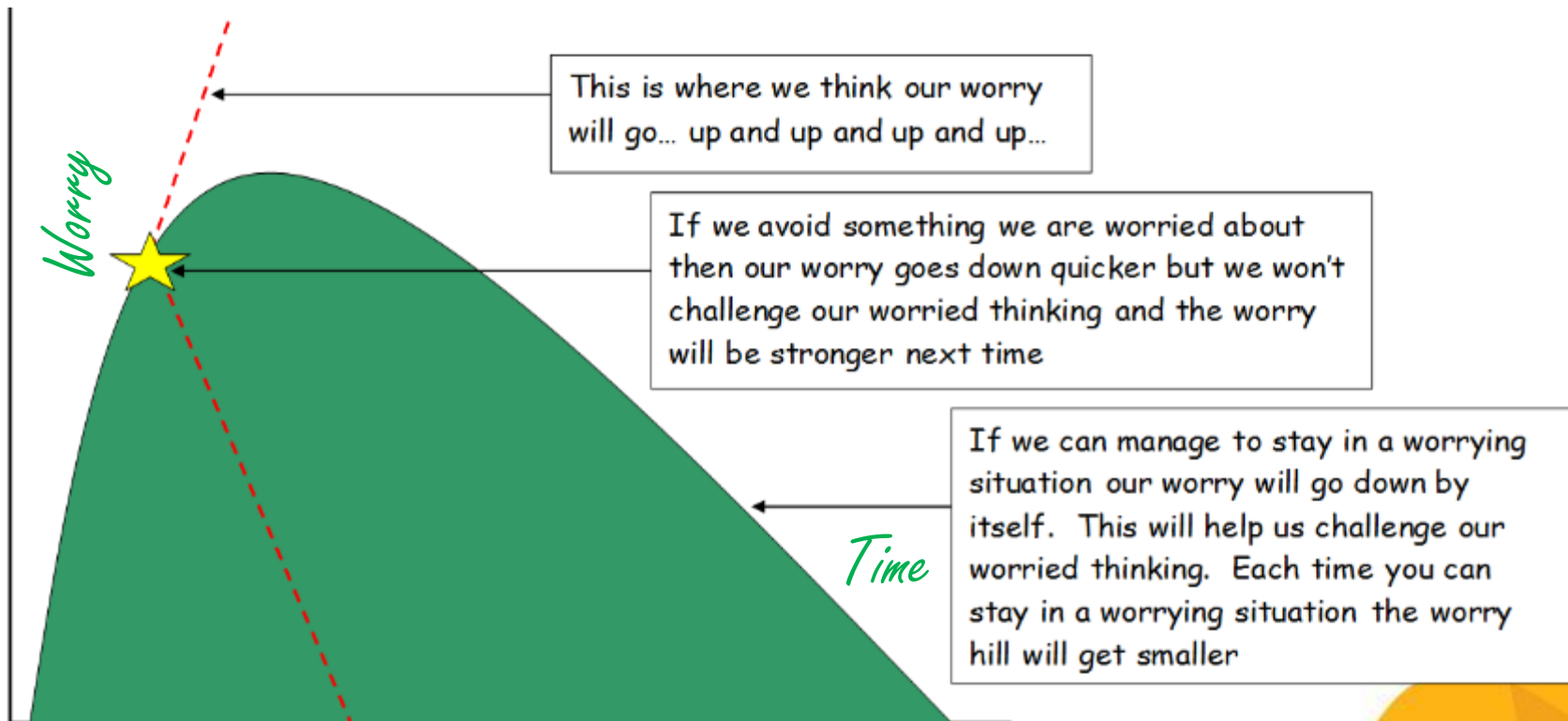


High Interest activities or those  
requiring repeated actions

# Avoid avoidance

- Avoidance & excessive reassurance grow and maintain stress and anxiety
- The brainstem never learns ‘this is safe, I am okay’
- Acute episodes of stress and anxiety almost always reduce after 45 mins – and when this starts to happen the brain does important learning.
- Reduce the anticipatory anxiety

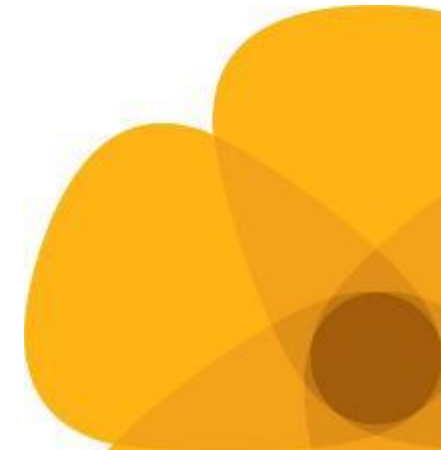
# The Worry Hill



# Graded exposure examples:



Behavior	Fear rating
Think about a spider.	10
Look at a photo of a spider.	25
Look at a real spider in a closed box.	50
Hold the box with the spider.	60
Let a spider crawl on your desk.	70
Let a spider crawl on your shoe.	80
Let a spider crawl on your pants leg.	90
Let a spider crawl on your sleeve.	95
Let a spider crawl on your bare arm.	100





## How is it for you?

How does it feel?

Does it feel like..?

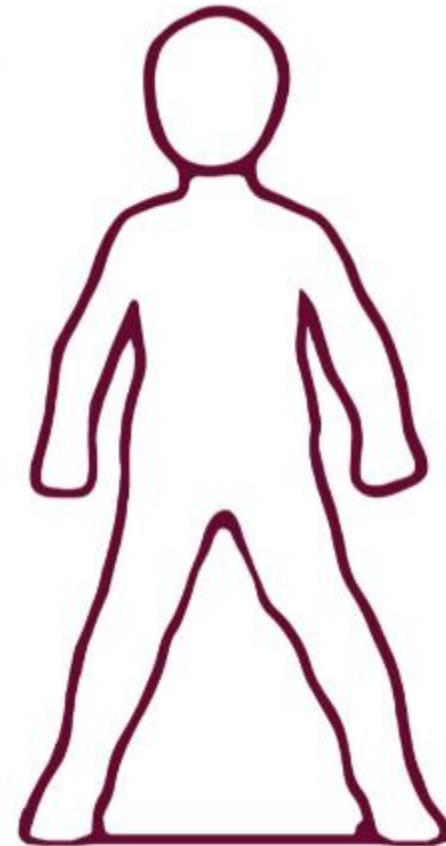
Where do you feel it?

Does it feel warm or cold?

Do you feel fast or slow?

I can see...

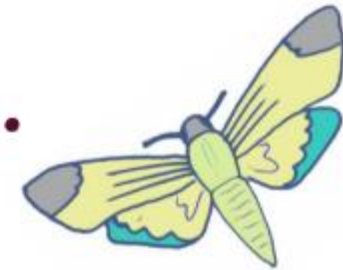
I wonder if...





## Dipping your toe in...

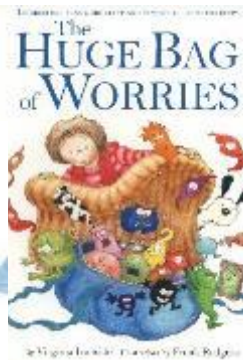
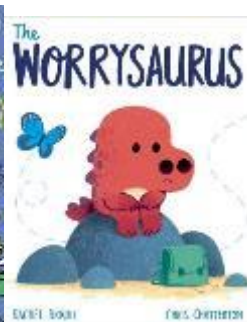
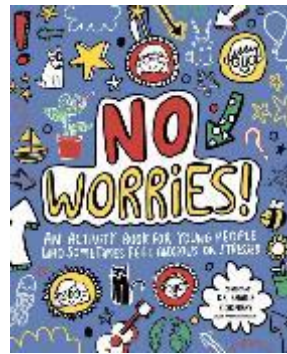
- If it was a colour, what would it be?
- If it was an animal, what would it be?
- If it was a shape, what would it be?
- Is it loud or quiet?
- Is it familiar or new?
- Is it large or small?



# When they are calm... be curious about their negative belief

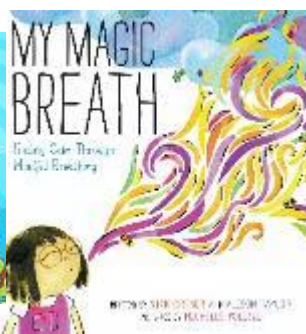
- On a scale of 0 – 10, how strong does that belief feel right now?
- Let's think of all the 'evidence' that the belief is true
- Let's think of all the 'evidence' that the belief is not always true
- What do you notice in your body as you think about this second list?
- Where are you on the scale now?

# Some useful resources...

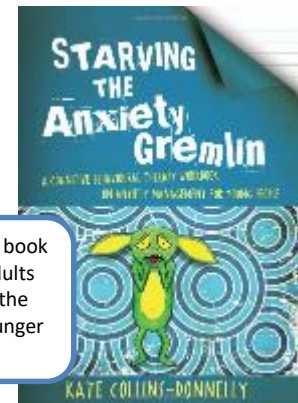


Explaining Anxiety to children

For mindful breathing and regulation



For older children (the book mentions 10+) but adults can use the ideas in the book and adapt to younger audiences



(Most of these can be found on YouTube being read as well)

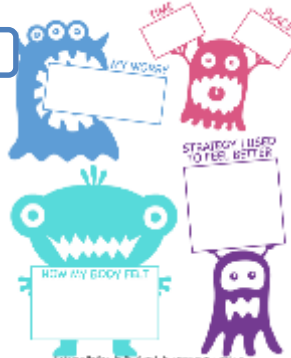
# Other Things to Try...



Worry Monsters



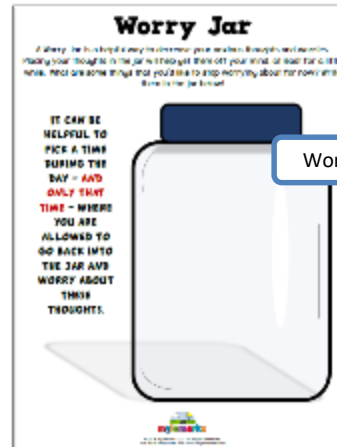
## MY WORRY MONSTER TRACKER



Worry Trackers and Diaries

Today I Feel...

Because...

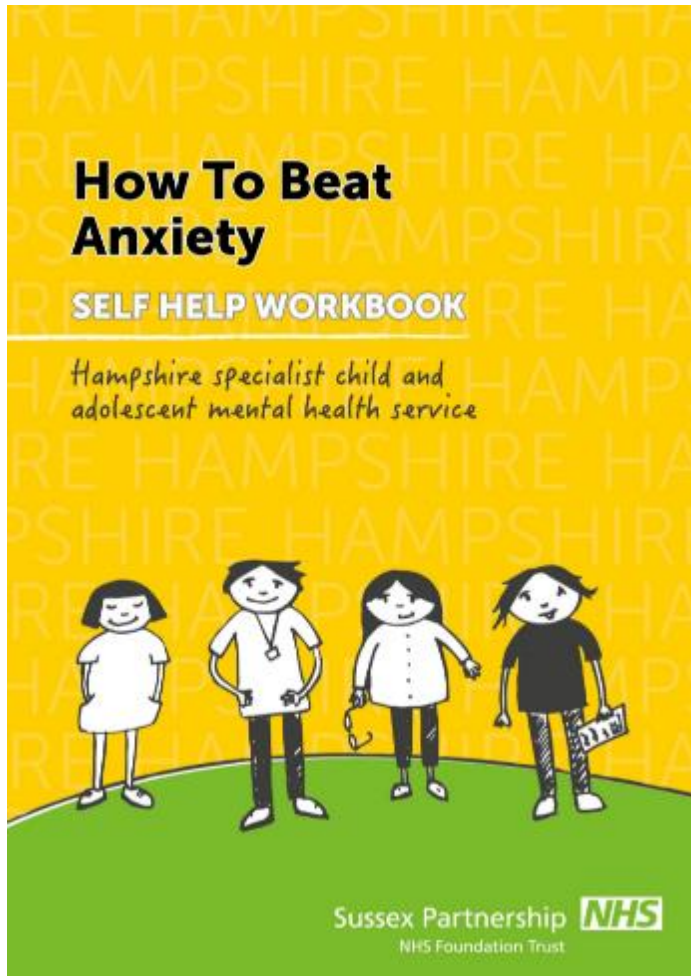


Worry Jars



<https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/issue/anxiety-2/>

[EBSA-Parents-and-Carers-Information.pdf \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://hants.gov.uk/EBSA-Parents-and-Carers-Information.pdf)



## Emotionally Based School Avoidance

Information for parents and carers

January 2021

Thank you!

