

When to worry about your worrier

Workshop

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Understanding and Supporting Worries

Why are we here today?

- *Validation and Reassurance*
- *Empowerment*
- *Practical Strategies*



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**EMOTIONAL HEALTH
AND WELLBEING**



Emotional Well-being

At primary school age, it is likely that a child's thoughts and emotions relating to worries are much better explained by:

- Reasonable and expected responses to the environment or event
- Their developmental stage
- Emotional regulation
- In certain cases, a neurodevelopmental disorder e.g. ASD/ADHD

“Challenging the medicalisation of well-being needs”

I’m depressed.

I’m a bit OCD about it.

I have anger issues.

My anxiety is playing up.

I’m an insomniac.

“Challenging the medicalisation of well-being needs”

I’m feeling a bit sad.

I have strong feelings about this.

I have lots of worries.

I’m not sure how I feel today.

I’m a bit overwhelmed by some big emotions.



Emotional regulation is the ability to exert control over one's own emotional state.

This may involve processes such as rethinking a challenging situation to reduce anger or worry, focusing on reasons to remain calm or be happy and containing our emotions until a more appropriate time.



Emotional Regulation

The greatest impact on psychological well-being Shenfield (2016)

Children will develop the ability to emotionally regulate at different stages. This ability continues developing well into adulthood.

A child cannot usually emotionally regulate to any great effect until **at least** the age of 8.

Without this ability being fully developed, children often display greater conflict, higher levels of stress and have difficulty in truly expressing how they are feeling.

We need to model and support emotional regulation.



Developmental Worries

Age	Typical Fears
9 months- 3 years	Sudden movements or loud noises, toilets and large objects, strangers and separation from parents/caregivers
3-6 years	Animals, dark and Monsters/ghosts, sleeping or staying alone
6-12 years	Thunder, lightening, death, Tests/ Exams, Performance anxiety
12-18 years	Social anxiety, personal appearance, and Relationships, fear of failure and future
Adulthood	Financial affairs, Death or illness

Common Worries

What are your child's top 3 worries?

Separation from
parent/s

Harm coming to loved ones



Death

School

Feeling unsafe

Friendships

Health

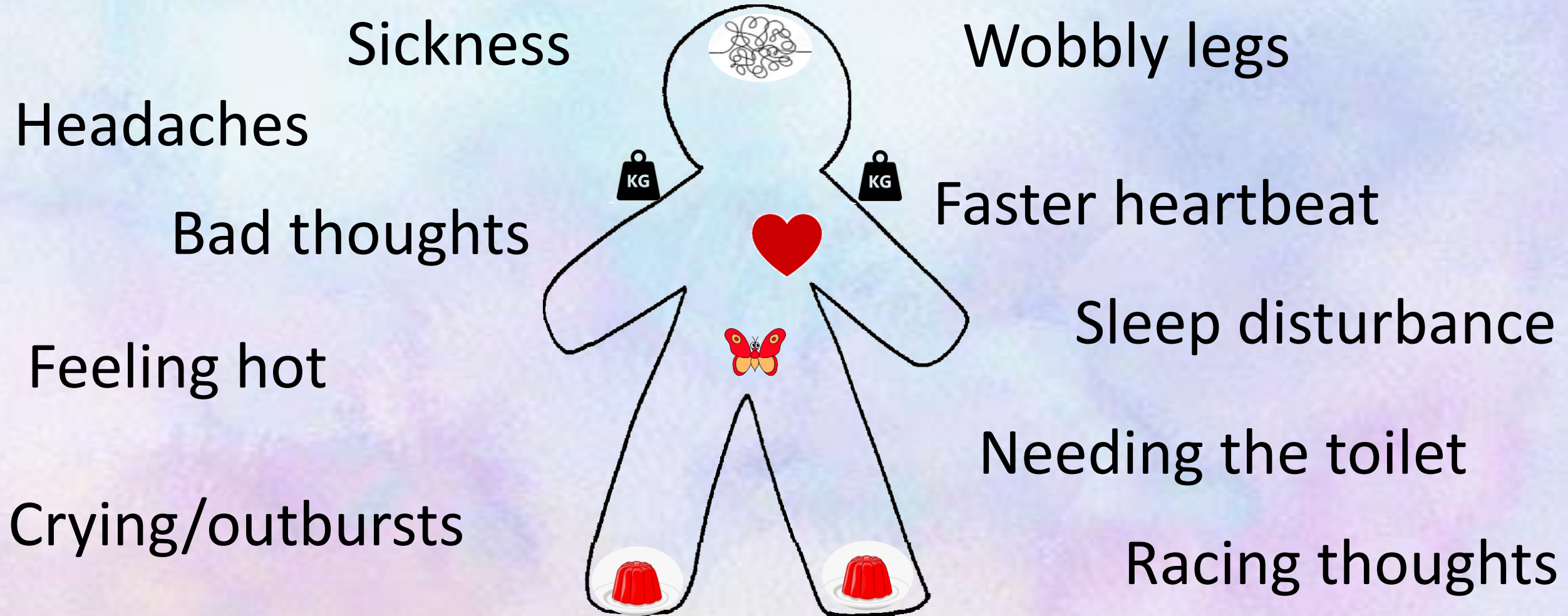
Sleep/own bed

Any change

N.B. If your child's worries aren't noted here, it does not mean they are a cause for concern.

Common Physical Symptoms

How does your child report physical symptoms?




N.B. If your child's symptoms aren't noted here, it does not mean they are a cause for concern.

Education is Empowering

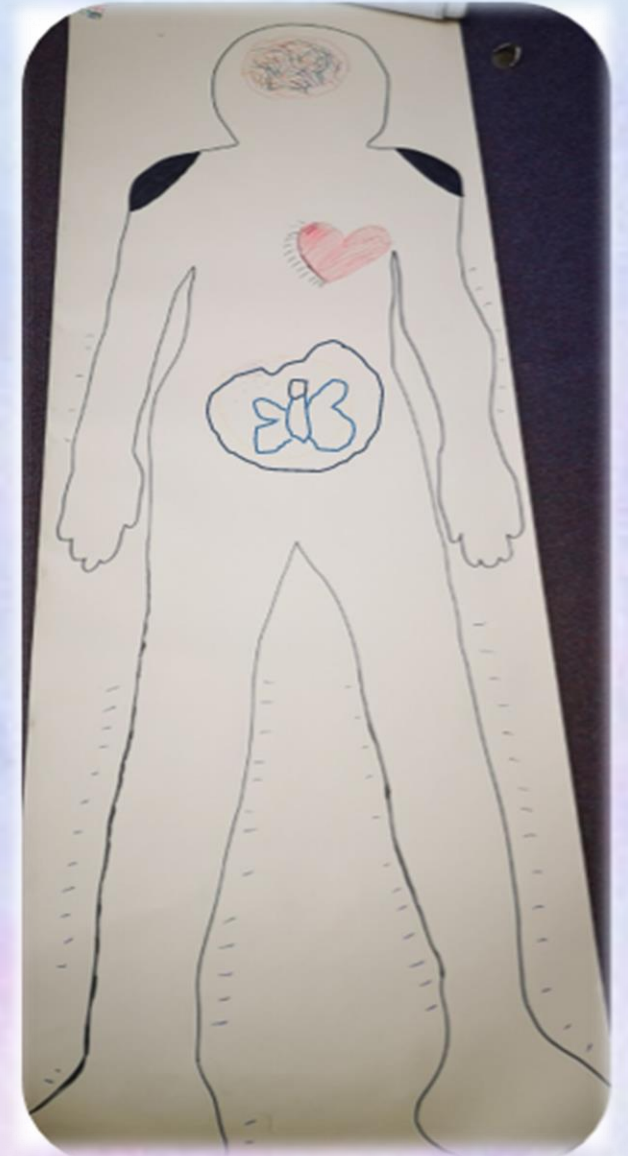
Color in the reactions that happen to your body when you start getting anxious.

What are some other physical symptoms that you experience?


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Children knowing what happens to their bodies will give them an increased awareness of the signs of big emotions.

Being aware and noticing these sensations can help them to identify when they happen and in what order. Putting strategies in place early will help them to manage their emotions before they take over their body.



Fight Flight & Freeze



Thinking
Brain



Emotional
Brain

What is Anxiety?: Fight, Flight and Freeze



This is an innate response that is triggered by perceived stress.

It is important to note that we need anxiety! Jumping when we touch something hot, braking in a car, preparing for exams... it can be very motivating. In modern society, this response is needed much less, but is often triggered when not needed.



The body will usually return to a state of rest within around **20-30 minutes**.

The body **cannot** maintain this level of intense response for a significant period of time. Young people knowing this often helps them to return to calmness – *and helps us to remain calm too!*

Recognising Worry

Sometimes we **forget to look after our minds**, so we need to notice when we need to stop and **take care of ourselves**.



Not being able to sleep

Feeling stressed

Thinking things are 'too much'

Feeling sick in our tummy

Finding it hard to focus

Not feeling hungry

Feeling sad

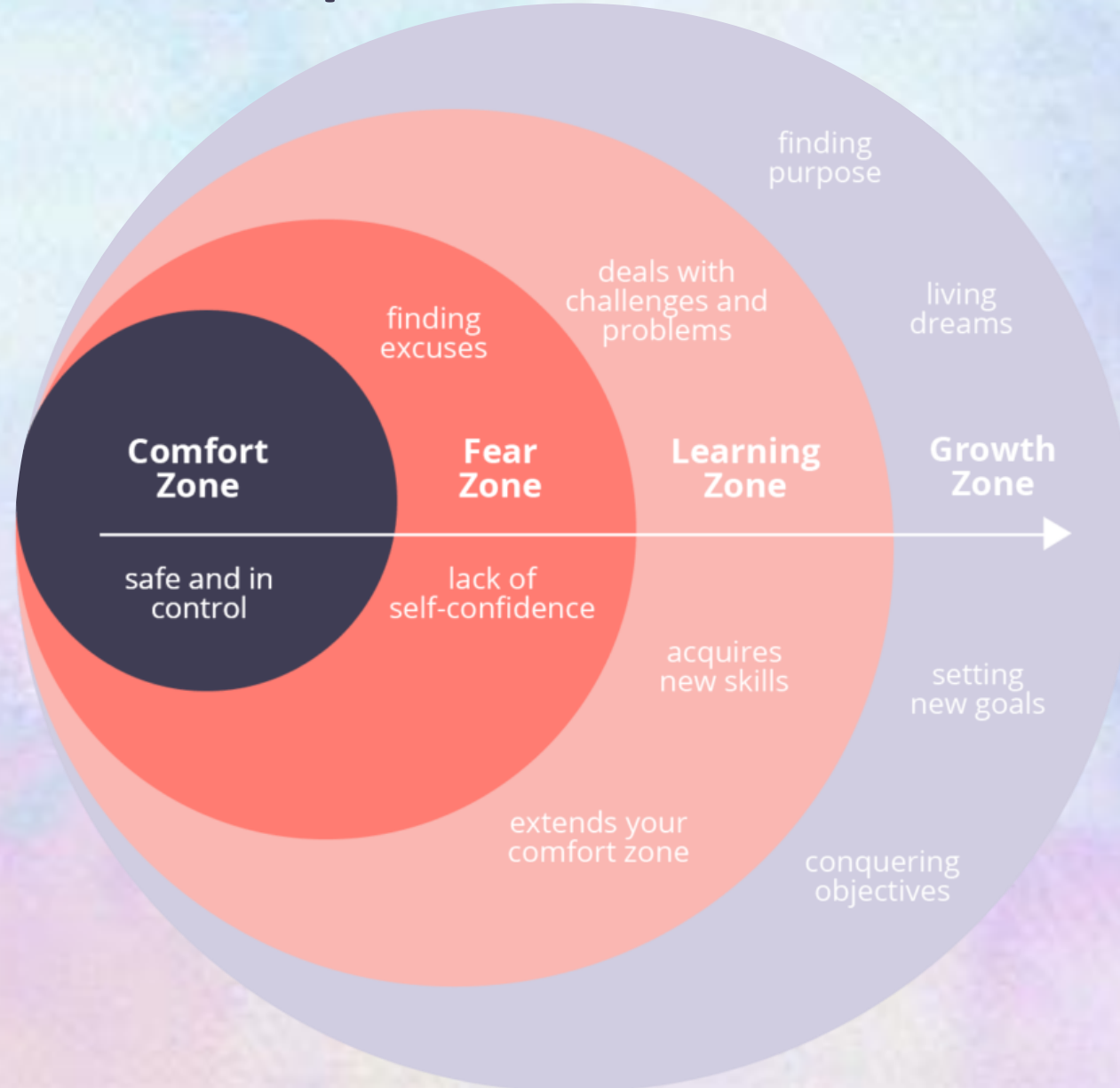
Wanting to stay home

So, when do we worry about our worrier?

- Prolonged impact on child's daily functioning
- Consistently tried strategies
- Other people noticing a change in your child/ sudden changes
- Stepped approach; trying strategies at home/ in school and seeking further support if necessary



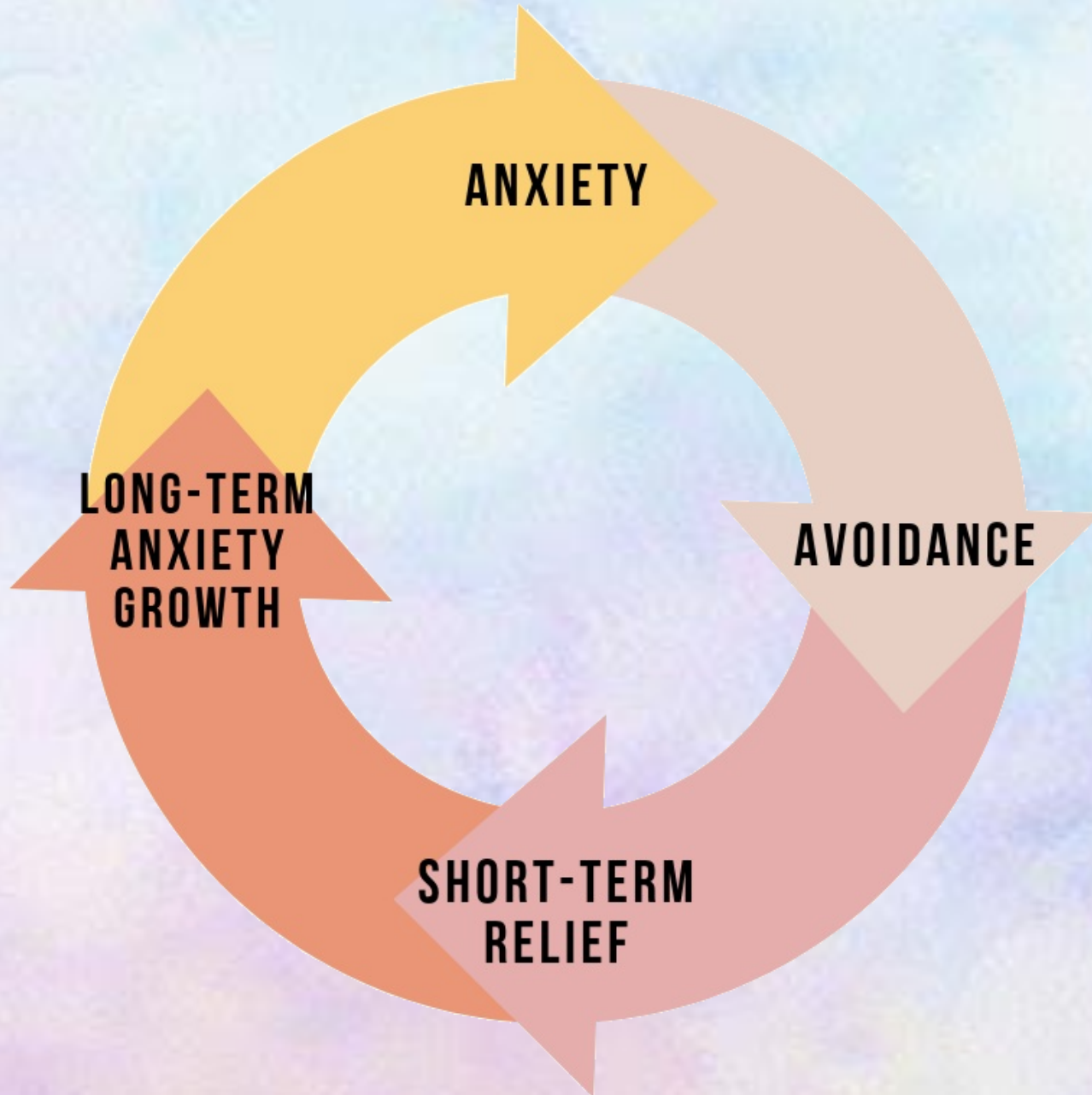
We have to set aside our own worries and allow children to explore, take risks and experience both success and failure.



The Anxiety Cycle

Anxiety is created and maintained through the anxiety cycle.

Without realising it, we often reinforce a child's anxiety which ultimately **makes the anxiety grow and often spreads** to other circumstances/scenarios.





The Anxiety Cycle

Worry gets bigger!

Child is worried about going to crowded places.

Child learns that avoiding crowded places and being in control makes them calm.

Child is allowed to avoid crowded places and chose where to go.

Child feels relief from worries and calms down.

Providing a way to relieve the anxiety here has reinforced it and allowed it to embed.



The Anxiety Cycle

Worry gets bigger!

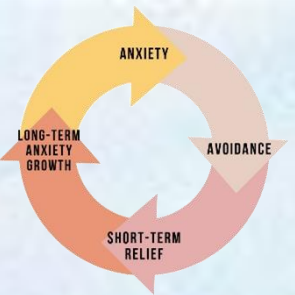
Child is worried about monsters/burglars.

Child learns that they only feel 'safe' after checking behaviours and seeking reassurance.

Parent gives verbal reassurance then checks under bed and in cupboard.

Child feels relief from worries and calms down.

Providing a way to relieve the anxiety here has reinforced it and allowed it to embed.



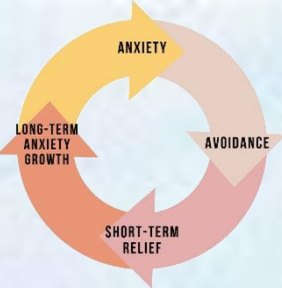
The Anxiety Cycle

Avoidance behaviours

Avoidance behaviours involve the child avoiding any situation that makes them feel anxious or behaving in a way that means they remove the unwanted anxious feelings. Sometimes, this can result in distressed behaviours such as seeming agitated, crying or running away.

Worry	Avoidance behaviour
I will perform really poorly on my maths test.	Tells the teacher they are ill and asks to sit outside.
None of my friends will play with me today.	Refusing to get dressed for school and trying to stay at home.
There are germs on the handrail that will make me ill.	Not touching handrails.





The Anxiety Cycle

Safety Behaviours

Safety behaviours are used in an attempt to **prevent fears from coming true** and to feel more comfortable in situations that cause anxious feelings.

If they cannot avoid a situation altogether, children may use more subtle forms of avoidance or precautions.

Worry	Safety behaviour
If I answer a question, I may get it wrong and be embarrassed.	Staying very quiet in social situations/in class.
If I feel worried, I might get a dry mouth and choke.	Carrying a water bottle everywhere.
If someone speaks to me, I won't know what to say.	Wearing headphones in public places.



Breaking The Anxiety Cycle

Avoidance and reassurance feed worries.



Validate Without Agreeing

I can see that you're really nervous for your test today, but you're going to go in and try your best.

I know you really worry about me, that's okay. I will see you after work.

I can see that you don't like sleeping in your own bed. It's important that you stay in your own bed tonight.

Breaking The Anxiety Cycle

Avoidance and reassurance feed worries.

Gradual Exposure

Setting small, achievable goals that aim to exposure your child to their worry will build up evidence that there is no need to worry!

Your child needs to experience success in order to reduce anxiety in a way that does not reinforce it, but instead challenges it.



Breaking The Anxiety Cycle

Avoidance and reassurance feed worries.

Exposure – Separation Anxiety

4. Child tries a sleep over at grandparents' house.
3. Parent(s) goes out but does not say what time they will come back.
2. Parent(s) goes out for 40 minutes.
1. Parent(s) goes for a 20 minute walk without child while child is supervised.



Negative Thinking Patterns

When a child adopts negative thinking patterns, they develop a **negative thinking bias**. They begin to think negatively about situations without giving themselves a chance to think positively about something.



If you wear glasses with a purple lens, everything you see becomes tainted with purple. This can make it hard to see things and colours as they really are.

The same thing happens with worrying. You begin to see all situations in life through a '**worried lens**' which can prevent you from thinking positively.

Negative Thinking Patterns

When a child adopts negative thinking patterns, they develop a **negative thinking bias**. They begin to think negatively about situations without giving themselves a chance to think positively about something.



Predicting

Thinking that you already know what is going to happen or what something will be like.



Catastrophising

Thinking the absolute worst.

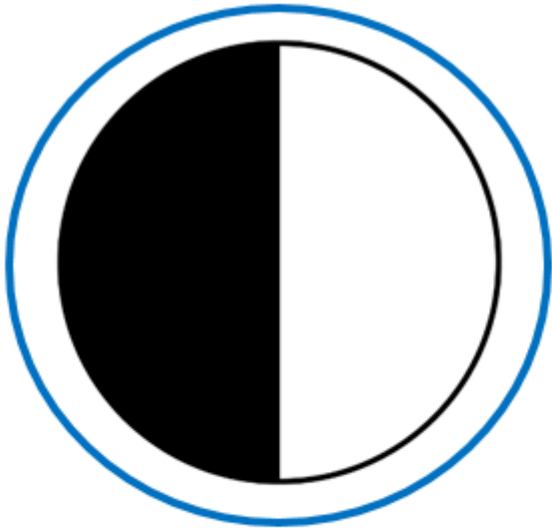


Blaming

Blaming other people or circumstances.

Negative Thinking Patterns

When a child adopts negative thinking patterns, they develop a **negative thinking bias**. They begin to think negatively about situations without giving themselves a chance to think positively about something.



All or nothing

Seeing only one point of view.



Over Generalising

Thinking that something is always a certain way.



Mistaking

Thinking that thoughts are facts.

Negative Thinking Patterns

When a child adopts negative thinking patterns, they develop a **negative thinking bias**. They begin to think negatively about situations without giving themselves a chance to think positively about something.



Mind Reading

Believing that you know what someone thinks about you or a situation.



Spiralling

Allowing one negative thought to 'suck you in' and bring more negative thoughts.

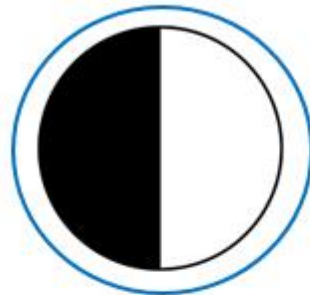
Negative Thinking Habits

When you thinking a certain way over-and-over again this can become a habit. This changes the way you see certain situations and can make you biased. It takes 21 days to break a habit, so try challenging some of these thinking habits.



Blaming

Blaming other people or circumstances.



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Thinking that you already know what is going to happen or what something will be like.



Over Generalising

Thinking that something is always a certain way.

Allow your child to become familiar with these thinking habits.

Point out to them which thinking habit they are doing and help them to realise it is simply exacerbating their worry.

Sometimes, the simple realisation that they are doing this is enough to destabilise their thought.

POW!

Is there another way to see this?

What evidence is there?

How would someone else see this?

BAM!

Is this helpful?



What advice would you give someone else?

Is this fact or opinion?



First **identify the thought** – you need to know your challenger!



Defeat the negative thought by coming up with a new, more positive one!

'What If?' Land



Many children express their worries through using 'what if?' questions.

This can exacerbate their worries as they often get no answers and only find themselves with more questions that they started with.

Balancing these questions works well to change their outlook.

What if I don't like it?

What if it's the worst day ever?

'What if?' Land

The place with no answers, only questions!

What if people laugh at me?

What if I get lost?

What if I don't have friends?

'What If?' Land – Balancing their questions

Having a new class teacher

What if they're really strict?

What if the work is too hard?



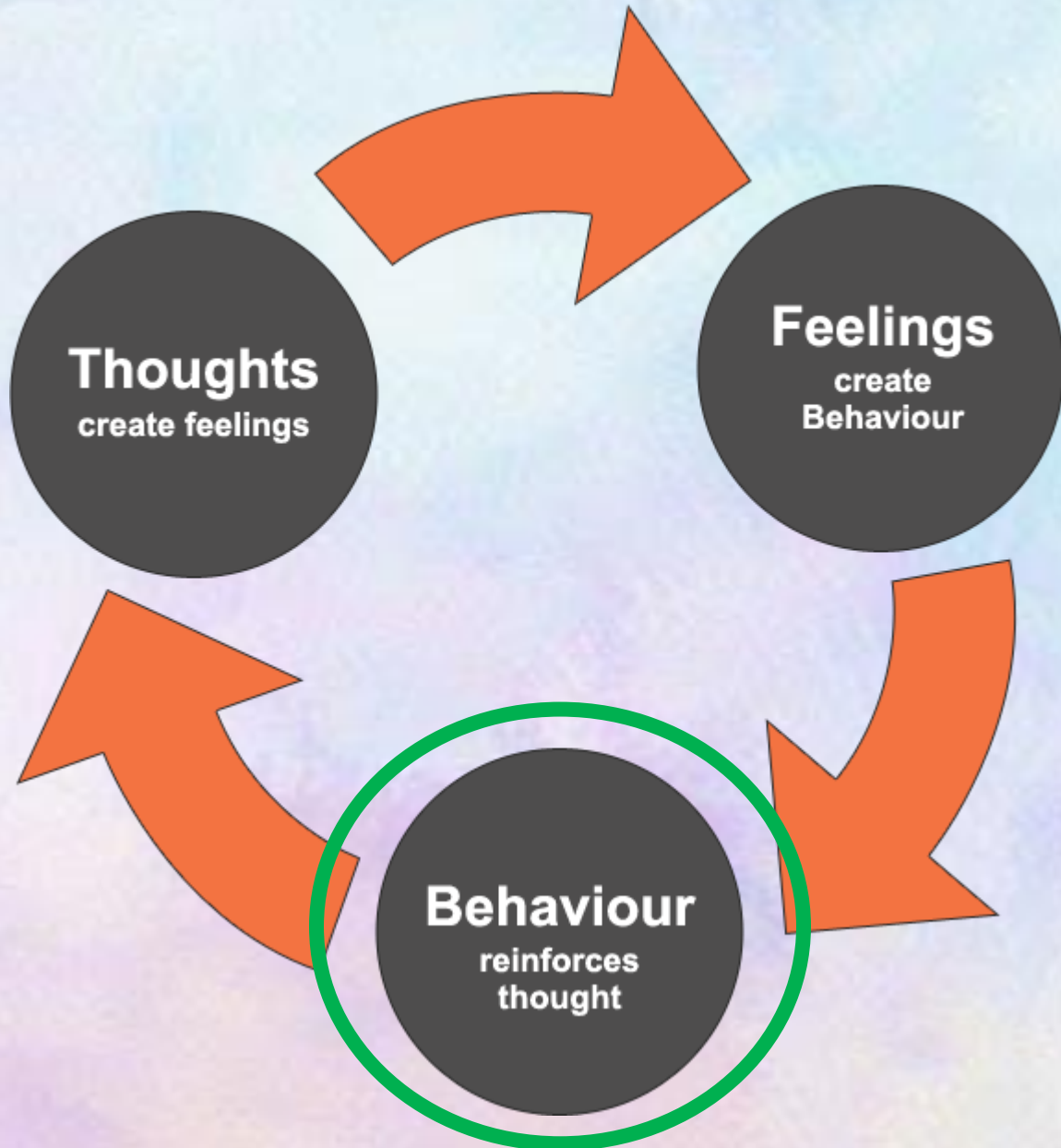
What if they let you do your favourite things?

What if you enjoy the work?

Having a neutral 'what if' question is often more realistic and believable for a child.



Behaviour-First Approach



Behavioural Activation

We've discussed the importance of challenging thoughts however **sometimes these thoughts are entrenched and hard to change.**

The thoughts, feelings, behaviour cycle shows us that **behaviour can influence thoughts too.**

Getting a young person to engage in a **positive behaviour** (*even with the negative thoughts still in place*) **can work to change the thought itself!**

Acceptance of Thoughts

For some young people, the pressure, effort and expectation of challenging negative thinking habits can exacerbate anxious feelings.



Encouraging a young person to ‘notice’ a thought from a distance but not have an emotion or action attached to it, removes the power of the thought itself. This can be particularly helpful if they have unwanted or distracting thoughts.

I notice the thought that...

Thoughts are like bubbles; they float around us and often distract us. Just like bubbles, thoughts often swirl around inside our head but then float away. Thoughts are not facts, let them float away and not bother you anymore.

Managing Worries not Eliminating Them



Resilience is a skill that we all need in life.

It is very likely that your child will face many challenges throughout their childhood and, of course, as an adult too.

We need to equip children with the **tools that they need** to face worries and know how to **manage them** rather than thinking they will never have worries again.

Managing Worries not Eliminating Them

Because of the state of arousal that the body enters into when young people are anxious, they often cannot make decisions, plan or respond to instructions.

This means that having an '*anxious feelings plan*' can take away the need to think when experiencing worries. It is important that this 'plan' is made when the child is calm and willing, and that it is practised too!

The worksheet is titled "Home Worry Plan" and features a sad face icon. It includes several sections for a child to write in:

- Signs that I am worried outside of school are...** (light blue box with an exclamation mark icon)
- I will let people know I am worried by...** (yellow box with a hand icon)
- I will talk to...** (green box with a person icon)
- A place I can go is...** (purple box with a house icon)
- I can calm myself down in three steps...** (orange text above three green boxes labeled Step 1, Step 2, and Step 3)

Abbie's Action Plan

Sometimes, when we're feeling low or having lots of negative thoughts, we need to do things that make us feel better. We might not want to, but it's a good way to help to change our mood. Planning what we will do while we are in a 'good' mood can help us later on.

What will I wear to feel better?



Where will I go to be safe?

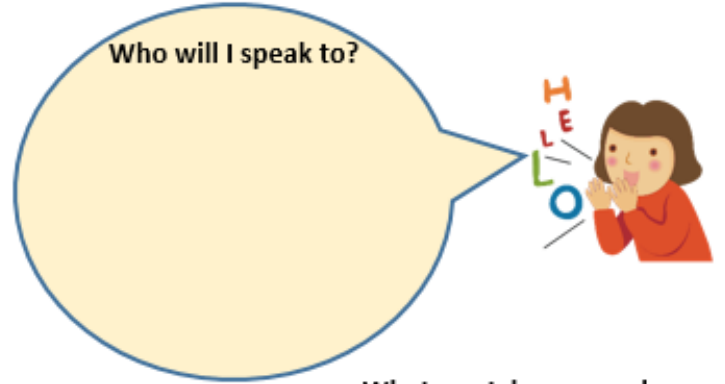
A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a light green border, intended for writing a safe location.



How will I manage my emotions?

A large, empty, rounded rectangular box with a light pink border, intended for writing strategies to manage emotions.

Who will I speak to?



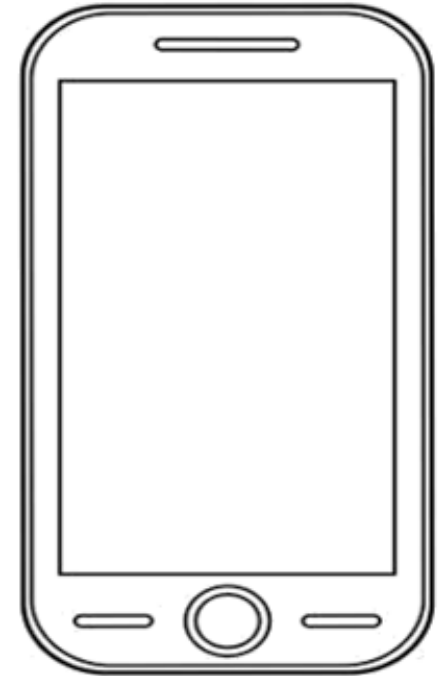
What can I do on my phone to help me?



MoodGym



HappiMe



Under 11s

Containing Worries

Some children let worrying take up a lot of their time and it consumes them. Structuring this time, where they are allowed to 'worry' but then ending it can be an effective tool.



Breathing Strategies

A brilliant way to manage your anxiety symptoms is to use different **breathing strategies**. I know we breathe all the time so it might seem silly, but breathing in certain ways can bring down the feelings in your body and help you to **take control of your body**.



Volcano Breathing

Stand up nice and tall with your arms by your side. Take a deep breath in through your nose. As you do this, bring your arms up above your head and reach for the sky. Breathe out through your mouth and push your arms back down towards your body. Repeat 5 times or until you feel calm.



Cake and Candle Breathing

Bring both your hands up near your face with the palms facing you. Imagine that you have a delicious cake in your left hand and a candle in your right. Bring your left hand to your nose and smell the delicious cake. Now bring your right hand to your face and blow out steadily through your mouth to blow out the candle.

Repeat 5 times or until you feel calm.



Star Breathing

Use your pointing finger to slowly trace the outline of the star. Follow the breathing instructions on each edge of the star, remembering to pause and hold at each tip of the star. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.

Trace around the star until you get back to where you started!



5 Finger Breathing

This is similar to star breathing but may be easier as you always have a hand with you!

Put one hand out in front of you with your fingers stretched wide. Take the pointing finger of the other hand and place it on the tip of your thumb. Now move your finger and trace the outline of your hand. As you trace down a finger breathe out through your mouth, and as you move up a finger, breathe in through your nose.

Do this until you have done the whole outline of your hand. You can do both hands if you need to!

Breathing

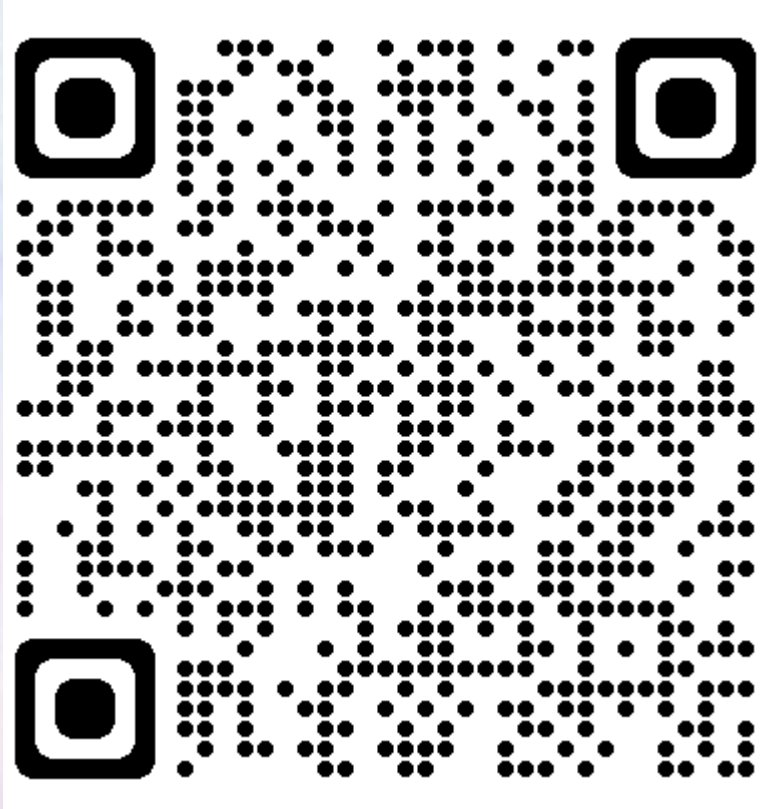
Shallow, upper chest breathing is part of the stress response. This type of breathing can exacerbate the symptoms of worries and add to a feeling of panic.

Controlling this will be a good step to taking control of the situation.

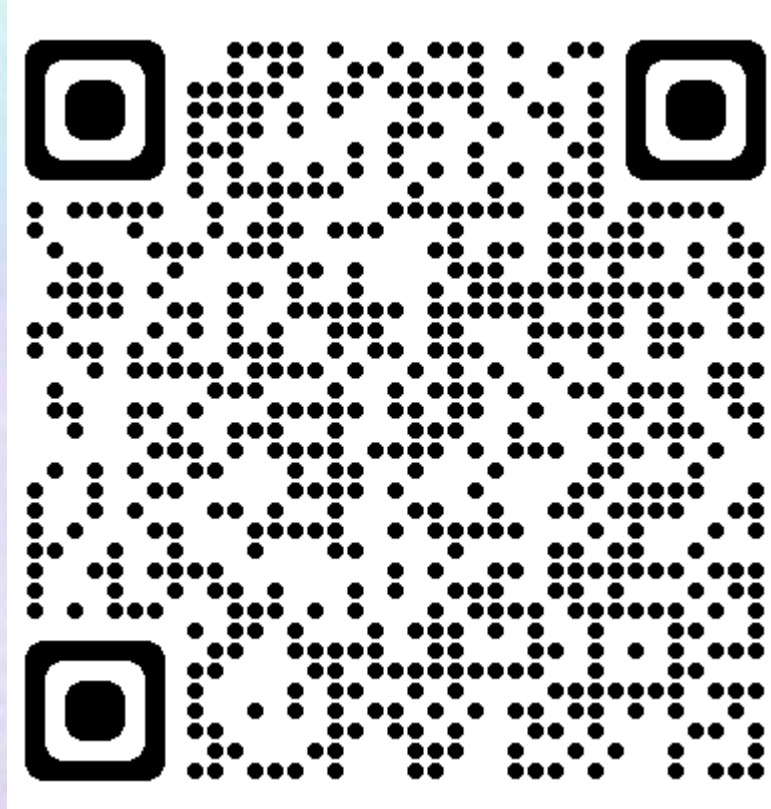
Managing Bodily Sensations



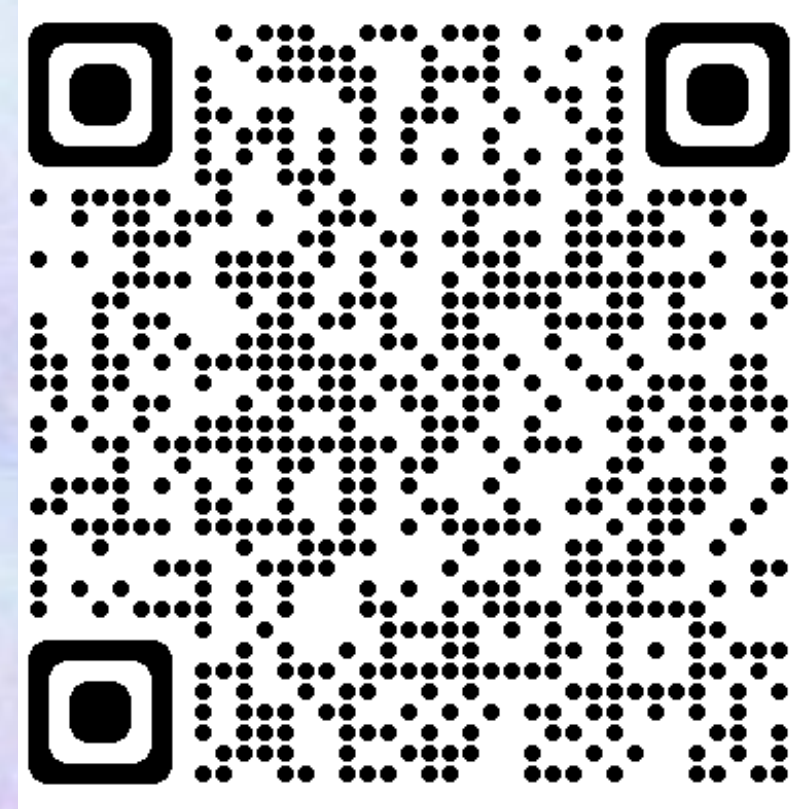
Breathing – under 11s



Cake and Candle Breathing



Square Breathing

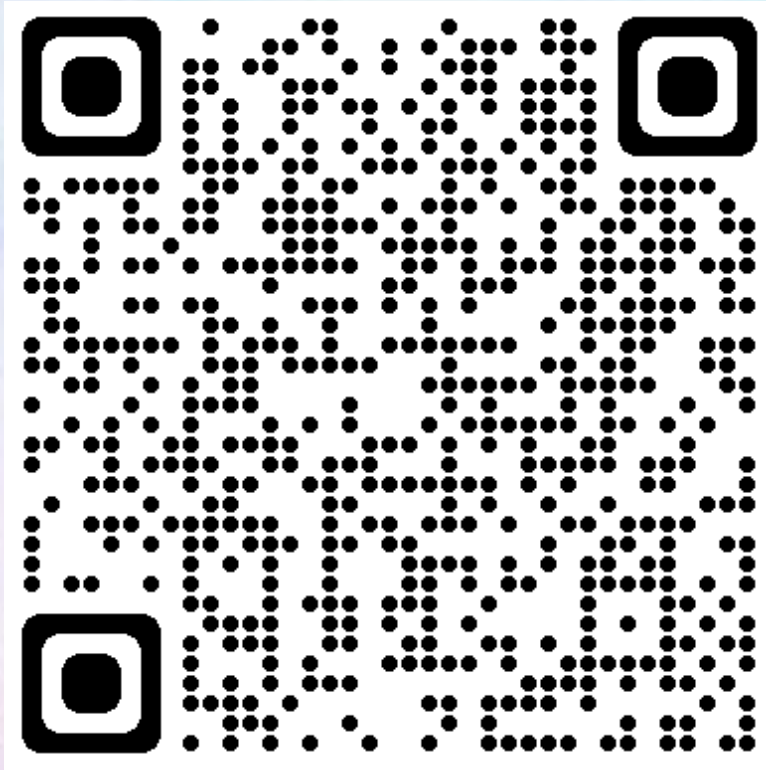


4-7-8 Breathing

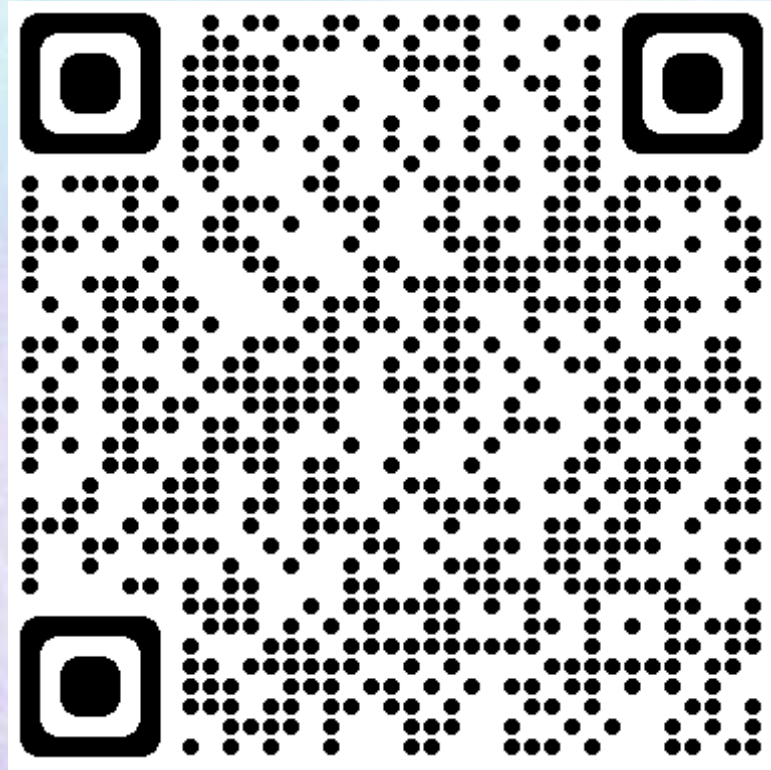
Managing Bodily Sensations



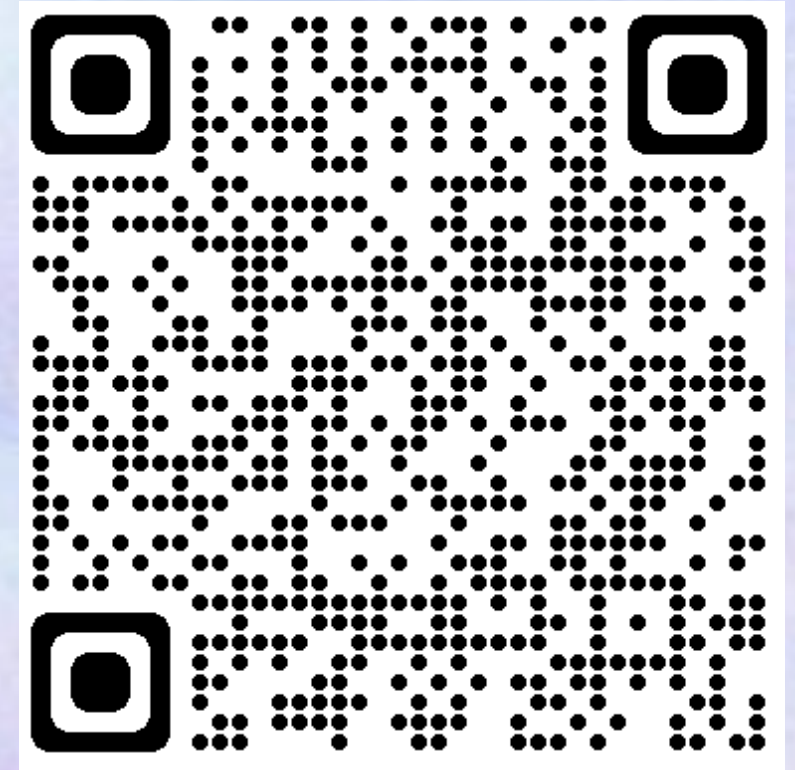
Breathing – Over 11s



5-4-3-2-1 Method



Square Breathing

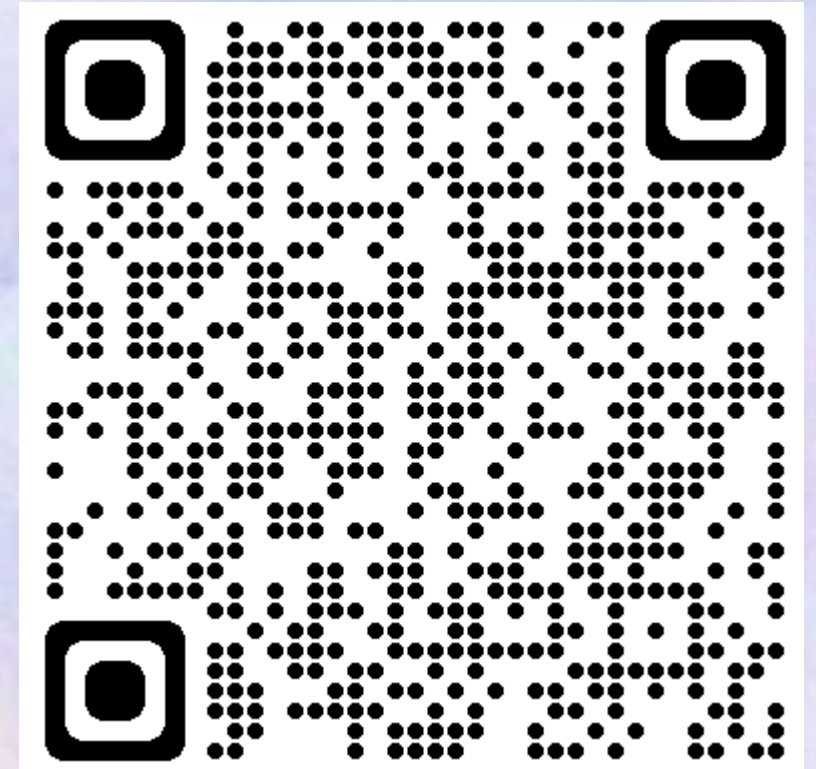
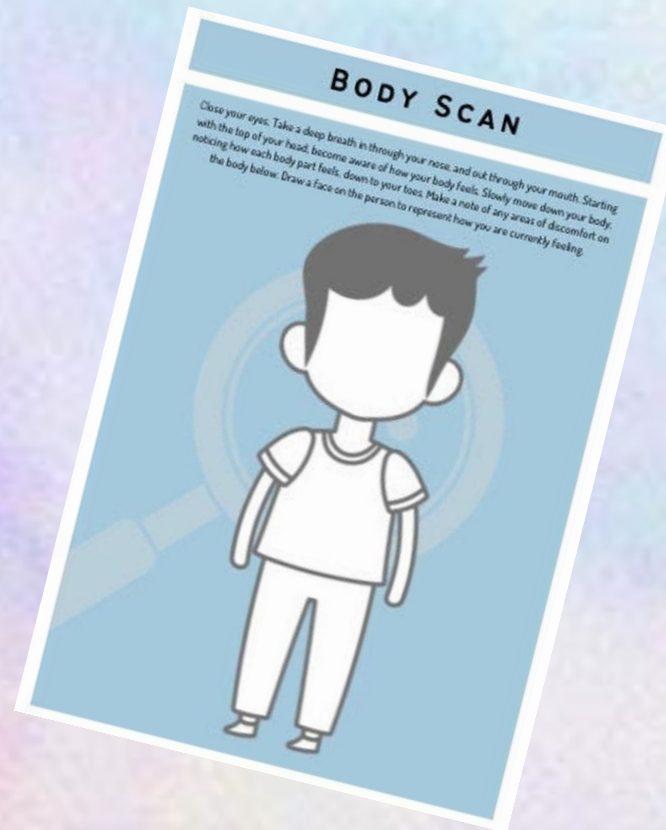


4-7-8 Breathing

Managing Bodily Sensations

Muscle Relaxation

Tensing and relaxing muscles can be really powerful because it gives lots of sensory input. It helps young people to feel in control and distracts them from their thoughts or bodily sensations.



Muscle relaxation under 11s

An Emotionally Open Home

Open discussions
around all
emotions.

Emotion 'check ins'.

Self-reflect.

Feelings chart on
the fridge.

Good sleep/eat
routines.

Time to talk through
thoughts and
feelings.

Modelling how to
emotionally
regulate.





Headspace | Meditation Tips | Letting Go of Effort

Headspace | Mini Meditation | Let Go of Stress

10 Minute Sleepcast: Rainday Antiques from Sleep by Headspace



Headspace | Meditation | Underlying Calm

10-Minute Meditation to Reframe Stress

Sunday Scaries? Identify Anxious Thoughts with this Mini-Meditation



MoodKit
Uses CBT principles to help with low mood and anxiety.



HappiMe
Free app that helps to raise self-esteem, self-confidence and happiness levels in children and young people



Chill Panda
Chill Panda helps children better understand their stress and shows them ways to feel better using breathing techniques, yoga, exercise and calming games.



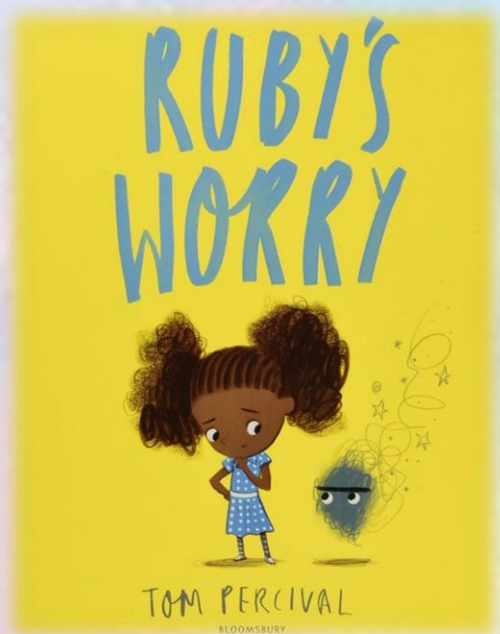
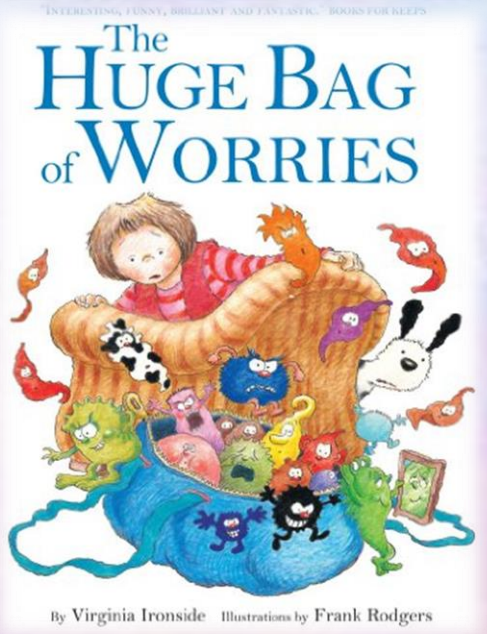
SAM
SAM is an app to help you understand and manage anxiety.



Stop Breathe Think
Check in with how you're feeling, and try short activities tuned to your emotions.

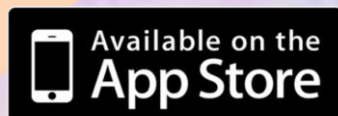
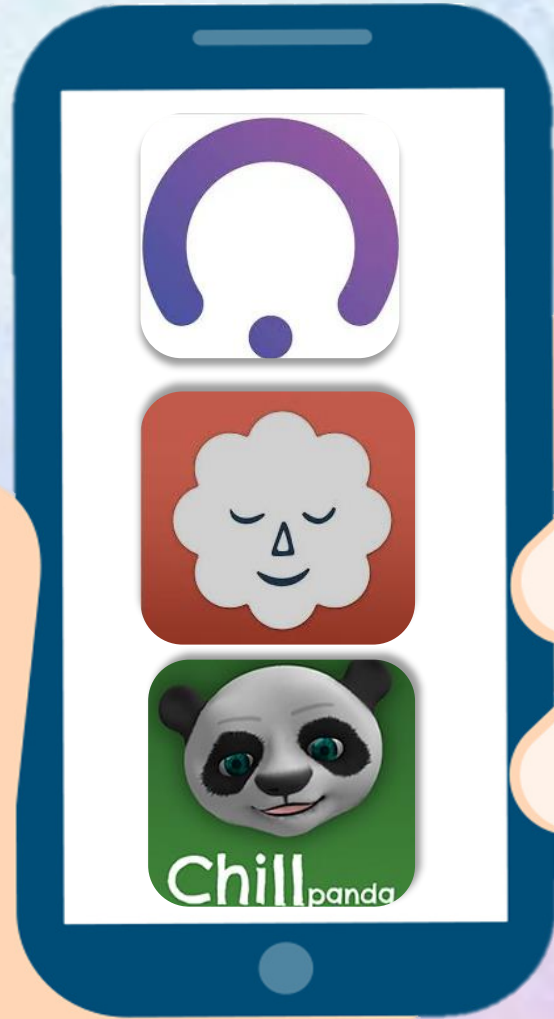


Virtual Hope Box
The Virtual Hope Box (VHB) is an app that contains simple tools to help with coping, relaxation, distraction, and positive thinking.



Useful books, apps and clips

Under 11s



Available to Download

Clear Fear

Clear Fear provides you with a range of ways to manage and monitor anxious feelings.

Stop Breathe Think

Emotion check-ins with short activities to follow.

Stop Breathe Think

Chill Panda helps children better understand their stress and shows them ways to feel better using breathing techniques, exercise and calming games

Please check costs before downloading

When to worry about your worrier

Key Points

- Avoid medicalising emotions.
- Strive to break the anxiety cycle.
- Challenge negative thinking patterns.
- Manage anxiety with practical steps.



www.camhs-resources.co.uk

www.tidyminds.org

www.elsa-support.co.uk

www.kooth.com (age 11+)

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