

AIMS for the session are to:

- Provide an opportunity to discuss what we understand about anxiety
- Identify some causes and effects of anxiety
- Learn helpful techniques to manage anxiety

Anxiety is.....

- Anxiety is a future- oriented mood state associated with preparation for possible, upcoming negative events. (Barlow, 2002)
- a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some (usually ill-defined) misfortune... strong desire or concern to do something or for something to happen.
- often represented by physical symptoms such as sweating and shaking.
- nervousness or unease about something with an uncertain outcome.
 - ... a sense that something bad is going to happen.
 - ... an uncomfortable feeling of fear or dread
 - ... a sense of impending doom

synonyms: concern, consternation, disquiet, perturbed, fretful, agitated, angst, edginess, tension, misgiving, trepidation, foreboding, suspense..

Some Types of Anxieties

1. General Anxiety
2. Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
3. Post Traumatic Stress
4. Phobias and Fears
5. Panic Attacks
6. Social Anxiety

Physiological effects (bodily symptoms)

- Body may feel hot or cold
- Breathless
- Tightness in arms, legs or stomach
- Feel like vomiting
- Dry mouth
- Sweaty palms
- Difficulty sleeping
- Numbness
- Exhaustion
- Dizziness
- Restless



Emotional effects

- Tense, nervous and on edge
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Having a sense of dread
- Fearing the worst
- A feeling of 'the world is speeding up or slowing down'
- Becoming self conscious when others look at me
- Numbness
- Feeling isolated

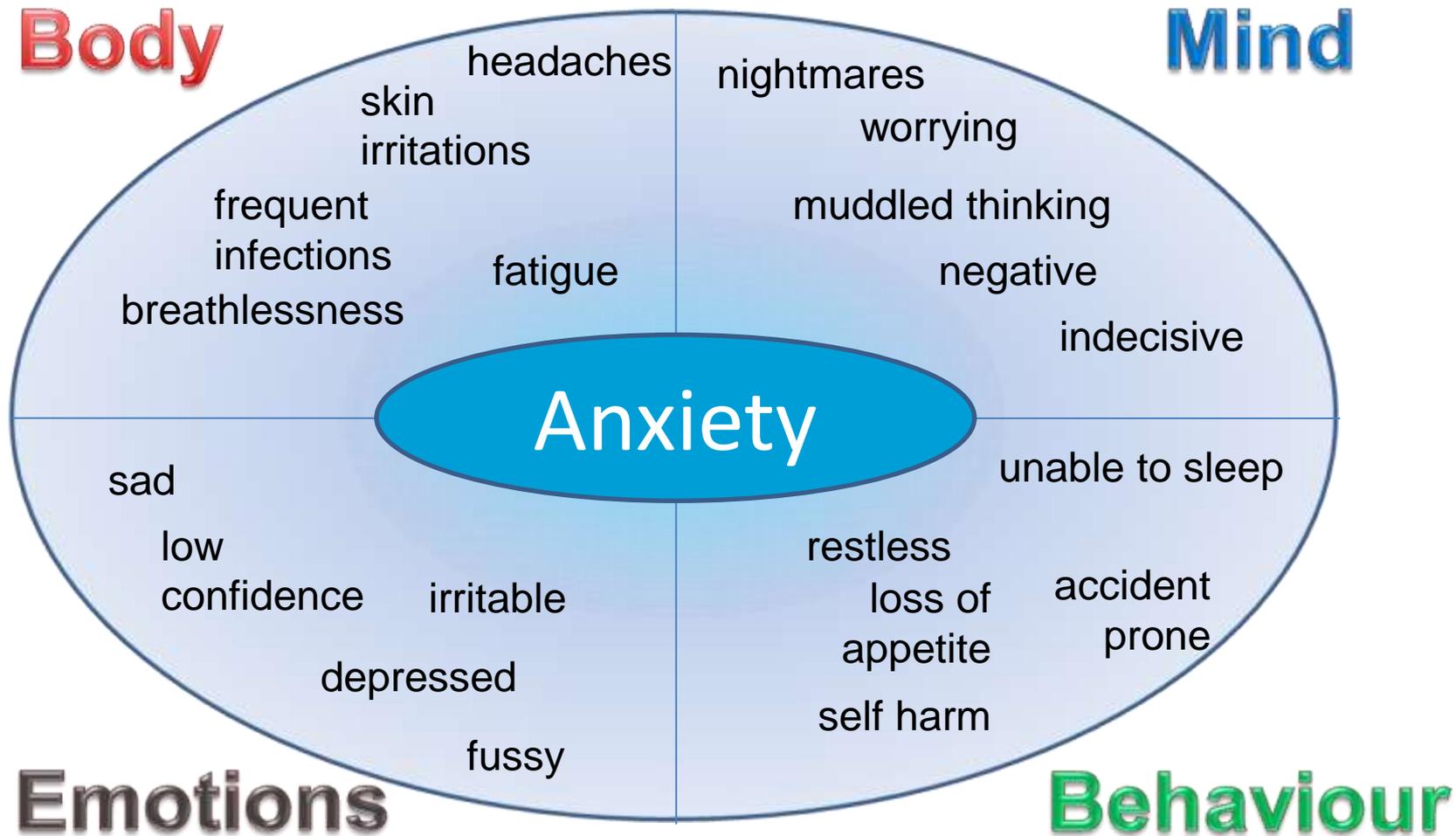


Cognitive effects

- Mind is busy with anxious thoughts
- Dwelling on negative experiences
- Rumination (thinking over a situation again and again)
- Worrying
- Unable to Concentrate



Effects of anxiety



What Maintains Anxiety?

1. Our beliefs about the situation and it's consequences

Anticipating or expecting something bad to happen creates a vicious cycle of anxiety

Different perspectives...



Common anxiety features:

- Hyper vigilance to (perceived) danger
- Overestimation of threat or danger
- Underestimation of one's ability to cope

No wonder this can feel overwhelming!!

ANTS = Automatic Negative Thoughts

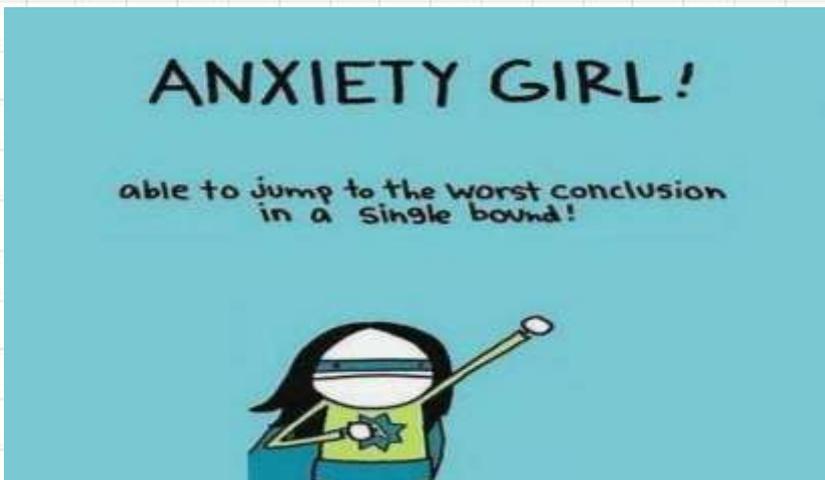
Black and White thinking...



Negative filter



Catastrophising



"I tend to look on the negative side of things. Do you guys do rose coloured glasses?"

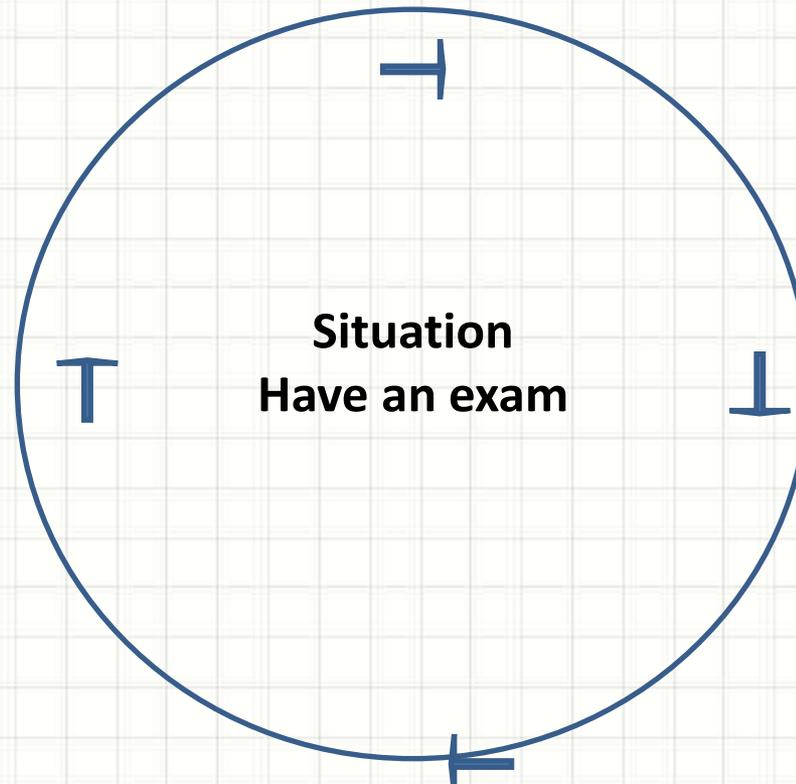
The Vicious Circle of Anxiety

1. Body = Feel sick,
tummy hurts

2. Thought: 'I wont
be able to think or
remember anything
or teachers will be
watching me or I
might fail

3. Feeling:
Terrified

4. Behaviour =
Refuse to go/ not
wanting to do it.
Wanting to avoid or
get out of situation
asap.



Our response to anxiety:

The brain is sending information to the body that there is an immediate threat and I have to protect myself with response:

'Fight, flight or freeze'.

Anxiety is normal...and can be helpful

- To cope with difficult, challenging or dangerous situations.
- A driving force to do better
- Focusing on tasks
- Helps us achieve things we didn't think we could

Anxiety is an issue when...

- Fear is out of proportion to the level of threat
- Fear in the absence of actual threat
- Difficulty settling back to a normal state
- **Key message: anxiety becomes a problem when it prevents children and young people from enjoying normal life experiences**

How does anxiety affect us?



Signs of anxiety in children could include:

- Pessimism and negative thinking patterns
- Rigidity and inflexibility e.g. not coping with change
- Anger, restlessness and irritability
- Constant worry about situations (real or imagined)
- Crying
- Physical - headaches, stomach ache and fatigue
- Poor memory or concentration

Is your child physically active?



Is your child eating healthily?



Is your child getting plenty of sleep?



Is your child feeling isolated?



How to talk to your child about ANTS

If you spot your child is anxious (behaviour or body language) you could ask some

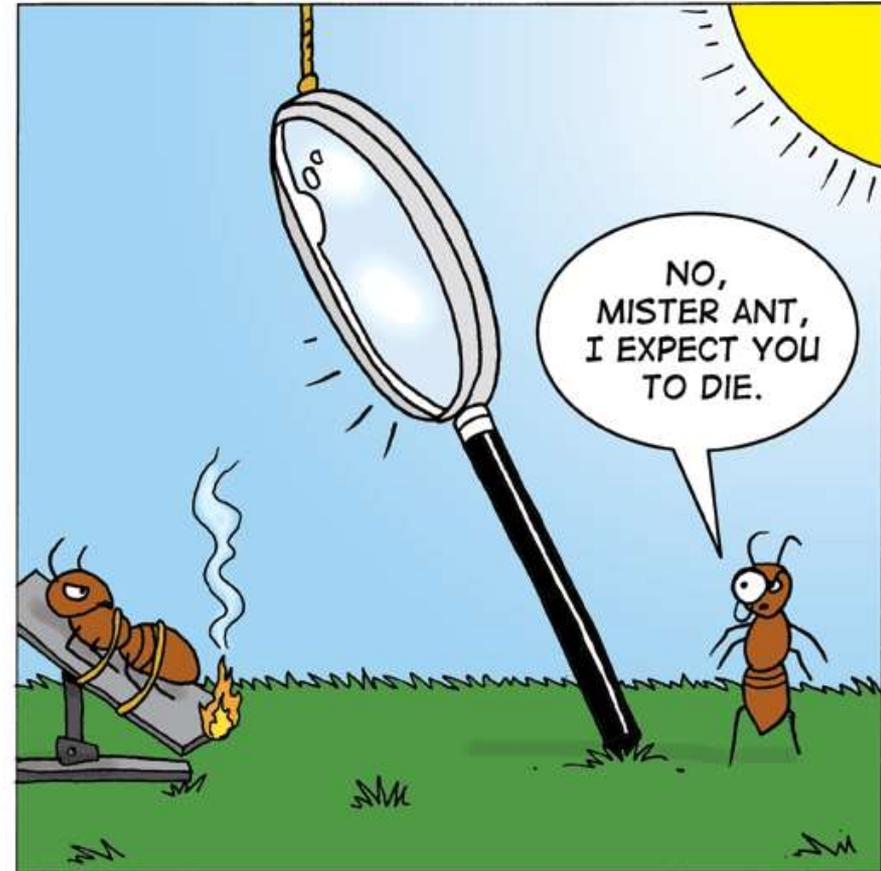
Open Questions:

- “**Why** are you worried?”
- “**What** is frightening you?”
- **What** do you think will happen?”
- **What** is it about (this situation) that is making you worried?”

Let them tell you how they feel.

Recognise, Record, Rationalise

- Get your child to Spot ANTS. They could keep a record of them each day.
- Once your child is recognizing and recording ANTS, the next step is to become a scientist and put the ANTS under the magnifying glass of rational thinking



Rationalizing ANTS

- Weigh up how true they are. Just because we have an anxious thought or feel upset, this may not be a realistic representation of the state of the world.
- Experiment e.g. fear of getting a question wrong in class because everyone will think they are stupid.
- Test theories – Gathering real world data to test out how true the thoughts and fears are.

Become a Scientist!

**A Scientist
is someone who...**

**observes
and
wonders**

**shares
their ideas
and
discoveries**

**Listens to
the ideas
of others**

**Explores
the world
around
them**

**ASKS
questions**

**uses
tools to
solve
problems**

**conducts
experiments**



**A Scientist
is someone like you!**

Have a Go Heroes

- Now let's look at behaviour.
- Anxiety often leads to avoidance of a situation. Encourage your child to adopt a Have a GO approach.
- Develop a step-by-step plan WITH your child. Break tasks down into small manageable steps, praising and rewarding effort no matter how small.

Remember...

miStAkEs

are proof
that you are

TRYING

Problem solve

- Help your child become an independent problem solver.
- Reassurance can become counterproductive as the child relies on support OUTSIDE themselves. They have not 'updated' their 'fear beliefs'.
- Too much reassurance can actually help to keep the anxiety in place, and give the child the message they are not able to cope on their own.

The 3 Questions:

1. What is your worry saying? . Help your child pin down what they are actually worrying about.

1. How likely is that? Help your child estimate probability. You could ask *Is the bad thing likely to happen, or unlikely? How do you know?*

1. If whatever your child is worrying about is unlikely ask **What is more likely to happen?** If what she is worrying about is likely (i.e., *I'm going to miss you*) ask **What can you do to help yourself?**

Reduce reassuring and prompt your child to use The 3 Questions

(Dawn Huebner, Ph.D)

Don't Talk Them Out of It

- Ask what it feels like for them. They may or may not be able to tell you and that's ok.
- Then, ask if it's **'like that feeling you get when you miss a stair'** or **'when you are falling in your sleep'**. Often this in itself is a relief because 'someone gets it'.

Normalise 'it' = 'Anxiety'

- Explain anxiety is normal and everyone experiences anxiety at some time in their life, e.g. before an exam, meeting new people, starting a new school.
- Sometimes it happens for no reason at all. That's also normal. It happens to lots of adults and lots of kids but there are things you can do to cope with it.

Explain why anxiety feels like it does...

It happens because there's a part of our brain that thinks:

- 'There is something it needs to protect us from.'
- 'We are under threat; it's like a fierce warrior or a lion coming towards us.'
- The brain's job is to get you ready to run away from the danger or fight it.

Give it a Name

- Externalise the anxiety
- Ask your child to draw a picture of it and ask them to pick a name.
- This will help them feel as though something else is the problem, not them.
- It also demystifies their anxiety. Rather than a nameless, faceless 'thing' that gets in their way, it's something contained, with a name and a look.



Anxiety

The anxiety monster is small enough to sit on its victim's shoulder and whisper things in to their unconscious, eliciting fearful thoughts and irrational worries. The anxiety monster is often seen as weak in comparison to others, but it is one of the most common and is very hard to get rid of.

They often carry small objects linked to their victim's anxieties such as clocks which represent a common but irrational fear of things that might never happen. No-one has ever seen the face of the anxiety monster for it always wears a skull as a mask.

Relax ... slow down your breathing

Relaxation helps to slow down the 'adrenalin rush' in the body and reduce the tension in the body.



Relaxation in everyday life

- Stop rushing around
- Give yourself short breaks: relax, stretch, go for a walk.
- Adopt a relaxed posture: drop your shoulders, sit back in your chair, unclench your fists.
- Inject pleasure and treats into your daily routine.

Distractions

- Go for a walk
- Gardening
- Watch a comedy
- Bake a cake
- Listen to music
- Read a good book
- Have a hot drink
- Exercise – it's a good way to get the stress out

**When was the last time
you and your child had a
good laugh?**



Laughter improves emotional health by shifting our perspective, breaking the cycle of negativity, and improving our mood.



Communication – How?

- Communication is talking but also listening
- ‘When my child is ready to open up, am I ready to communicate?’
- Informal settings help kids feel more inclined to open up.
- Be intentional about finding time to talk
- Be aware of your non-verbal communication.

Communication - continued

Try This: When your child makes a strong statement, 'I hate you' say something like this: "I can see that you're upset. Why don't you tell me why you feel like that?." Then listen without interrupting.

Try This: If your child is unresponsive to questions, try a different approach, e.g. to discover your child's opinion on a matter, ask her how a friend of hers feels about the topic. Then ask what advice she would give her friend.

Set an example

‘The good news is that anxiety in kids is very treatable and they are particularly responsive. I often think we don’t give them enough credit.

They’re so open to possibility, and very quick to make the right connections when they’re given the right information and support. As the adult in their life, you’re the perfect one to give it.’

<http://www.heysigmund.com/anxiety-in-kids/>

Breathing exercise worksheet

Before you start, check out your feelings and use the scale below to rate how anxious you are.

Totally relaxed

Very anxious

1..... 10

- Now take a deep breath, push out belly
- Hold it, count to 5
- Very slowly let the breath out
- As you let it out, think to yourself “Relax”.

Take a deep breath and do it again. Remember to let the breath out nice and slowly.

Do this again, and then one more time.

My Feelings Tool box



Write them down **WITH YOUR CHILD** to help them remember

- Physical activities that help me relax are:
- My favourite breathing exercise is*
- Social activities I could do when I am anxious are:
- Distraction exercises I could use are:
- I like to relax doing:

*Remember – controlled breathing can quickly help you
gain
control of your feelings

Mindfulness is...

...paying attention to thoughts and feelings in the present moment, accepting them, without judging or reacting to them.



Summary:

- Explore ANTS by becoming 'The Scientist'
- Don't talk children out of anxiety
- Normalise it
- Explain why anxiety feels like it does
- Give it a name i.e. 'the worry monster'
- Get them to relax
- Distraction techniques
- Communicate
- Set an example
- Use worksheets
- Mindfulness

References

- Anxiety and its Disorders: The Nature and Treatment of Anxiety and Panic. 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press; 2002.
- Creswell. C. & Willets. L (2007) Overcoming your Child's Fears and Worries. London: Constable and Robinson
- Huebner. D. **Why Reassurance Doesn't Work (and what does)**
<http://www.dawnhuebnerphd.com/Articles/ReassuranceDoesNotWork.aspx>.
Accessed 30/10/2015

Resources:

- ARC website: www.arcweb.org.uk
- www.anxietyuk.org.uk/
- www.mind.org.uk
- www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/how-to-stop-worrying.htm
- For worksheets visit:
- http://documents.routledge-interactive.s3.amazonaws.com/9780415372558/stallard_web_pages.pdf