



# Learning to Beat Anxiety

## A parent's guide to anxiety and cognitive behavioural therapy

### What is anxiety?

- Anxiety is a **NORMAL EMOTION** – it helps us cope with difficult, challenging or dangerous situations.
- Anxiety is **COMMON** – there are times when we all feel worried, anxious, uptight or stressed.
- But anxiety becomes a **PROBLEM WHEN IT STOPS YOUR** child from enjoying normal life by affecting their school, work, family relationships, friendships or social life.
- This is when **ANXIETY TAKES OVER** and your child has lost control.

### Anxious feelings

When we become anxious our body prepares itself for some form of physical action, often called the "**FLIGHT-FIGHT**" reaction. As the body prepares itself we may notice a number of physical changes such as:

- shortness of breath
- tight chest
- dizziness or light-headedness
- palpitations
- muscle pain, especially head and neck pain
- wanting to go to the toilet
- shakiness
- sweating
- dry mouth
- difficulty swallowing
- blurred vision
- butterflies or feeling sick.

Often there is a reason for feeling anxious such as:

- facing a difficult exam
- saying something to someone they may not like
- having to go somewhere new or do something scary.

Once the unpleasant event is over our bodies return to normal and we usually end up feeling better.

## Worrying THOUGHTS

Sometimes there may not be an obvious reason for feeling anxious. Another cause of anxiety is the **WAY WE THINK** about things. We may think that

- things will go wrong,
- we will be unsuccessful
- we will be unable to cope.

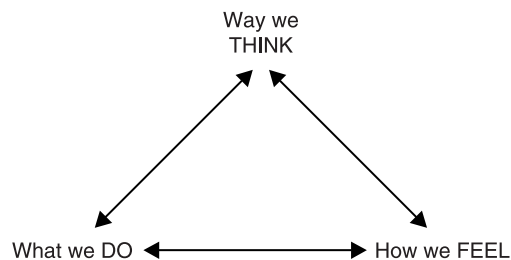
Life can seem like one big worry as minds become full of negative and worrying thoughts. We can't seem to stop them, we find it hard to concentrate and think straight, and the worrying and negative thoughts seem to make the physical feelings worse.

## Stop DOING things

Anxiety is unpleasant and so we find ways of making ourselves feel better. Feared or difficult situations **MAY BE AVOIDED**. We may stop doing things that worry us. The more we stop or avoid things, the less we do and the harder it becomes to face our fears and overcome our worries.

## What is COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY?

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is based on the idea that how we feel and what we do are due to the way we think. CBT is one of the most effective ways of helping children with anxiety problems, and looks at the link between



CBT assumes that a lot of anxiety problems are related to the way we think. Because we can change the way we think, we can learn to control our anxious feelings.

- Thinking in more positive ways can help us feel good.
- Thinking in more negative ways may make us feel fearful, tense, sad, angry or uncomfortable.

Teaching children to understand their thoughts is important. Children with anxiety tend to:

- think in negative and critical ways
- overestimate the likelihood of bad things happening
- focus on things that go wrong.
- underestimate their ability to cope
- expect to be unsuccessful.

CBT is a practical and fun way of helping children to:

- identify these negative ways of thinking
- discover the link between what they think, how they feel and what they do
- check out the evidence for their thoughts
- develop new skills to cope with their anxiety.

## **SUPPORT your child**

During CBT it is important that you **SUPPORT** your child.

### **S – Show your child how to be successful**

Show your child how to successfully approach and cope with anxious situations. Model success.

### **U – Understand that your child has a problem**

Remember that your child is not being wilfully naughty or difficult. They have a problem and need your help.

### **P – Patient approach**

Don't expect things to change quickly. Be patient and encourage your child to keep trying.

### **P – Prompt new skills**

Encourage and remind your child to practise and use their new skills.

### **O – Observe your child**

Watch your child and highlight the positive or successful things they do.

### **R – Reward and praise their efforts**

Remember to praise and reward your child for using their new skills and for trying to face and overcome their problems.

### **T – Talk about it**

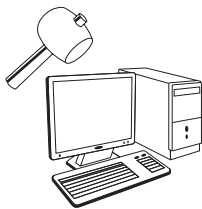
Talking with your child shows them that you care and will help them feel supported,

**SUPPORT** your child and help them to overcome their problems.



# Learning to Beat Anxiety


There are times when we **ALL** feel worried, anxious, uptight or stressed. This is **NORMAL** and often there is a reason. It could be



- Going somewhere new or doing something different.
- Having an argument with a friend.
- Performing in a sports or music competition.

At other times anxious feelings can be very strong or come very often. It may be hard to know why you feel so anxious and you may find that these feelings stop you from doing things.

- If you feel worried about going to school, you may stop going and stay at home where you feel better.
- If you feel worried talking with others, you may avoid going out and stay at home on your own.

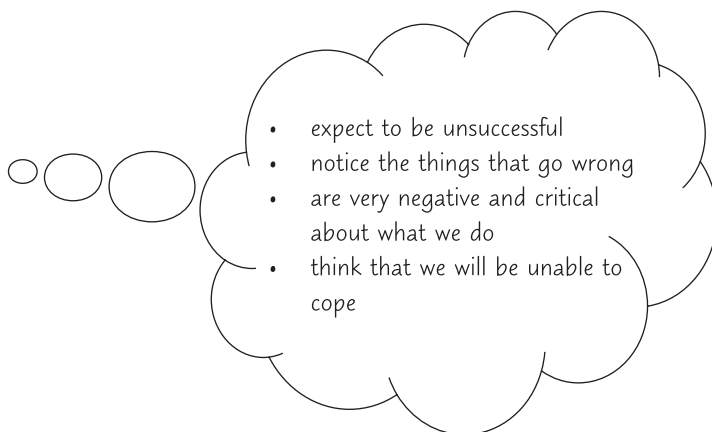
At these times the worry takes over and may  you from doing the things you would really like to do.



When this happens you need to take control and learn how to beat your anxiety.

## What can we do?

- Sometimes it is the way we **think** about things that makes us feel anxious. We:



- expect to be unsuccessful
- notice the things that go wrong
- are very negative and critical about what we do
- think that we will be unable to cope

If we change the way we think then we can feel less anxious. We can learn to do this through something called cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT).

## How will CBT help?

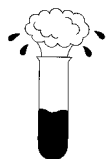
CBT will help you find:

- the anxious thoughts and feelings you have
- the link between what you think, how you feel and what you do
- more helpful ways of thinking that make you feel less anxious
- how to control anxious feelings
- how to face and overcome your problems.

## What will happen?

We will work **together**. You have lots of useful ideas and important things to say, which we want to hear.

We will **experiment** with new ideas to find what helps you. You will:



- check out your thoughts and find more helpful ways of thinking
- discover ways of spotting and controlling your anxious feelings
- learn to overcome and beat your worries.

**So let's have a go and see if it helps!!**



# Flight–Fight Response

When we see something scary or think frightening thoughts, our bodies prepare us to take some form of action.

This can either be to run away



(**flight**) or to stay and defend



yourself (**fight**).

To do this the body produces chemicals (adrenalin and cortisol).

These chemicals make the heart



beat faster so that blood can be pumped around the body to the muscles.

The muscles need oxygen and so we start to breathe



faster in order to provide the muscles with the fuel they need.

This helps us become very alert and able



to focus on the threat.

Blood gets



diverted away from those parts of the body that aren't being used (tummy) and from the vessels running around the outside of the body.

Other bodily functions shut down. We don't need to eat at times like this and so you may notice the mouth



becoming dry and it being difficult to swallow.



The body is now working very hard. It starts to become hot.



In order to cool down the body starts to sweat and pushes the blood vessels to the surface of the body, resulting in some people becoming flushed or red in the face. Sometimes the body may take in too much oxygen, resulting in people feeling faint, light headed, or as if they have wobbly or jelly legs.

Muscles that continue to be prepared for



action (tensed) start to ache and people may notice headaches and stiffness.

Fortunately there aren't any dinosaurs anymore, but we still end up feeling stressed. The dinosaurs have become our worries.

**So what are your dinosaurs??**

# My Anxiety Body Signals

When you feel anxious you may notice a number of changes in your body. Circle the body signals you notice when you get anxious.

Light-headed/feel faint

Red face/Feel hot

Headache

Dry mouth

Blurred eyesight

Lump in throat

Shaky voice

Butterflies in tummy

Heart beats faster

Sweaty hands

Difficulty breathing



Jelly legs

Want to go to the toilet

**Which body signals do you notice most?**

# Things That Make Me Feel Anxious

Draw a line between the anxious face and the things that make you feel anxious.

Going somewhere new

Spiders

Snakes

The dark

Talking with my friends

Meeting new people

Getting my school work right

Me being ill

Exams and tests


Leaving Mum/Dad

Germes or diseases

Dentists or doctors

Doing something in front of others

Mum and dad being ill



Animals

[Empty box]

[Empty box]

[Empty box]

[Empty box]

[Empty box]

[Empty box]

If the things you worry about aren't here, write them in the empty boxes.



# My "Hot" Diary

Complete the diary when you notice strong feelings of anxiety. Write down the day and time, what was happening, how you felt and what you were thinking.

Date and time	What was happening?	How did you feel?	What were you thinking?

# My Physical Activities

What physical exercise or activities do you enjoy?

Cycling

Running

Swimming

Skate boarding

Roller blading

Dancing

Going for a walk

Taking dog out

Going to the park

Working out

Cleaning my room

Cleaning the car

Doing things in the garden

Kicking a ball

**If the activities you enjoy aren't here then write them in the empty boxes.**

# Controlled Breathing Diary Sheet

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

Totally relaxed	Little bit anxious	Quite anxious	Very anxious
1 2	3 4 5	6 7 8	9 10

- Now take a deep breath
- 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.

Use the scale below to rate how you are feeling now

Totally relaxed	Little bit anxious	Quite anxious	Very anxious
1 2	3 4 5	6 7 8	9 10

If there is no difference in your ratings, don't worry. Have another go and remember that the more you practise, the more you will find it helps.

# My Special Relaxing Place

Think about your relaxing place and draw or describe it. This could be a real place you have been or a picture you may have created in your dreams.

- Think about the **colours and shapes** of things.
- Imagine **sounds** – seagulls calling, leaves rustling, waves crashing on the sand.
- Think about the **smell** – the smell of pine from the trees, the salty sea, cakes baked fresh from the oven.
- Imagine the sun warming your back or the moonlight shining through the trees.

This is your special relaxing place. To practise using your relaxing place:

- Choose a quiet time when you will not be disturbed.
- Shut your eyes and imagine your picture.
- Describe it to yourself in lots of detail.
- As you think of your picture, notice how calm and relaxed you become.
- Enjoy it and go there whenever you feel anxious.

Remember to practise.

The more you practise, the easier you will find it to imagine your picture and the quicker you will become calm.

# My Feelings Toolbox

You will find a number of ways to control your anxious feelings which you can keep in your "toolbox". Write them down to help you remember.

- Physical exercises that helps me relax are:
  
- My relaxing activities are:
  
- Mind games I could use when I am anxious are:
  
- Distraction exercises I could use are:
  
- My relaxing place is:

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

# My Worrying Thoughts

Write the situation that makes you worried in the box. When you think about facing that situation, fill out the thought bubbles with some of the thoughts that race through your mind.



My scary or worrying situation is

# Tumbling Thoughts

What worrying thoughts keep tumbling round and round in your head?



# Thinking Traps

- **TRAP 1:** The **negative glasses** only let you see the negative things that happen.



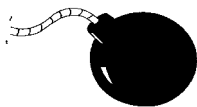
Negative glasses find the things that went wrong or weren't quite good enough. Finding and remembering the negative things will make you think that you always fail and will make you anxious.

- **TRAP 2:** Anything positive or good that happens is rubbished so that **positive doesn't count**.



Rubbishing anything positive as unimportant or lucky means that you don't acknowledge your successes, never accept that you can cope or believe that success is due to what you do.

- **TRAP 3:** Negative things are **blown up** and become bigger than they really are.



Blowing things up results in events becoming more frightening and scary.

- **TRAP 4:** Makes us **expect things** to go wrong so that we become



**"Mind readers"** who think they know what everyone else is thinking or **"fortune tellers"** who think they know what is going to happen.

Expecting things to go wrong will make you feel more anxious.

- **TRAP 5: Disaster thinking** makes us think that the worst thing we could imagine will happen.



People who have panic attacks often think like this and imagine that they will become seriously ill and die.

What thinking traps do you get caught in?



# The Cool Cat

Everyone will laugh if they see me looking like this

I look really cool in this hat



**Which thought would make the cat feel most anxious?**

# How Would They Feel?

Mr Evans the head teacher walked into Amy and Luke's class and asked to see them before they went home at the end of the day.



**Amy and Luke had very different thoughts.**

How would they feel?

# Worksheet: Possible Solutions?

What I want to achieve:

One way of doing this is:

Or I could do:

Or I could do:

Or I could do:

Or I could do:

# Which Solution Should I Choose?


Once you have a list of possible ideas the next step is to think about the negatives (-) and positives (+) of each solution. You may want to ask someone to help you do this.

When you have finished look at your list and choose the best solution for your challenge.

My challenge is:		
Possible solution	Positives (+)	Negatives (-)
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		
7.		
My best solution is:		

# My Experiment

1. What do I want to check out?
2. What experiment could I do to check this out?
3. How can I measure what happens?
4. When will I do this experiment and who will help?
5. My prediction – what do I think will happen?
6. What actually happened?
7. What have I learned from this experiment?



## **My Record of Achievement**

The FEARS I have faced

The WORRIES I have conquered

The CHALLENGES I have coped with

# My Ladder to Success

Write the goal that you would like to achieve at the top of the ladder. Write the steps that will take you there, with the easiest at the bottom.

My goal is:

