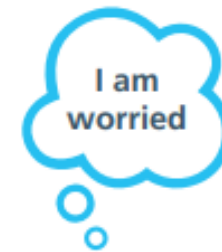


Parent Workshop: Anxiety

MindMate[©]
Support Team



Understanding worries, anxiety and fears

Discussion: What comes to mind when thinking of worries, anxiety and fears?

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a normal emotion and reaction. It can be useful and enhance performance. Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can range from mild to severe.

For some people though, it is difficult to control their worries and their feelings of anxiety are more constant. It becomes a problem when it is severe or interferes with a child's everyday life.

Anxiety is the most prevalent mental health concern in childhood and adolescence.

Where it can come from :

“One-part genes and two parts experience”

Genetics:

Explains roughly one third of general anxiety. Psychological **characteristics are inherited** e.g. how easily your body reacts to threat (just like physical characteristics)

Environment:

- Adverse experiences: Stressful life events can heighten pre-existing fears and worries OR seem to be where the child's fears and worries began
- Learning by example: Watching those around them to understand how they should respond to information when it is their turn for the experience
- Learning from others' reactions: the way others respond when the child appears anxious
- Coping experiences : is the child always given the opportunity to see what happens?

Common signs:

- Concentration difficulties
- Not eating properly
- Anger or irritability
- Seeming 'on edge' or nervous
- Expressing negative thoughts
- Fidgeting
- Using toilet often
- Tearful
- Physical symptoms e.g. tummy aches and feeling sick
- Avoidance of certain situations
- Extremely compliant

Discussion: Is there anything else you have noticed?

Fight, Flight, Freeze and Fawn

When we were cavepeople, we may have been faced with lots of dangerous situations. Our brain wants us to keep safe, so it developed a quick way to respond to danger, it's called fight, flight or freeze response. The fight, flight or freeze response is like our body's alarm system. It causes changes that we can feel in our body.



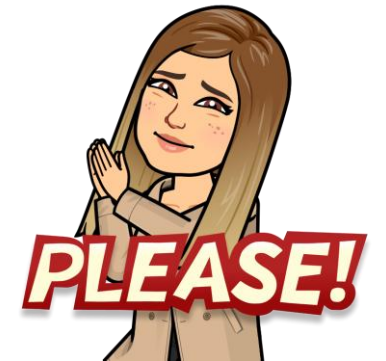
Our bodies become energised, and we want to confront and 'fight' the situation.

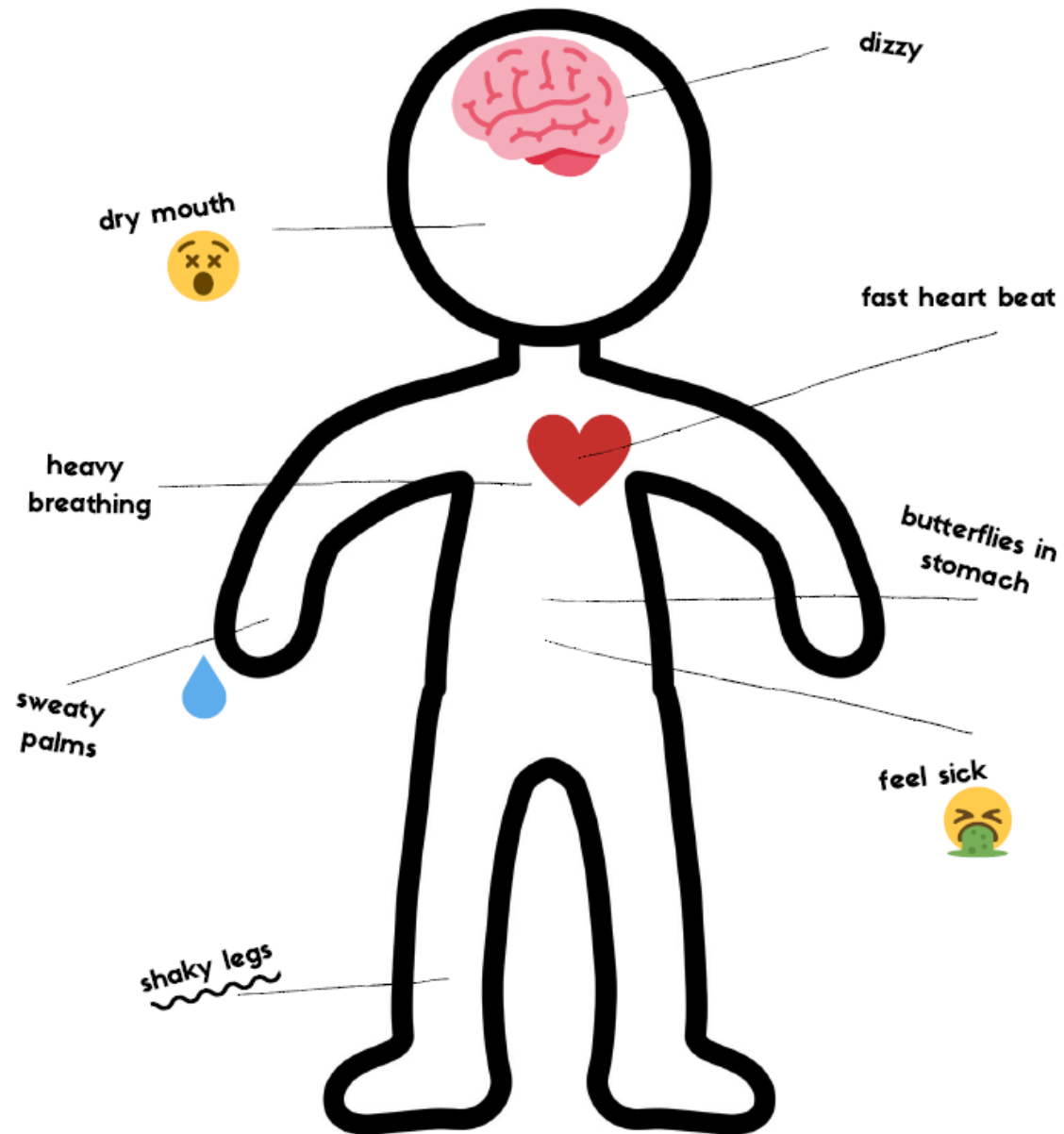
We want to escape and avoid the situation.



We feel like we are unable to move or act. Our bodies and minds 'freeze' and we don't know what to do.

Sometimes we can people please and fawn over other people to make sure we are part of the 'pack'.





The Fight, Flight or Freeze response

- Automatic response
- Prepares body to react when danger or threat is perceived
- Causes lots of unpleasant physical symptoms

Common fears and worries

Specific Phobia:

Common examples - dogs, spiders, balloon, hand driers, heights, getting lost.

Generalised Anxiety:

Common examples - Things going on in the world (such as terrorism), doing well at school, friendships, getting things right, and health of ourselves and others.

Social Anxiety:

Common examples - Going to school, cafes, parties, play centres, extra-curricular activities.

Separation Anxiety:

Common examples - Harm will come to them or their carer if they are apart, they will not be able to cope without their carer.

Maintenance of anxiety

Five Areas:



Five Areas:

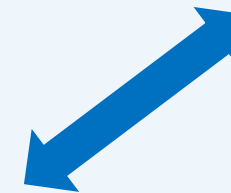
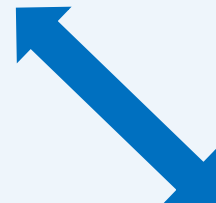
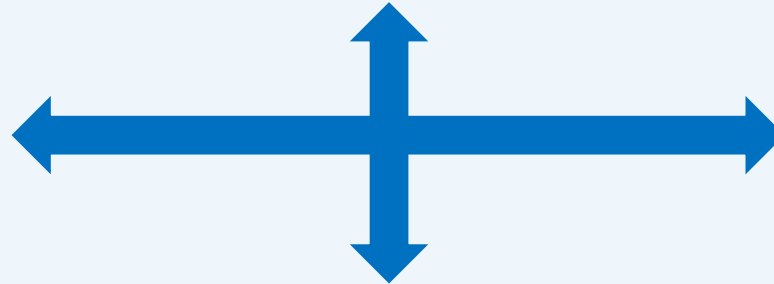
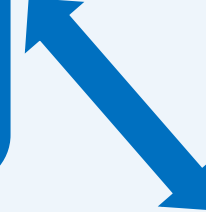
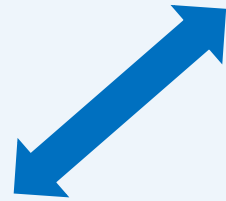
Situation
Doesn't understand new learning in class

Thoughts
I am stupid / other people will think I am stupid / people will laugh at me / I will get told off

Bodily Sensations
Sick / heart racing / warm / shaky / changes in breathing

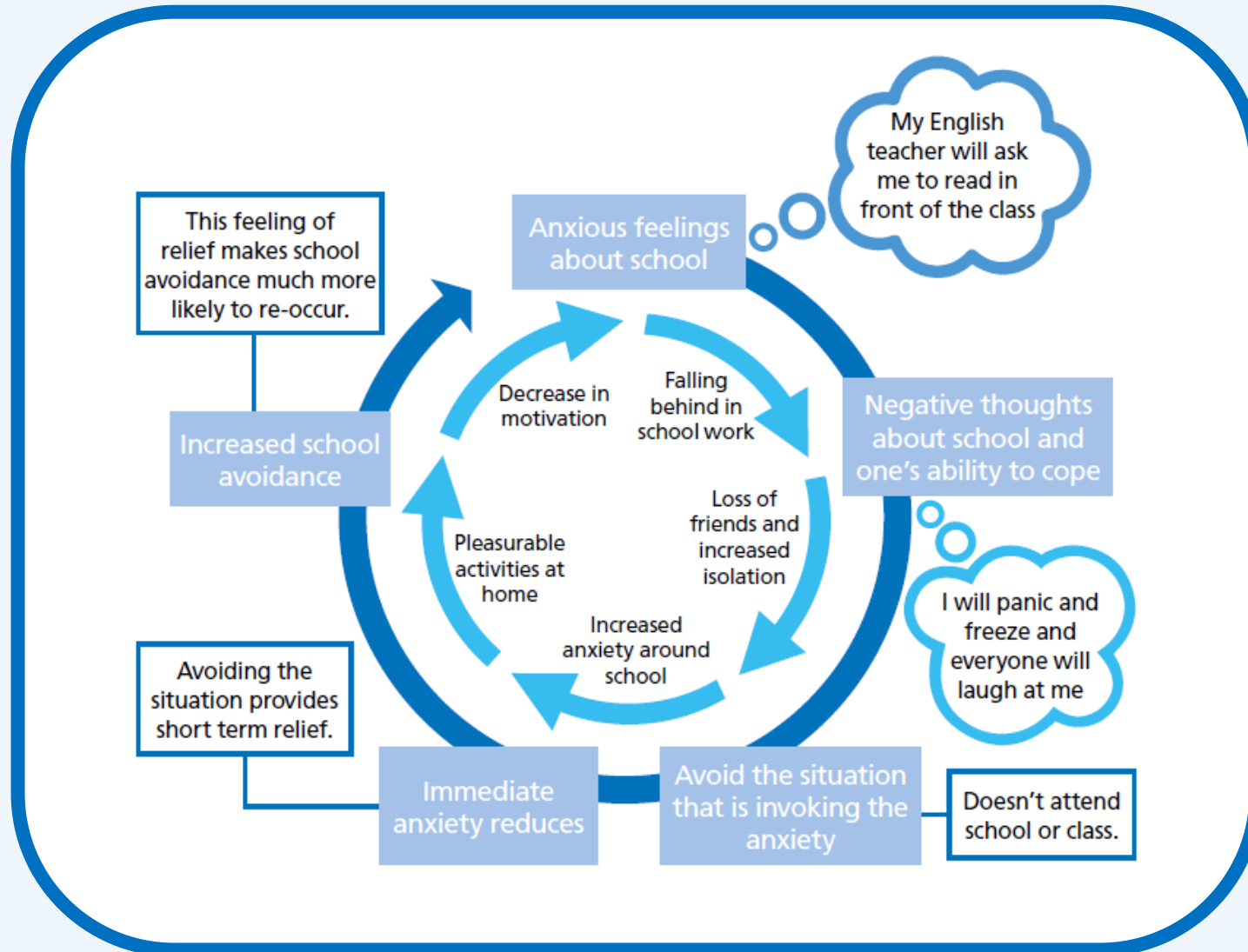
Feelings
Worried / scared / embarrassed / frustrated

Behaviours
Doesn't ask for help / doesn't do the work / looks for distraction / tries and gets it wrong



Cycle of Anxiety:

Emotional Based School Avoidance example



Maintenance of anxiety:

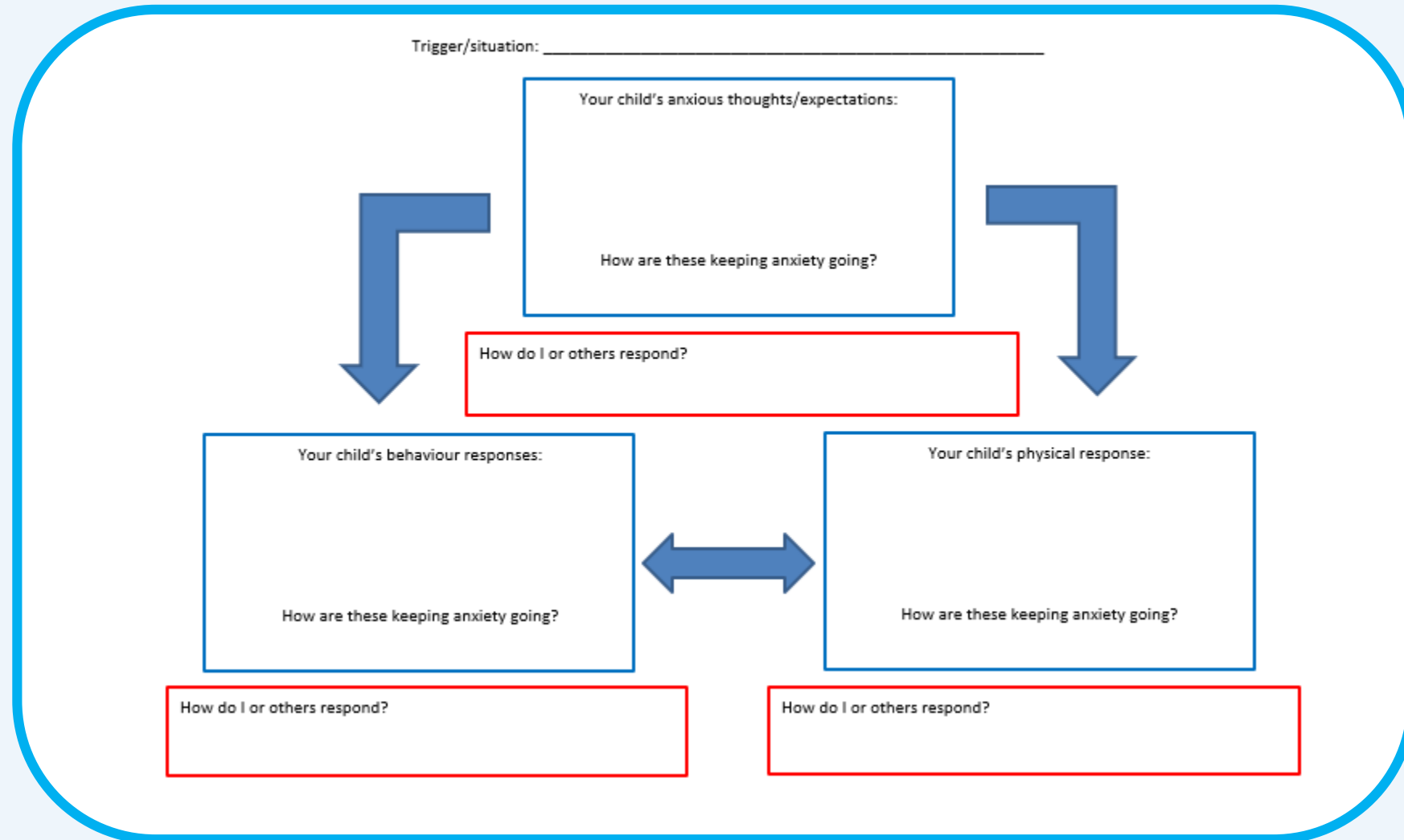
For parents and carers, it can be helpful to understand what has caused their child's anxiety problem.

This is not essential for successful treatment.

It is much more important to the treatment process to understand what is maintaining their child's anxiety.



Maintenance of anxiety:



Normalising:

Taking a normalising approach allows us to share that everyone can have negative thoughts, unhelpful thinking and use coping negative strategies. Normalising allows us to evaluate threat effectively and respond positively.

Sharing how we feel with others is a key element of normalising.

sometimes I feel bad for
feeling **sad**.



but I have to let the sadness exist!
it's normal. it happens. it'll pass.



@chibirdart

when you're both having a bad day.



chibird.com

🔑 Validation: It's about being heard

You can validate by reflecting someone's feelings back to them without judgment. Phrases like “it makes perfect sense you're worried” or “it's understandable that you feel frustrated” can help the person know they are being heard and de-escalate rising anxiety.

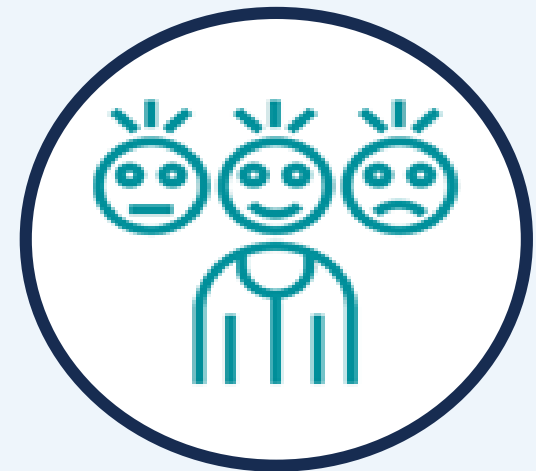
Behavioural



Cognitive



Emotional





Watch out for Minimising:

When we are tired, busy or feel particularly challenged by a child/young person's behaviour we may slip into minimising their thoughts feelings and behaviours.

What are the dangers of this?

What might the impact of minimisation be?

Reassurance vs Questioning:

Many adults describe reassurance as a usual and natural response to a young person who is anxious. This is because it can often reduce stress in the short term.

Reassurance can be unhelpful in the long term as it can become addictive: the more the child gets reassurance, the more they want it/ they believe they need it.

Young people need to be able to feel that they can deal with their fears themselves and are able to test out for themselves whether their worried thoughts are accurate or not.

Cutting out reassurance is not about not responding at all; It is about responding differently



Asking questions rather than giving answers:

What is making you feel worried?

What is frightening you?

What do you think will happen?

What is the worst thing that might happen?

What is it about this situation which is making you worried?

Alternatives to Reassurance:

Check your understanding by repeating back what the young person has said:

‘It sounds like you are feeling... because... is that right?’

Label emotions

‘It looks like you are anxious/scared/worried’

Pick your moment

If they are distressed, help them to calm down and possibly wait to talk about what happened.



Key Phrases:

Thank you for sharing that with me.

That must have been difficult for you.

It seems like you felt...when...

Sometimes I feel like that too, I remember when I was young and...

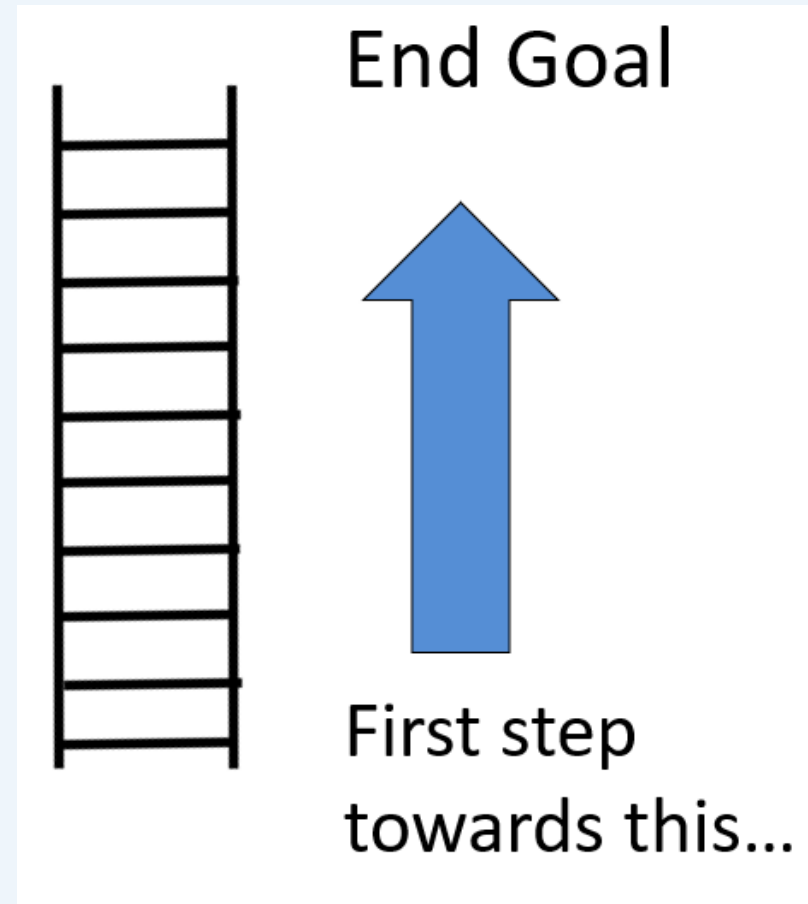
I know a lot of young people who also feel...when...

What is the worst that can happen? What makes you think that will happen?

Strategy: Step by step approach:

When someone is clearly feeling anxious, often the response from people around them is to try their best to make sure the person doesn't become more distressed.

A step by step approach helps with gradual exposure to a feared situation – working towards an “ultimate” goal



An example

| Step | Anxiety rating 0-10 |
|---|---------------------|
| Practice asking the teacher a question when nobody else is in the room | 3/10 |
| Answer a pre-planned question asked by the teacher during a lesson | 5/10 |
| Ask the teacher a question in a small group task | 6/10 |
| Answer an unplanned question asked by the teacher in a small group task | 7/10 |
| Answer an unplanned question asked by the teacher in front of the whole class | 9/10 |

Helpful Strategies:

Worry time – a dedicated time each day to talk about worries.

Worry monster – a monster to ‘eat’ the worries away.

Check in – regular check ins will make your child feel heard.

Predictions – challenge the anxious expectations with their predictions, and then reflect afterwards to see if they were true.

Self soothe box – a collection of items to help when dysregulated.

Breathing strategies – finger breathing, square breathing.

Spending quality time together.

Any Questions?

