

Introduction to Child Anxiety Workshop

Session 3: Strategies to manage anxiety and build confidence in your anxious child

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1. Educate children about anxiety

- ❑ It is important for children to know that **anxiety is normal**.
- ❑ To manage their anxiety, it is helpful to **give them an understanding of the symptoms**. An important way to do this is to **focus on the physical symptoms**.
- ❑ Teach them that physical symptoms are **normal responses** to anxiety (even if they are not pleasant).
- ❑ Encourage your child to **practice breathing and other relaxation exercises** when they are feeling anxious.
- ❑ There are lots of videos of relaxation exercises on YouTube. *We recommend Mindful Gnats YouTube channel.*



1. Educate children about anxiety

- ❑ You can also help them to **recognise their anxious thoughts and expectations.**
- ❑ You can do this by **asking them** about what is making them anxious and discussing their anxiety.

Questions to ask:

Why are you feeling worried?

What do you think will happen if you...?

What is the worst thing that might happen?

What is it about this situation that is making you feel worried/
frightened?



2. Containment: Responding to your child's anxiety

- ❓ **All children feel anxious at times** - at different ages they struggle with different anxieties.
- ❓ Sometimes these anxieties **connect to life experiences**, other times they **come from worries inside them that they might not recognise or understand**.
- ❓ As parents, we can help by **recognising that they are struggling and trying to understand what's going on for them**.
- ❓ This can help to make them feel **less alone** with their difficulties and sometimes **feel more able to do the things they are worried about**.



How do we do this?

- ❑ By staying calm and not expressing any strong emotional responses.
- ❑ Talking calmly to your child and helping them unpick and make sense of what they are worried about.
- ❑ If your child is unable to tell you what is wrong, using more indirect ways of communicating, e.g. tell me one good thing about your day and one bad thing.
- ❑ Showing your child that you are there when they need you e.g. with a hug, making them a hot chocolate, sitting with them and listening.
- ❑ Monitoring your responses and being aware of them.

Pick your moment!



The conversation:

- **Asking questions – being curious:**

“I wonder if you’re feeling _____?”

“I wonder if you’re worried about _____?”

“I imagine that would feel _____”

- **Empathising**

- **Normalising, making suggestions**

“lots of children feel / think about _____ when they are worried. Is that like what’s going on for you?”

- **Check their understanding – “does that make sense?” but also yours – “have I understood that you feel _____ because of _____?”**

- **Labelling emotions**

- **Make it fun or rewarding**



3. Facing fears

- ❑ To overcome anxiety, you need to allow your child to be exposed to situations to make them anxious so they can learn that they will usually be able to cope.
- ❑ However, it is important that you do this gradually in a step by step approach to make sure they do not feel overwhelmed.
- ❑ Try and get them on board with standing up to their anxiety: what is their anxiety stopping them from doing? What would they like to be able to do that they can't do at the moment?
- ❑ Think about what they need to work on to help them overcome their anxious expectation. This will help you to set a goal to work towards.



Step-by-step plans: gradually facing their fears using a fear ladder.

1. Rate the anxiety for the situation (0-10)
2. Think together of smaller steps to take towards fear
3. Rate these steps (0-10) and place in order from least to most anxiety provoking.
4. Attach rewards that are suitable to each step.
5. Begin on first step on ladder, repeat as many times as needed to feel comfortable
6. If a step feels too hard – think of a step below that would be slightly easier but still challenging
7. Rate each step again after you've completed
8. Is it lower than their original rating?
9. What have they learned from carrying out this step?



Example

Leah (8) worries about meeting up with her friends, and especially worries about going to parties, because she will be by herself. She rated going to parties as an 9/10 on the fear scale. With her mum Amy, Leah made a fear ladder with steps to work towards this goal and rewards for completing each step.



9/10 going to a party with her friends without mum	Trip to Leah's favorite cafe with mum
7/10 playdate (3 friends) without mum 1 hour	Moana family movie night
6/10 playdate (3 friends) with mum in next room 1 hour	Favourite meal for tea
5/10 playdate (1 friend) without mum for 30 minutes	Bake a chocolate cake
4/10 playdate (2 friends) with mum for 20 minutes	Board game night
3/10 playdate (1 friend) with mum for 10 mins	Milkshake



Building confidence to have a go

Promote 'brave' behaviour, where your child stands up to anxiety and 'has a go' at doing something:

- ❑ Pay attention to it
- ❑ Give clear and specific praise for it
- ❑ Model brave behaviour to your child
- ❑ Allow and encourage independence



4. Problem solving

- ❓ Sometimes your child may be anxious for a valid reason that they won't be able to overcome by using the strategies we have used so far.
- ❓ If your child's worry is realistic, problem solving is an effective way for them to take control of the difficult situation.
- ❓ As parents, we often want to solve our children's problems for them. This will be appropriate at times, especially when they're younger.
- ❓ However, as they get older it is important that we involve them in the problem solving process which will help teach them how to solve problems themselves.



4. Problem solving

Here is an example of how you can problem solve with your child:

The problem: I am being bullied and don't want to go to school.

Solution	Pros	Cons	Who can help me with this?	Rate this solution 1-10
Move to the North Pole	Wouldn't see the bully anymore.	Cold. Would miss my friends. May be bullies at the North Pole too. I don't have money for a ticket.	Not sure.	1/10
Move schools	Would be a fresh start.	Further to walk to school. Would still see bully at park. Nervous to make new friends	Mum and dad	6/10
Talk to my teacher	She could do practical things to help me solve my problem at school.	Nervous that she might not help me.	Maybe my best friend?	9/10



Distraction techniques:

It may be helpful to teach your child some techniques to distract them if they recognise that they are feeling anxious:

- ❑ Count back from 20 in 2s
- ❑ Get them to imagine a big red STOP sign in their head and get them to describe it to you.
- ❑ Get involved in absorbing activities e.g. making/building something, being active
- ❑ Get them to describe things around them.
- ❑ Make a time of the day to think/ talk about worries, or write them in a book – ‘worry time’



Relaxation techniques:

It is also helpful to practice mindfulness and other relaxation techniques:

- ❑ Teach calm, gentle breathing
- ❑ Relaxation e.g. progressive muscle relaxation, drawing, reading.
- ❑ Mindfulness: e.g. Apps: HeadSpace, Smiling Mind, Chill Panda, Sleep Meditations for Kids, My First Yoga.
- ❑ Use stories and books to talk to them about worry e.g. The Huge Bag of Worries by Virginia Ironside; Silly Billy by Anthony Browne.



Resources:

- ❑ **Overcoming Your Child's Fears and Worries: A Self-help Guide (2nd edition)** by Cathy Creswell
- ❑ **What To Do When You Worry Too Much** by Dawn Huebner
- ❑ **When my worries get too big! A relaxation book for children who worry a lot** by Kari Dunn Buron.
- ❑ **The Huge Bag of Worries** by Virginia Ironside
- ❑ **Silly Billy** by Anthony Browne
- ❑ **Think Good Feel Good** by Paul Stallard
- ❑ 'The Headspace App' - a good meditation app for young people
<https://www.headspace.com/>
- ❑ 'Relax Kids' - useful resources to help children cope with a range of stressful situations: <http://www.relaxkids.co.uk/UK/Home>



Thank you

If you have any questions/ concerns please contact us at
MHST@achievingforchildren.org.uk

**Please also complete this short workshop
feedback questionnaire:**

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1IODr3HOrmn5ThR7h-T51tyR8S22BsPWufUzTCHyFxSw/viewform?edit_requested=true

