

# Helping The Anxious Child

Training delivered by Kerri White SENCO

(Trained by EWMHS Child & Adolescent Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist)

A normal and adaptive response to real or perceived danger, serving as a natural alarm system to alert us to potential danger.

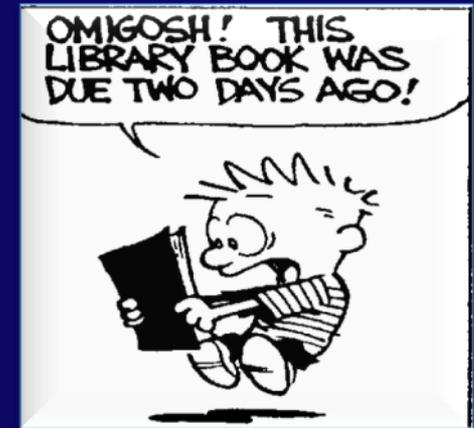
# What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is another word for worries, fears, being frightened or scared that something either has happened or might happen sometime in the future.

Anxiety is a normal emotion that helps us to perform to the best of our abilities and protects us in dangerous situations, in fact we cannot live without anxiety, nor would we want to! Anxiety and worry is the emotion that helps us to protect ourselves and alerts us to real danger. If we didn't experience anxiety we might get hurt, or worse still, die.

# WHEN DOES ANXIETY BECOME A PROBLEM?

- When it is excessive;
- When it is persistent;
- When it causes impairment in functioning;
- When it results in the child's anxious behaviour needing to be accommodated by others.

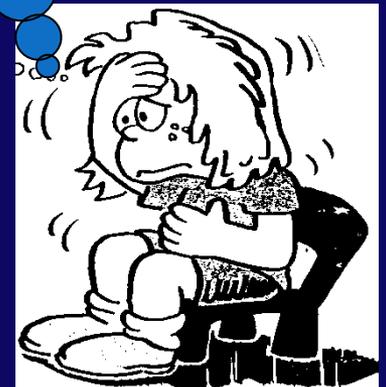


# Negative Thinking

- Catastrophizing or blowing things out of proportion;
- Underestimating their own and other's ability to cope with the potential threat;
- Negative glasses: only ever seeing one part of what could happen and finding it hard to see the good or positive aspect of the situation;
- Fortune-telling: where he/she predicts that something bad will happen;
- Mind-reading: where they are convinced that they 'already know' what other's will be thinking about them.
- Remember, it's difficult to stop a thought once it gets in (Pink Elephant)

Activity 1 – Being positive to ourselves.

**“I always get the answer wrong!”**



# FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

- Physiological changes occur during the fight or flight response in order to give the body increased strength and speed in anticipation of fighting or running.
- Pupils dilate to let in more light and enhance vision;
- Heart rate increases to move oxygen-carrying blood cells quickly through the body;
- Blood travels towards muscles and crucially away from the brain, making thinking difficult;
- Breathing quickens to provide oxygen and expel carbon dioxide;
- Capillaries near the surface of the skin close off to minimise bleeding in case of injury (which is why we become pale when we're frightened);
- Palms become a bit sweaty, which actually improves grip.

# Anxiety Truths ....

It is true that anxiety often runs in families, but that's because of learned behaviour, and not because of genes.

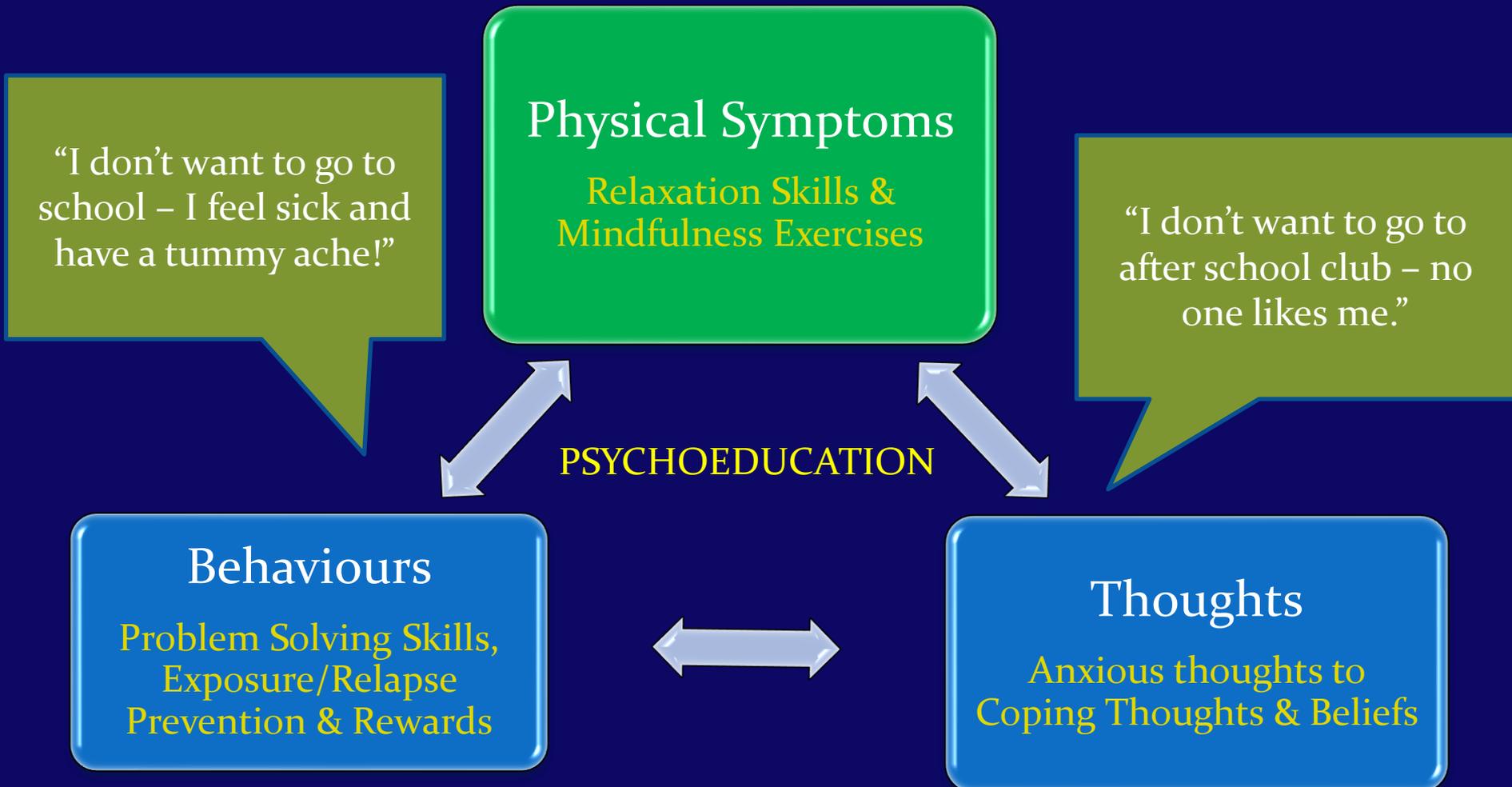
Since anxiety personalities are notorious worriers, our worry about our symptoms often fuels the anxiety fire.

What can we do? - share some top tips....

# What can parents/carers do?

- In order to provide some basic facts about the physical aspects of anxiety and its treatment and to instil some hope!
- To **normalise** anxiety and to acknowledge that everyone experiences worry or anxiety of some kind and that it serves a useful purpose in keeping us safe;
- To recognise that anxiety is a genuine physical and emotional response to a situation that you may not have control over;
- To help their child to manage, but not prevent, the threat.

# Anxiety Symptoms and CBT Skills



# QUESTIONS - HELPING THE CHILD TO SPOT UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS

- Why are you worried?
- What is it specifically about the situation that is frightening you?
- What do you think will happen next?
- What do you think will happen if you don't do anything different this time?
- What have you been able to do in the past that has helped? What makes it worse?

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# EXPERIENTIAL AVOIDANCE



# ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT TO IDENTIFIED GOALS IS THE ONLY WAY FORWARD

- Thoughts and Feelings are not necessarily the problem, and they do not necessarily need to be eliminated or altered unnecessarily;
- The problem lies in avoidance behaviours and maladaptive control strategies;
- Valued goals create a context in which acceptance, willingness and a commitment to action becomes possible;
- It may be quicker to 'act' your way into thinking differently than to think your way into acting differently i.e. 'faking it to make it.'

# Exposure/Relapse Prevention: Facing Fears

- Exposure is the key component of CBT for anxiety and it's rationale is that;
  - Anxiety is partly learned and so can be unlearned;
  - Feared consequences will either not occur or can be managed better.
- Climbing the F.E.A.R. Ladder
  - Gradually building up from bearable to much harder situations



# WHAT HELPS?

- Rewarding Coping Behaviours;
- Discouraging Unhelpful Anxiety-Related behaviours;
- Modelling Distress Tolerance
- Developing Good Communication and Problem-Solving Skills;
- Using an Authoritative Parenting Style;
- Expressing Warmth and Acceptance

# What strategies help when feeling anxious ?

- 333 Rule Ask your child to name 3 things they can see, identify 3 sounds they can hear, and move 3 different parts of their bodies. This mindfulness strategy helps children engage their senses and focus on reality rather than worrying about what might happen in the future.
- Encourage them to do an activity that helps them feel calmer. This could be running, walking, listening to music, painting, drawing or colouring-in, writing in a journal, watching a favourite film or reading a favourite book.
- think about something you're looking forward to
- imagine your thoughts leaving your brain and floating off into the sky
- reflect on how you're feeling talk to other people you trust someone else in your family who is less emotional.
- remind yourself you're not alone – odds are someone in your friendship circle is feeling the same.

# WHAT DOESN'T HELP?

- Over-Protectiveness;
- Too much reassurance;
- Over-control and Intrusiveness;
- Anxious Interpretation of Events;
- Tolerance or Encouragement of Escape and Avoidance;

# Goals of CBT and ACT for Anxiety

- Reduce anxiety, but not eliminate it;
- Increase ability to manage and cope with anxiety by teaching skills;
- To identify and change anxious behaviour (avoidance) and unhelpful thoughts ;
- Using some detective-thinking to decide what is possible and what is probable;
- Committing oneself to work towards achieving a desired goal by changing our behaviour.

# What do we currently do well at Sacred Heart Catholic school?

Sacred Heart families share the same values

Love of God  
Love of One Another  
Love of Our World  
Love of Learning

Schools are the first point of reference for children who are suffering with mental health problems – not health services!

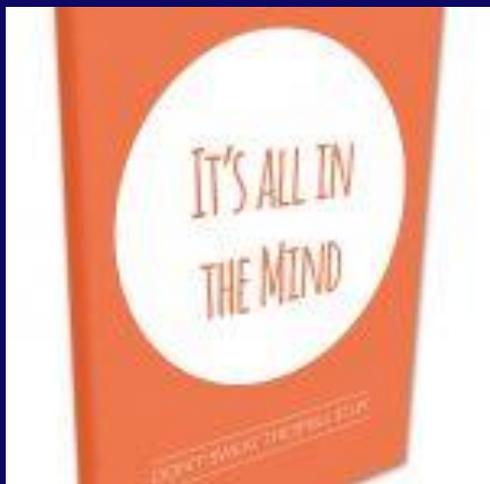
In School:

- School-based early intervention support available to all pupils who require help – daily nurture, check in with children (a trusted adult).
- Specialist/trained staff – welfare officer / Inclusion Lead / SENCO
- Inclusion Team outreach service
- Access to Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Service (EWMHS), Kids Inspire
- Access to Play Therapists / Counsellors

# Who can help?

EWMHS Southend and Thurrock - Child & Adolescent Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist . Call 0300 300 1600 9am-5pm, Monday to Friday

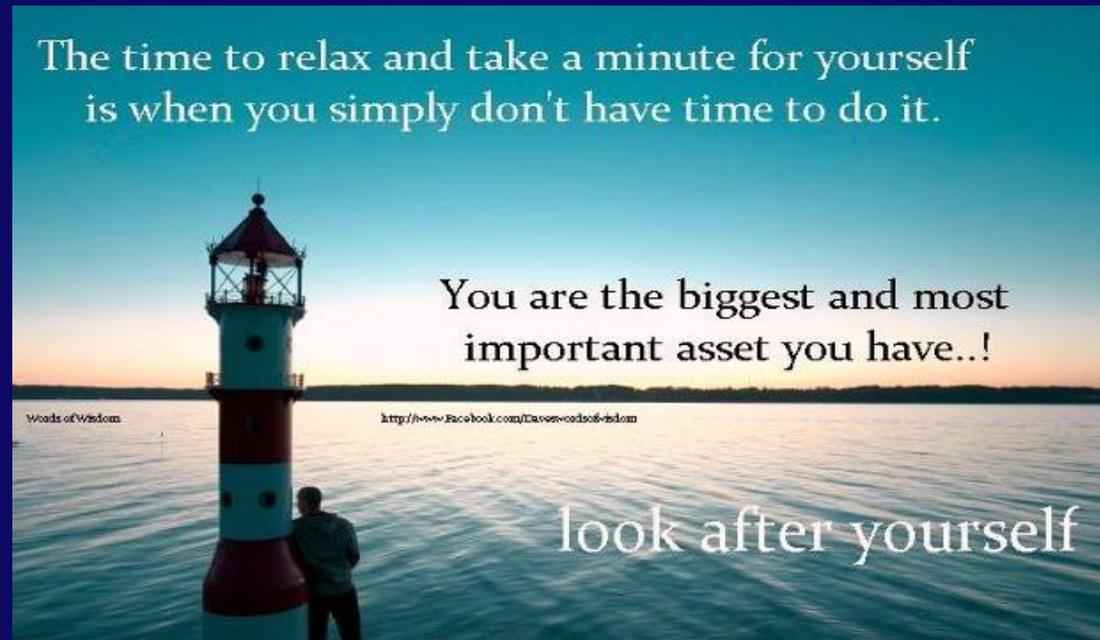
<https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-anxiety/>



<https://www.minded.org.uk/>



# Embedding Social Emotional and Mental Health and Well-being in schools



**Thank you for attending – questions?**