UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

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South West Herts Partnership

What we offer

South West Herts Partnership is a family focussed/needs-led partnership working alongside children and their families to ensure access to a wide range of early support with a non-judgemental friendly approach. Our ethos is underpinned by principles of choice, flexibility and respect.

- Providing advice, emotional support, mentoring, encouragement, and motivation
- Strategies to help manage challenging behaviour
- Supporting families with children with additional needs
- Managing finances and household budgeting
- Housing concerns
- Changing school/transition
- General routines and boundaries
- Assisting with engagement with your child's school and other agencies
- Advising on local parenting groups or support groups
- Bereavement & Separation
- Support with parenting strategies to improve behaviour and relationships at home

ANXIETY IS …….

- Helpful – we all experience anxiety at times, it is needed to help us function.
- Useful – the right amount of anxiety is useful and helps us identify and respond to danger in ‘fight, flight or freeze’ mode. It can motivate us, and help us to face dealing with difficult challenges. The ‘right’ amount of anxiety can help us perform better and stimulate action and creativity.
- Anxiety is your body’s natural response to stress. It is a feeling of fear or apprehension about what is to come.

FIGHT, FLIGHT OR FREEZE

- People feel anxious when they believe they are under threat. When someone thinks something bad is going to happen , their bodies release adrenaline which helps them prepare physically to deal with the threat by running away or fighting.
- These chemicals cause physical sensations in the body, such as sweating, a dry mouth, fluttering tummy, and a fast heart beat etc
- HOWEVER… sometimes we think things are dangerous, even when they are not. When we think we are in danger, our bodies produces adrenaline just as if we were in real danger. This is a FALSE alarm as there is no real danger and we DO NOT need to run away or fight. (this physical sensation is uncomfortable but is temporary and harmless

WHY DO CHILDREN BECOME ANXIOUS?

- •Anxiety runs in families
- •68% of children with anxiety disorders have an anxious mother.
- •28% of children with anxiety disorders have an anxious father.
- •Some of this is due to genes but not all of it.
- •Roughly 1/3 explained by genes
- •Child temperament

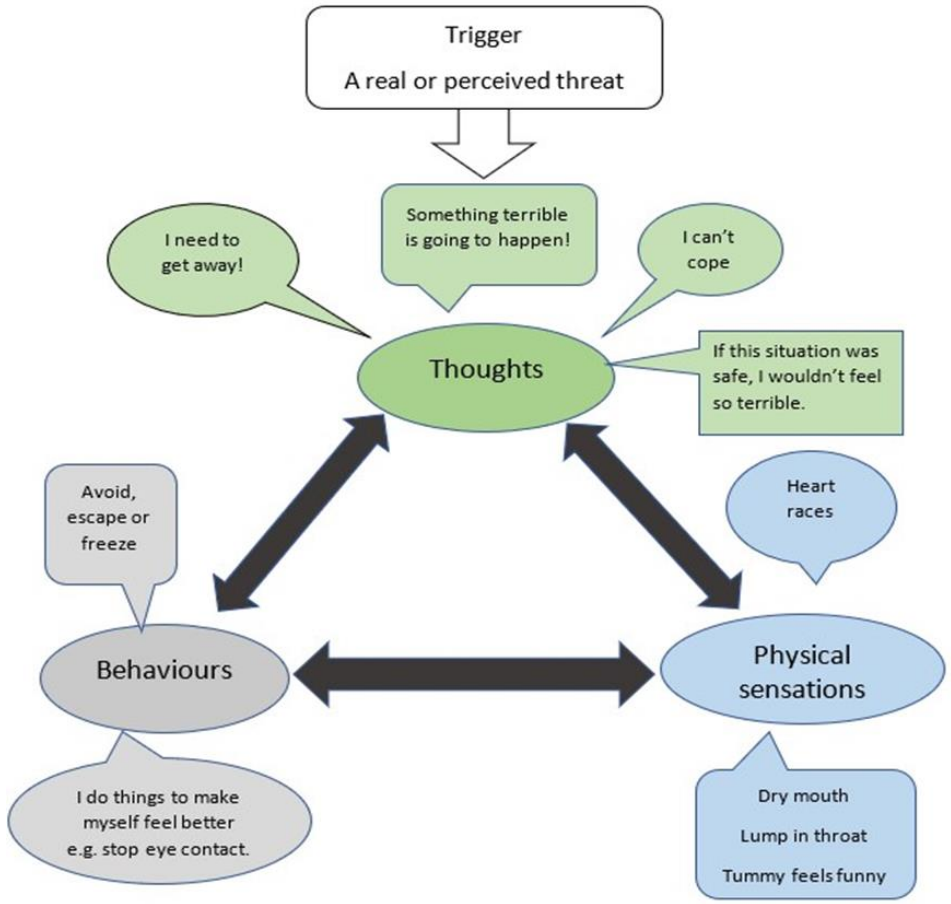
Dr Helen Dodd, Lecturer in Clinical Psychology

Dr Claire Hill, Clinical Psychologist & Postdoctoral Research Fellow

Anxiety & Depression in Young People (AnDY) Research Unit, University of Reading

CYCLE OF ANXIETY

When we feel anxious sensations in our bodies, we naturally want to avoid the situation that is triggering the anxiety. But every time we avoid the thing we are worried about, it reinforces the belief that we need to avoid the scary thing to make ourselves feel safe.



Key strategies to support anxiety

- Morning and evening routines (handout)
- Listening to your child and acknowledge their feelings.
- Sometimes it is enough for you to just sit with your child and listen. You do not have to ‘fix’ the problem for your child there and then.
- Encourage your child to use their coping skills
- Reduce attention for anxious behaviours
- Limit verbal reassurance
- Give frequent, specific praise for brave behaviour
- Manage your own emotions in front of your child
- Do not let your child avoid situations that make them feel anxious
- Be positive
- Keep clear and predictable routines
- Consider seeking medical advice and support

LISTENING TO YOUR CHILD…
Children are more likely to talk to their parents or carers about their worries.

- Things you should do when talking with your child:
- Show them you are actively listening through use of body language, facial expressions, eye contact, and responding with short phrase such as ‘yeah’
- Give your child time to say what they want in their own words.
- Sometimes when our children talk to us about their worries this can make us feel very anxious. It is important that you try to stay calm throughout the discussion.
- Acknowledge that your child's fears are real to them and empathise with how they are feeling for example: ‘ I can hear that you’re feeling really worried about going back to school on Monday. I’m sorry. That must be really tough

TALKING ABOUT FEARS AND WORRIES

- Talking about fears and worries does not make them worse.
- Don't make assumptions about what is making your child anxious.
- Ask your child simple 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/frightened?
- Timing and the way you ask are important considerations

Things not to do …..

- Things you should NOT do when talking to your child about their worries:
- Say your child shouldn't feel worried, this will make them think their feelings are not valid.
- Allow them to talk endlessly about their anxiety in depth. Doing so may inadvertently give them more attention for being anxious than for being brave.
- Argue about the anxiety or try to 'jolly' them out of the emotion

Coping Strategies to help your child

Giraffe Mindfulness:

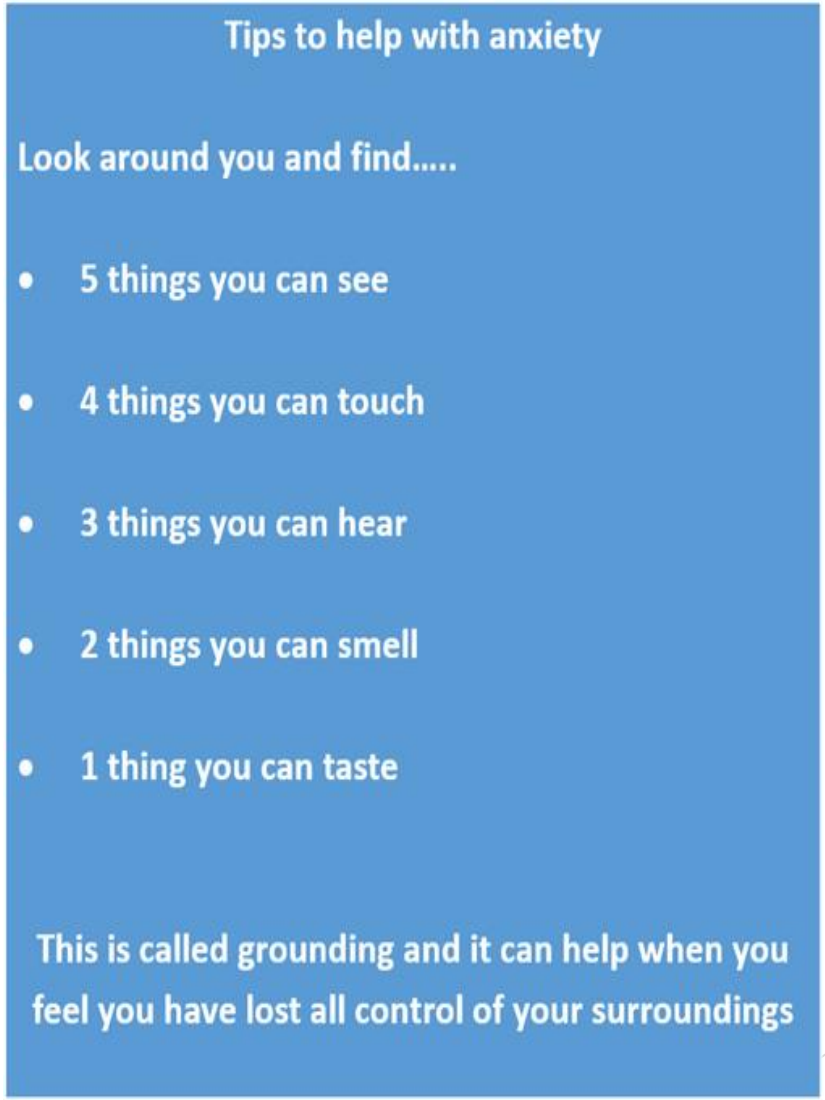
Now, stretch up your neck. Make it feel long, like a giraffe's. Pull your shoulders down as low as they will go.

Stretch your neck.

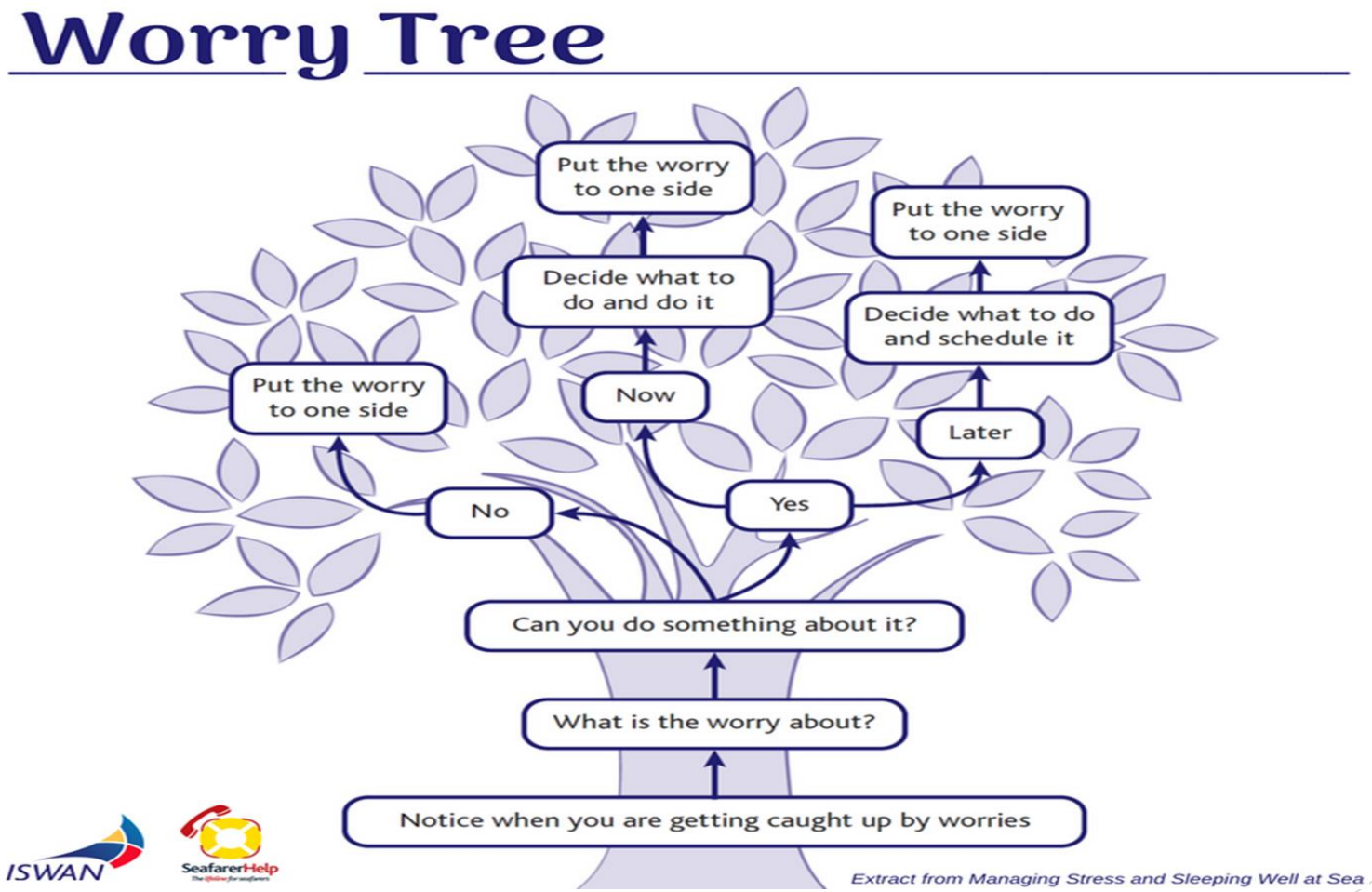
Make it as long as you can.

Now stretch just a bit more! RELAX!

Let all your muscles go floppy. Do this 4 or 5 times.



Strategies


Worry Tree
Notice when you are getting caught up by worries
What is the worry about?
Can you do something about it?
No
Yes
Now
Later
Put the worry to one side
Decide what to do and do it
Put the worry to one side
Decide what to do and schedule it
Put the worry to one side
Extract from Managing Stress and Sleeping Well at Sea

Give frequent, specific praise for brave behaviour

- It is important that your child feels like their efforts are recognised, and you may need to point out when your child made progress. For example:
- Wow, I'm so proud of you that you put on your school uniform today without a fuss;
- You did such a great job of thinking of things you could do to calm down;
- I could see you were scared, but you hung on in there and didn't try to run away. Amazing!

Manage your own emotions…

- Children look to their parents / carers to see how they respond to situations and are very good at reading their parent's / carer's cues. If you look anxious, your child will interpret this as a sign that they should be worried (or confirm their worried feelings) and it will make them feel that the situation is not safe.
- It is important that you try to remain calm as much as possible, so that your child does not get the impression that the situation is unmanageable. You should also try to remain positive and give the impression that you believe the situation can get better. It can be very hard to remain calm and upbeat when you see your child is anxious and upset. You may find it helpful to share how you are feeling with someone you trust so that you can get support for yourself in managing your emotions.

SUPPORT

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTsUEOUaWpY
- https://youtu.be/PFZ6C2XhJAc
- Lumi Nova App
- Herts Mind Network
- Jami
- Kooth
- Hub of Hope
- Sam – Anxiety app
- Huge Bag of worries
- Worry monster bag
- Journaling – Diary

QUESTIONS

- Thank you for taking the time to come to this coffee morning. Please feel free to ask any questions.