

# *Managing My Child's Anxiety*

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**achieving  
for children**


# *Talking Points*

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- What does anxiety look like?
  - What kind of worries are expected as your child develops?
  - What keeps anxiety going? The thoughts – emotions – behaviour connection
  - Spotting & talking about anxiety
  - What to do with your child's anxiety?
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# *But first, Ground Rules*

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- Toilets
  - Mobile phones
  - Exits
  - Confidentiality
  - Respect for others
  - Keeping yourself safe
  - No question too small!
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# *What does anxiety look like?*

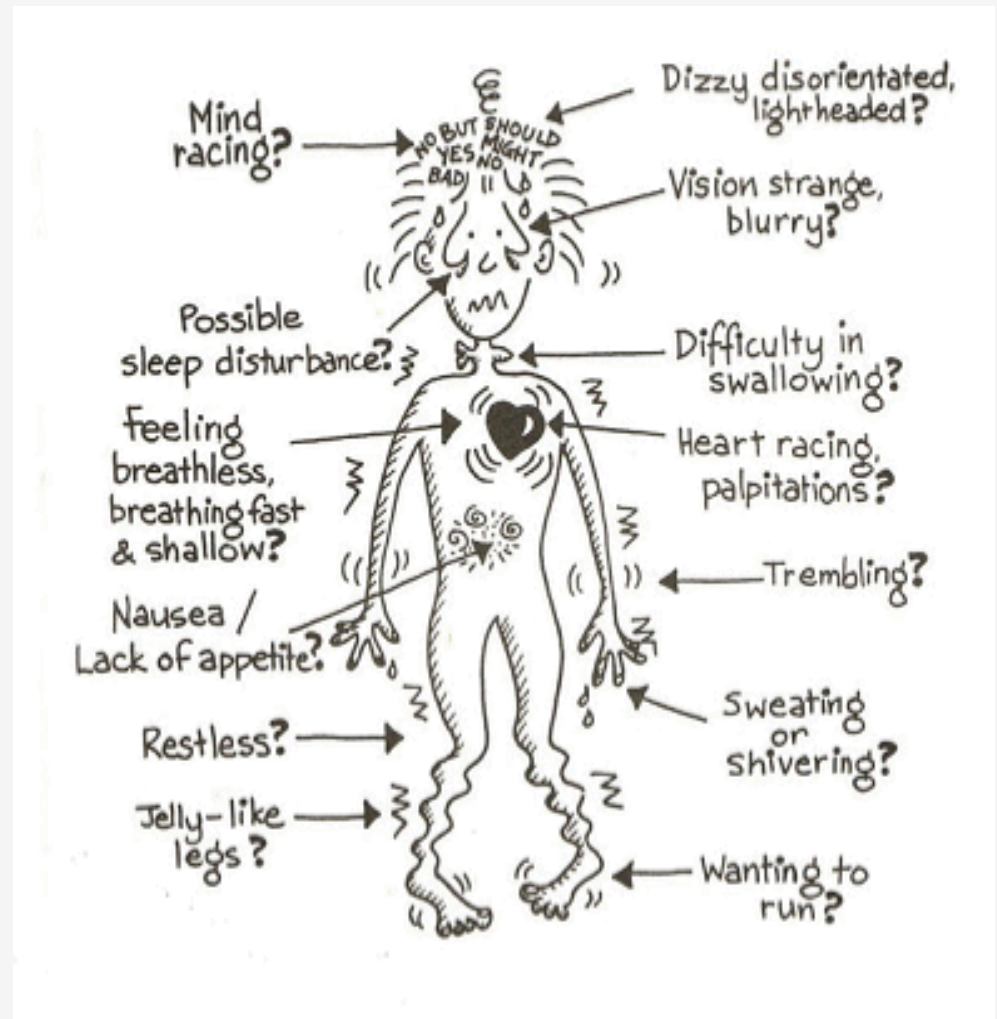
*Please share*

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Think about a time when you have felt anxious.

- What did you notice in your body?
  - What went through your mind?
  - What did you want to do?
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*What does anxiety look like?*



Any ideas why?

# *What does anxiety look like?*

- Anger & argumentativeness
- Changes to appetite
- Wanting to run away or talking about not wanting to be alive or hating their lives
- Underperforming at school
- Decreased confidence and avoidance
- Re-creating “stories, worries” in play
- Changes to sleep pattern
- Physical health complaints
- Shaking, sweating & restlessness
- Appearing low, sad or more tearful
- Worrying much more than usual
- Withdrawal
- Not wanting to see friends or play

Anything sound familiar?

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*What kind  
of worries  
would you  
expect your  
child to  
have?*

Age	Psychological and social competencies and concerns relevant to development of anxiety	Principal sources of fear	Principal anxiety disorders
Early infancy 0-6 months	Sensory abilities dominate infants' adaptation	Intense sensory stimuli Loss of support Loud noises	
Late infancy 6-12 months	Sensorimotor schemas Cause and effect Object constancy	Strangers Separation	
Toddler years 2-4 years	Pre-operational thinking Capacity to imagine but inability to distinguish fantasy from reality	Imaginary creatures Potential burglars The dark	Separation anxiety
Early childhood 5-7 years	Concrete operational thinking Capacity to think in concrete logical terms	Natural disasters Injury Animals Media-based fears	Animal phobia Blood/injury phobia
Middle childhood 8-11 years	Esteem centres on academic and athletic performance in school	Poor academic and athletic performance	Test anxiety School phobia
Adolescence 12-18 years	Formal operational thought Capacity to anticipate future dangers Esteem is derived from peer relationships	Peer rejection	Social phobias Agoraphobia Panic disorder

*What kind  
of worries  
would you  
expect your  
child to  
have?*

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- Anxiety is the most common mental health issue in children.
  - Approximately **one in six children and young people aged 5 – 16** will experience an anxiety disorder at some point in their lives.
  - That's around **five children in every class**
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*What kind  
of worries  
would you  
expect your  
child to  
have?*

*Please share*

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Have you noticed anxieties in your child that go beyond what's "expected"?




# *When does anxiety become problematic?*

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## **DSM-IV & ICD-10:**

Explicit distinction between 'normal' and 'abnormal' anxiety

1. The duration and intensity does not correspond to the real danger of the situation
  2. It occurs in situations where there is little actual threat
  3. It lasts over a long period of time
  4. It causes impairment and interferes with psychological, academic and social functioning
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*When does anxiety become problematic?*

Early childhood	Middle childhood	Early adolescence	Mid adolescence	Late adolescence	Early adulthood
Specific phobias					
Separation anxiety					
		Social phobia			
			Obsessive Compulsive Disorder		
					Panic disorder
Generalized Anxiety Disorder					

# *What keeps anxiety going?*

*The thought - emotion - behaviour connection*



# *What keeps anxiety going?*

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## **Cognitive components**

- Fear of not being able to cope
- Uncertainty about the future

## **Physical components**

- Activation of sympathetic nervous system
- Production chemical/physical effects to mobilise body for action

## **Behaviours components**

- Most commonly, avoidance of the feared stimuli or situations
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# *What keeps anxiety going?*

## *Red Thoughts*

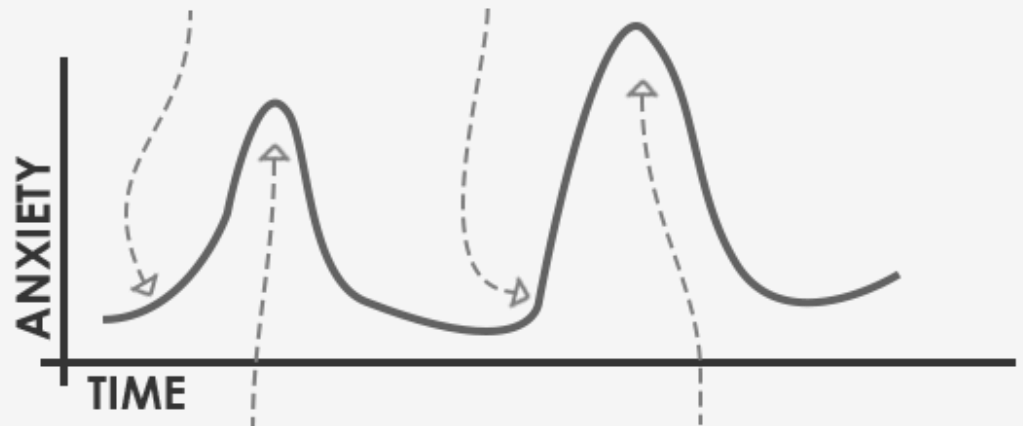
- STOP us from feeling good, or doing important things.
- Everyone has red (unhelpful, discouraging, unrealistic) thoughts sometimes, and that's okay.
- But red thoughts can make us feel sad, worried, and sometimes more upset than we need to feel.
- Just because these red thoughts pop into our heads doesn't mean we have to believe them.
- We can actually learn to **challenge red thoughts**.

**Examples** : “This is never going to get any better”; “I’m a terrible parent”; “my child never makes any progress”

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# *What keeps anxiety going?*

(A person is confronted with an anxiety-producing situation which leads to an uncomfortable sense of worry and agitation.)



(The anxiety-producing situation is avoided, and the person receives a feeling of relief. However, next time the anxiety will be worse.)

# *What keeps anxiety going?*

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## **Refusal / Avoidance / Escape behaviours**

- Child never learns that nothing terrible does happen or that they can actually cope in the situation.

## **Safety behaviours**

- Child develops a belief that they can only cope with these props that keep them safe

## **Reassurance Seeking**

- Child becomes dependent on this reassurance to manage the anxiety.
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*How do you  
spot  
anxiety?*

*Behaviours*

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**Observe your child**

- Has anything changed at school or at home?
  - Notice changes in appearance?
  - How they relate to peers and to adults?
  - Observe beyond behaviour, what is triggering them?
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# *How to spot anxiety?*

*Thoughts*

## **Ask (be neutral, curious & sympathetic)**


- Why are you worried?
- What do you think might happen?
- What is it about that situation that is making you frightened?
- What would be the worst thing that could happen?
- Why does that worry you?
- I suppose if I had to .... I might worry that ....
- Write it down, draw, use toys as needed to help child express thoughts

Avoid offering reassurances

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# *How do you talk about anxiety?*

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- **Don't be afraid** to approach your child and ask if they are OK or if something is bothering them
  - Use your **listening** and **reflecting** skills.
  - **Wonder aloud** about what might be happening for your child
  - **Name feelings** around events if they approach you to talk.
  - Look beyond behaviour, **be curious** about what is happening for them.
  - **Model emotion regulation**
  - **Ask for help-** use systems of support and advice.
  - **Know** where else to get support from....
- 


# *How do you talk about anxiety?*

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- **Seize the moment**  
Informal spaces can be great opportunities to talk about serious topics in a more relaxed atmosphere (as long as its private).
  - **Start small**  
You don't need to set aside hours to chat. Just opening up the conversation makes a big difference
  - **Explain that we all have difficult times in our lives**  
Mental health is about our range of emotions and how we cope with our lives. Our mental health can fluctuate – over the course of our lives, or even from day to day. Draw on own experiences.
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# *How do you talk about anxiety?*

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- **Mental health is positive too.** Chat about things that help with all of our wellbeing, like talking to someone they trust, exercise, chill out or 'me' time. Let them know it isn't about feeling happy all the time, but feeling more able to cope.
  - **Talk their language.** Start with the language they use and helpfully expand on it e.g. "you said you've been feeling stressed, when you spoke about how it feels, I wondered if it's like a mix of angry and upset? "
- 


# *How do you talk about anxiety?*

- **Depersonalise.** People often find it easier to think and talk openly about a hypothetical situation rather than their own feelings and experiences. Rather than direct questions about them, ask ‘how someone might feel who is upset about XYZ?’
- **Show you’re happy to talk and listen.** Above all, let your child know that if they are worried about something or feeling sad more often – they can come and talk to you about it and you will be there to support them.
- **Learn together**  
It’s OK not to know or understand things. You could always suggest that it’s something you can learn about together.

# *What do you do with anxiety?*

*Manage anxious  
thoughts*

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- “Worry eaters” /Worry boxes
  - “Worry time”
  - Find evidence for worry
  - Amplify & affirm when expectation is different from reality.
  - Challenge “what if?”
  - Limit screen time
  - Establish clear and containing boundaries
  - Consider what information to share with children
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# *What do you do with anxiety?*

*Encourage positive  
self-talk*

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## **Preparatory thoughts:**

“It’s not going to be as bad as I think”

“It won’t be for long and I can cope with it”

“I might even enjoy it if I go”

“Let’s just give it a try”

## **Coping thoughts:**

“Concentrate on what’s happening”

“Let’s just relax and think positive

“This is just anxiety. It isn’t nice but it won’t hurt me”


“I have done it before and I can do it again”

## **Self-praise after the event:**

“I did it, I coped!”

“I achieved that, I’m getting better”

“That was tough, but I got through it. It will be easier next time.”






# *What do you do with anxiety?*

*Try relaxation  
exercises*

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- Deep breathing
  - Visualisation
  - Grounding
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
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# *What do you do with anxiety?*


*Build resilience*

**Resilience**; the ability to bounce back. Build resilience by encouraging your child to:

1. Make connections
2. Help others
3. Maintain a daily routine
4. Take a break
5. Self-care
6. Set & move toward their goals
7. Nurture a positive self-view
8. Keep things in perspective and maintain a hopeful outlook
9. Look for opportunities for self-discovery
10. Accept that change is part of living

# *What do you do with anxiety?*


*Other...*

- Eat well
  - Maintain a good sleep routine
  - Encourage exercise
  - Create positive experiences
  - Have fun!
  - Encourage social activities
  - Don't say "cheer up", "pull yourself together"
  - Validate and set SMART goals
  - Make changes to timetable, reduce stress...
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# *What do you do with anxiety?*

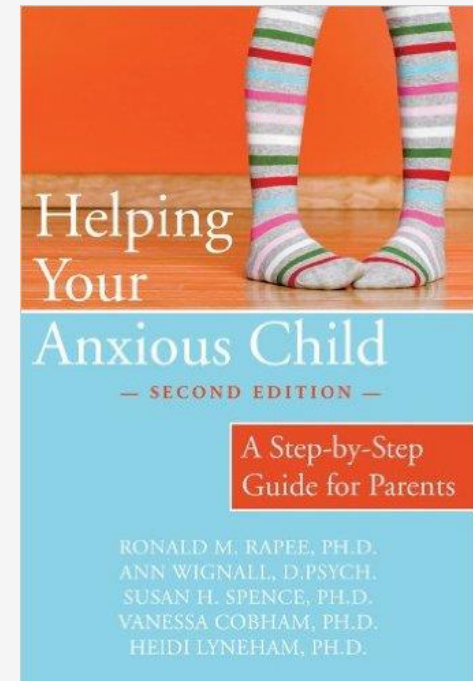
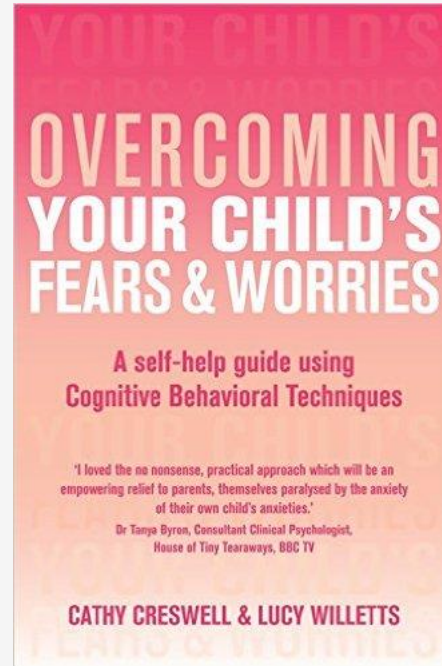
*Resources:  
Community*

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- Nurture groups
  - Social skills groups
  - Play therapists
  - Peer mentoring/encouraging friendships
  - Buy-in work with services
  - EHS or Tier 3 CAMHS
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# *What do you do with anxiety?*

Resources: Books



# *What do you do with anxiety?*

Resources: Online

- Mental Health information leaflets:  
<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/youngpeople>
- Mental health & well-being:  
<http://www.youngminds.org.uk/>
- Relaxation Materials:  
<http://www.relaxkids.com/>
- Books on prescription:  
<http://reading-well.org.uk/>




*Questions*



# *Question*

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Can you name one  
thing you will take away  
from today?





*Thank you*

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