

Anxiety



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What is Anxiety?

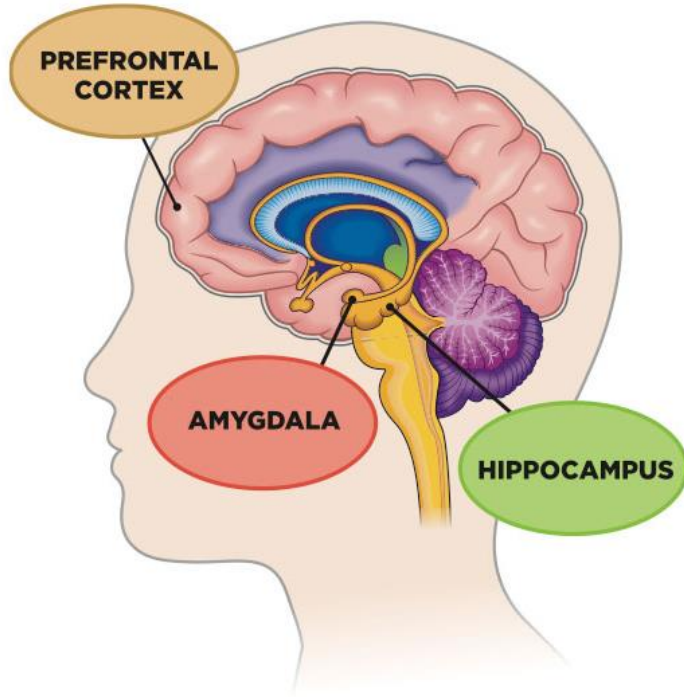
Our bodies are designed to keep us safe, our brains will always work to do this whenever it feels under threat.

Many, many years ago when we were caveman, we were always having to run from danger, so the amygdala within our brain is on high alert to protect us from dangerous situations.

When the amygdala senses danger, it sends our body into 'fight, flight or freeze' mode.

When this happens the frontal lobe goes off line so any rational, higher order thinking can no longer happen whilst the brain is in this state of high alert.

Discussing this with older children can be really useful, so they understand what is happening in their bodies during this time.



But sometimes...

- Our brains can be far too sensitive and perceive and react to danger, that isn't there.
- This leaves us with feelings of anxiety through our bodies, for some time afterwards.
- Some children are far more prone to anxiety than others.
- Sometimes the root cause of the anxiety will be obvious and easy to spot, other times, less so.



How can anxiety show in our bodies....?

- Sickness
- Stomach aches
- Headaches
- Difficulty sleeping
- Tearful
- Dizzy spells
- Tired
- Unable to sleep
- Nightmares
- Going off food
- Going to the toilet a lot
- Bedwetting

****please get your child checked out by a GP, if you are worried about any symptoms**



Anxious behaviours...



***Anger** – never occurs alone! There is always a secondary emotion underneath, such as frustration, disappointment or rejection.

***Overplanning** – a way of controlling situations that feel out of control

***Lack of focus** – the mind is occupied with other thoughts

***Defiance** – another form of control

***Negativity**- struggling to think positively and outside of the negative rut

***Difficulty Sleeping**

***Avoidance** – children will often do their best to avoid situations they are not comfortable with

***Regression** – reverting back to a time where they felt safe and secure.

***Invisibility** – trying their hardest to not be seen

***Heightened emotions** – tearful or highly strung

Behaviour is Communication

When your child is behaving in a difficult manner, remember 'behaviour is communication', so consider what they are trying to let you know. We often think that children are 'playing up', but actually, they feel their emotions so intensely as they don't have the tools we have, to acknowledge feelings or express themselves. When we are stressed, our window of tolerance is minimised, so not only will our own patience levels decrease, so will our children's.

**How can we help
our anxious child?**

Ways to communicate with an anxious child...

Remember.....**P.A.C.E**

P is for **Playfulness** – keeping body language relaxed and a light tone to voice

A is for **Acceptance** – accept your child's worries "You're really worried there is a monster under the bed!"

C is for **Curiosity** – "Can you tell me anymore about that?" "I'm wondering what's happened to make you feel this way?".

E is for **Empathy** – "It must be so scary for you to think there's a monster under the bed. No wonder you don't like going to sleep on a night".

(Dr Dan Hughes)



REALLY listen...and talk...

- Allowing your child to acknowledge and discuss their worries is very powerful, just keep in mind that younger children may not necessarily be able to understand their core emotion or what is at the root of it. It is perfectly ok to try to verbalise what you think could be going on for them emotionally even if they haven't yet acknowledged this themselves.
- Giving children an opportunity to talk about their worries, doesn't make it worse!
- Hold back on the reassurance as this can feed the anxiety.
- Try not to ask leading questions.
- Avoid rescuing and attempting to fix the problem - allow your child time to attempt problem solving where possible.

Mummy, I'm really worried about going back to school. I want to stay home with you.



I can hear just how worried you are. I'm wondering what's making it so hard to go back to school?

Remember to...

Name it to tame it!

"You're looking worried."

"I can hear just how anxious you're feeling".

"I'm wondering if it's a worry tummy you have."

"You're looking so sad today"

"I can see you're angry and feeling all shouty, but I'm not sure why".

"I've noticed you often feel a bit sick at this time of the day".

Say what you see...



Be the calm in the storm...

- You can't promise a child's fears won't happen, but you can help them to know it will be ok in the end.
- Balance being truthful, without overloading them.
- Are we discussing things we shouldn't be around children, assuming they aren't listening?
- Remind your child that a worry is only a thought, it isn't a fact.
- What are your child's environmental triggers? For example, tiredness, too much screen time, hunger etc. How can we manage these?
- Consider own language around children e.g. "I can't cope!".



Daily Worry Time...

- Provide your child with time each day to discuss their worries - this keeps it contained and prevents the anxiety feeding into every part of the day.
- Can children use this time to work through their anxieties and try to problem solve?
- If appropriate, are your worries likely to happen? What would happen if they did? Explore alternative endings.
- Children often find it easier to talk whilst sat alongside, rather than face to face.





Worry Time...

- Make a 'worry box', children can write or draw their worries in the day for you both to discuss at the allocated time.
- Make a worry monster using playdough – what would it look like?
- Use an 'anxiety thermometer', can children gauge out of 10 how anxious they are feeling?
- Make a 'worry wall', can your child identify what to write/draw in each brick?
- Or Worry Time, can just be a time to talk each day.



Children need to take small steps towards facing their fears.

- Giving into the fear, will increase the level of anxiety towards it.
- If the larger goal is feeling unmanageable, then take small baby steps towards it.

ALSO

- Consider our expectations of our children – are they fair and reasonable? Do we need to relieve any pressure from them?
- Can children be reframed into a more positive statement. For example, turn the statement “I can’t do it” in to “I’m still learning how”.

Play time

- The benefits of play are endless, escapism, fantasy, time to process thoughts and feelings.
- Watch them as they play, are there regular themes or processes? This will give you an insight into what is happening for them.
- Play should be open ended where possible, with no end goal.
- If you are invited to play, then take a less directive role and allow the child to lead.



Other practical ideas

- Maintain the healthy habits where you can, e.g. diet, sleep and balance.
- Keep to a routine at home – one that suits you and your family, but should include time for relaxation and having fun.
- Maintain links with friends and family through facetime, what's app, zoom.
- Limit access to the news/radio
- Build in time for some physical activity each day
- Consider meditation – use Calm/Headspace
- Calming/regulation techniques e.g. square breathing, running finger in and out of hands, mindfulness colouring sheets
- Make a 'feelings diary' or a gratitude journal.
- There are lots of stories around worries and anxiety, use these as a talking point.
- Encourage children to make links with what makes them feel good e.g. walks, reading a book etc.

Resources

EXERCISE

If your outside space is limited or the weather bad, try <https://www.cosmickids.com/> for children's yoga or <https://www.gonoodle.com> for movement ideas. Couch to 5k is another positive option if there is an adult who can support the child in doing this. If possible, going for a walk outside regularly will help to prevent your child from becoming anxious about leaving the home and again will help with the transition as and when we move back towards normality.

MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS

- If meditation is new to you, these apps are really useful as a way to introduce yourself and your child. Both the following apps provide guided meditations for both adults and children, which train the mind to stay focussed and in the moment. Calm is free, with some payable parts you can opt into. Headspace has a free trial you can use before opting to sign up.

Resources

WORKBOOKS

- *Starving the Anxiety Gremlin* by Kate Collins-Donnelly ~ this comes in two versions, one is aimed at children aged 5-9 years old, the other 10 years old plus. It is a workbook to complete together, which discusses ways your child can identify the anxiety and strategies to keep it at bay.
- *What to do when you worry too much* by Dawn Huebner
- *Through my world* by Naomi Moore ~ focuses on creative expression and self-regulation, can be accessed for FREE from <https://www.wellbeingresourceszoneuk.com/>

FILM

- *Inside Out* ~ a great film for all children, but again can be used as a basis to discuss thoughts and feelings.

NEWS

- If your child is of the age or inclination to want to keep up to date with what is happening in the news, then watching news aimed specifically at children means it is kept age appropriate without being overwhelming. Children's news can be accessed here ~ <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround>

Resources

STORIES

Storytime between a child and parent has enormous benefits generally, not only is it an opportunity for quality time together, but stories can be used as a basis to discuss worries. The following books are recommended for younger children who are anxious or worried;

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- *The Huge Bag of Worries* by Virginia Ironside
- *Ruby's Worry* by Tom Percival
- *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn (FREE access, using the link below)
- *The Invisible String* by Patrice Karst (particularly for children who are separated from a parent or other close family members).
- *Relax Kids: The Magic Box* by Marneta Viegas

The following website is FREE during the pandemic which allows access to a wide range of stories to keep children entertained ~ www.storylineonline.net

Resources

ONLINE SUPPORT

- If you would like to read further ideas on ways to support your child's emotional wellbeing, here are a few useful links;

<https://www.wellbeingresourceszoneuk.com/>

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

www.happymaps.co.uk

<https://amazing-s-school.thinkific.com/courses/amazing-you-me>
-a free course designed for adults to develop some insight into how emotional wellbeing can be supported. Activities are provided to support your own wellbeing, as well as your child's.

Resources

EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Southern Brooks is a local organisation offering Online Wellbeing Workshops and Peer Support Groups, please email wellbeing@southernbrooks.org.uk for further information.
www.mind.org.uk ~ support online and over the phone.

Self care (for you – in Covid times!)

Times are particularly tough for everyone right now, so please don't forget to think about you amongst all the chaos...

...talk to a friend...buy yourself a bar of chocolate...

...have a glass of wine....have a long shower, with the door locked and the music up...watch your favourite film...

And most importantly of all....

...if you mess up, apologise, forgive yourself and move on...

