

Fears and Worries

Helping anxious children thrive at school.



What is *anxiety*?

- Anxiety is a **feeling of unease**, like a worry or fear, that can be mild or severe.
- It can **make our heart race**, we might **feel sweaty, shaky** or **short of breath**.
- Anxiety can also **cause changes in our behaviour**, such as **becoming overly careful** or **avoiding things that trigger anxiety**.

When did you last experience
this feeling?



What caused it?

How long did it last?

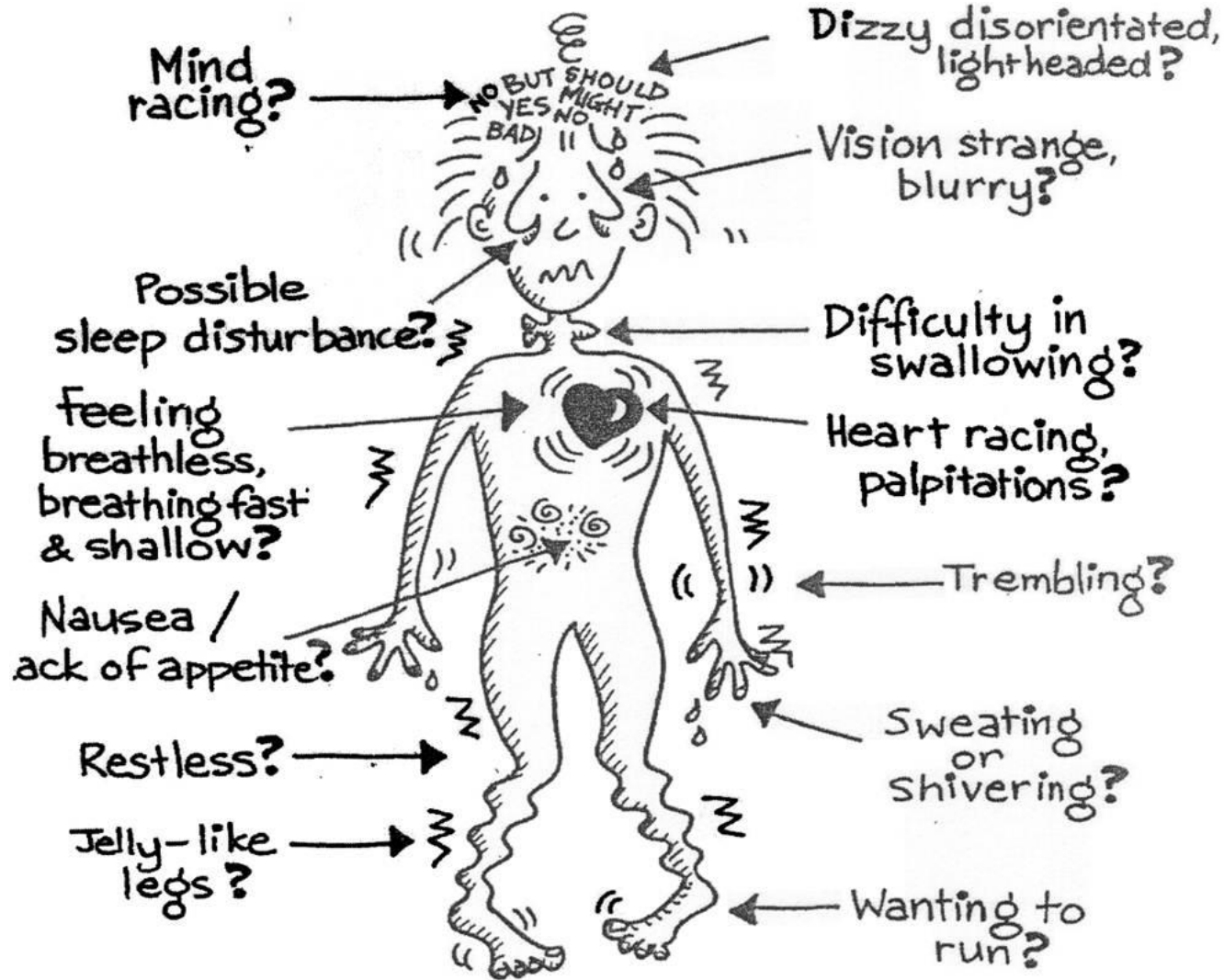


Most powerful statement I took away from this training:

Anxiety is **OVERESTIMATING**
THE EVENT and **underestimating your**
ability to cope.

Think about when you are feeling anxious- does this
resonate with you?

- How do you feel when you are feeling anxious?
- Can you relate to any of these reactions?



Anxiety in children

- All children will experience some fear or anxiety **especially when they encounter new challenges** (e.g. moving school, birth of a sibling) or unfamiliar people.
- Some anxiety is completely normal for most **children but some children will suffer from levels of anxiety that make it difficult for them to engage in age-appropriate activities**, or experience high levels of distress when doing so.
- Everyone experiences worries and anxiety at times. **It becomes a problem when excessive worrying starts to interfere with daily life.**

Types of *anxiety*

Separation anxiety – child doesn't want to leave the parent, worries about being away from home. School attendance issues.

Social anxiety – child being excessively self-conscious, making it difficult for them to participate in class and socialize with peers.

Selective mutism – child struggling with speaking in some settings, like at school or around the teacher

Generalised anxiety - Child worrying about a wide variety of everyday things. Children with generalized anxiety often worry particularly about school performance and can struggle with perfectionism.

OCD - Child's mind is filled with unwanted and stressful thoughts. Kids with OCD try to alleviate their anxiety by performing compulsive rituals like counting or washing their hands.

Specific phobias – Child experiencing an excessive and irrational fear of particular things, like being afraid of animals or storms (or birds!!)



8 WAYS A CHILD'S ANXIETY SHOWS UP AS SOMETHING ELSE

1. Anger

The perception of danger, stress or opposition is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.



4. Chandeliering

Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.



2. Difficulty Sleeping

In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.



5. Lack of Focus

Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.

FOCUS

6. Avoidance

Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.



7. Negativity

People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.

3. Defiance

Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child's defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.



8. Overplanning

Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.



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Potential *symptoms* observable at school

Inattention and restlessness – ADHD? Anxiety?

Attendance problems – school avoidance; phone use (to make sure everyone is safe)

Disruptive behaviour – aggression, defiance

Trouble answering questions in class – freeze response

Problems in certain subjects - avoidance

Not turning in homework - perfectionism, is it good enough?

Avoiding socializing or group work

- Often seems worried
- Often complains of headaches, stomach-aches or other aches and pains
- Catastrophic thinking (always thinking the worst will happen)
- Often unhappy or tearful
- Nervous or clingy in new situations
- Worry about being away from their parents
- Easily loses confidence
- Many fears
- Worries that something awful will happen to someone them or someone they know
- Easily scared
- Tired due to nightmares or trouble sleeping
- Have trouble going to school in the mornings because they feel nervous or afraid
- Seeking lots of reassurance
- Lots of “what if?” questions
- Irritable and angry, perhaps out of frustration with self, or due to sleep deprivation
- Excessively self-critical, nothing that they do is ever good enough
- Excessively concerned about what others think about them
- Avoiding participating in age appropriate activities, e.g. birthday parties, sleep overs.
- Talks about suicide or says they wish they’d never been born

Common *unhelpful* behaviours

Avoidance

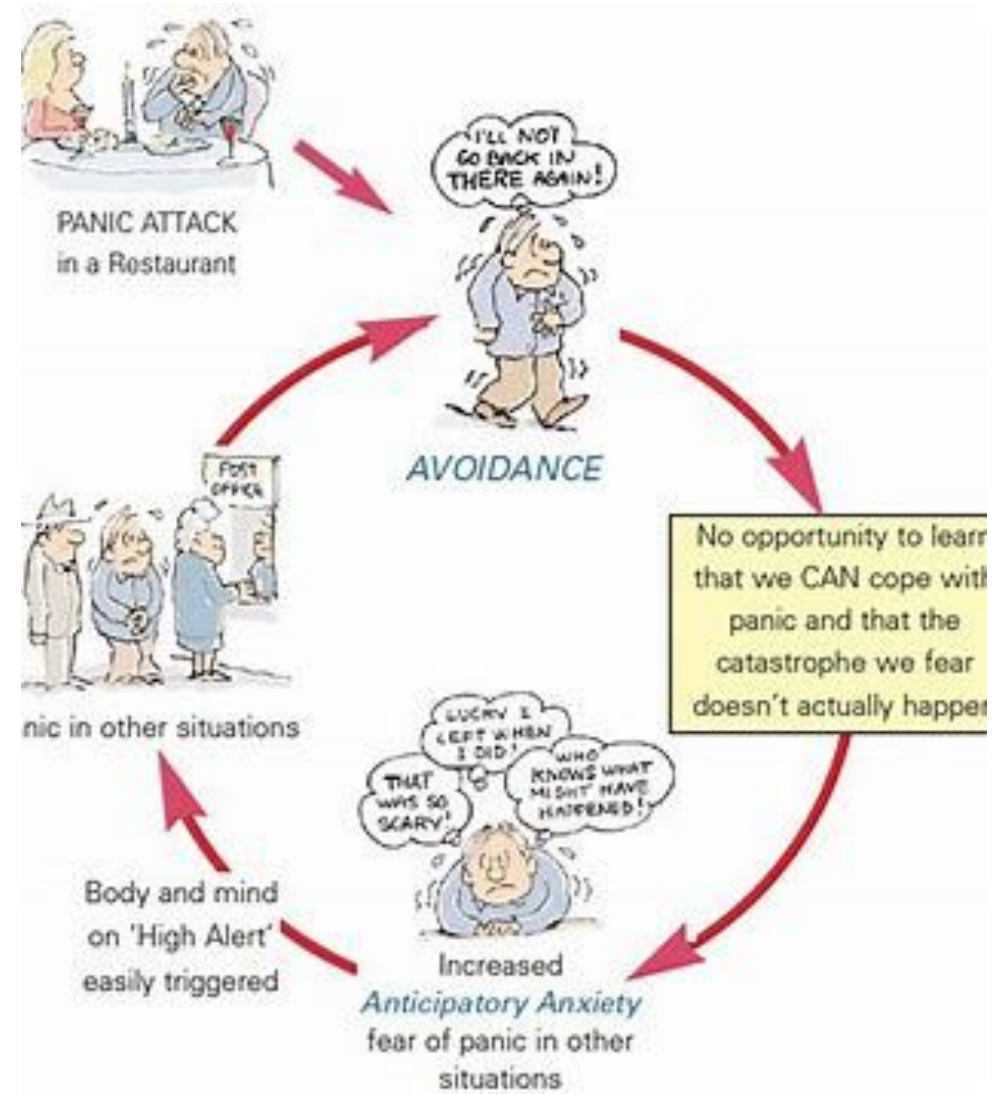
Safety behaviours

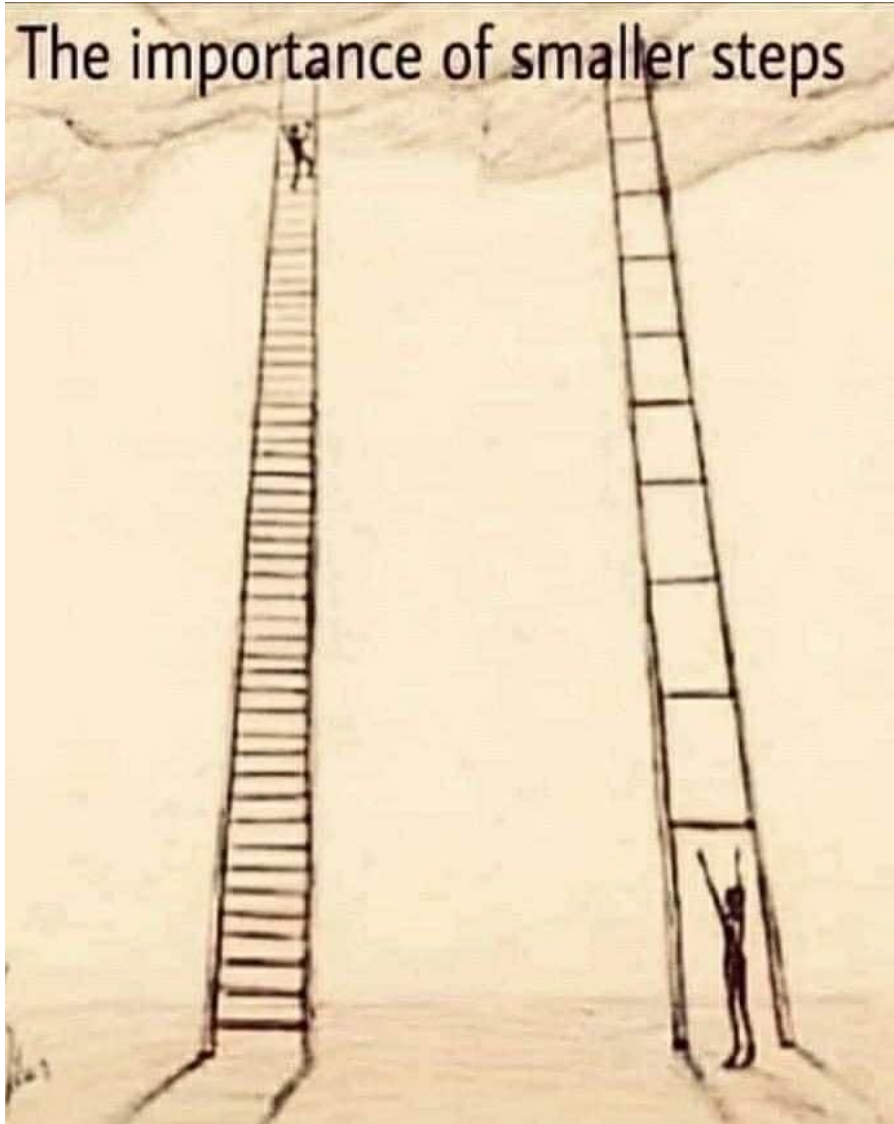
Reassurance

Catastrophic thinking

Getting it Wrong

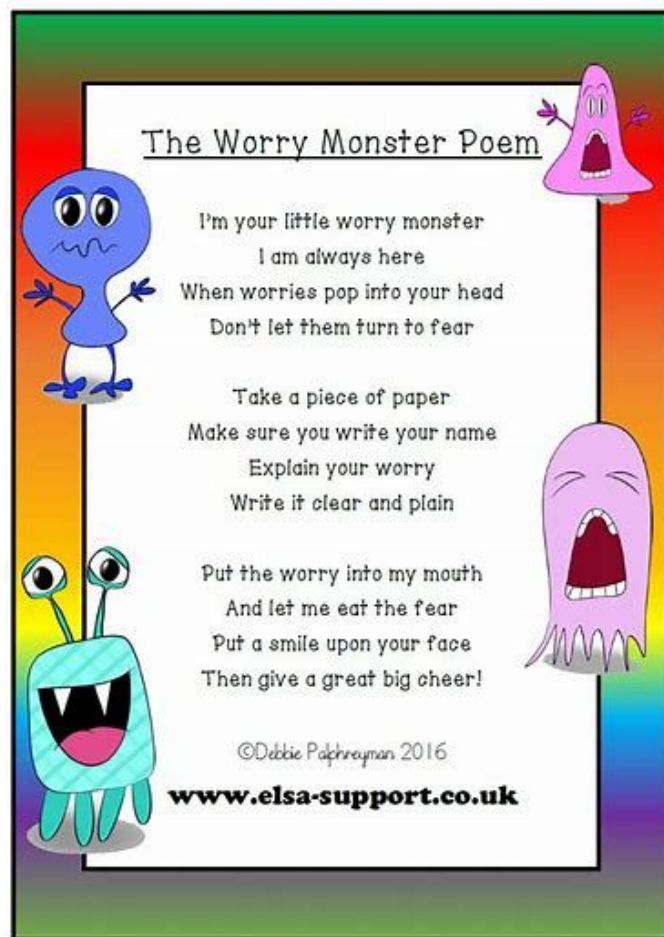
- Maintaining child's avoidance
- Allowing safety behaviours





Graded Exposure Therapy

- Evidence based psychological treatment developed to help people to overcome their anxiety by facing the anxiety provoking situation
- Fear Habituation - “original reaction towards the stimulus diminishes in intensity or even disappears” (Eelen & Vervliet, 2006)

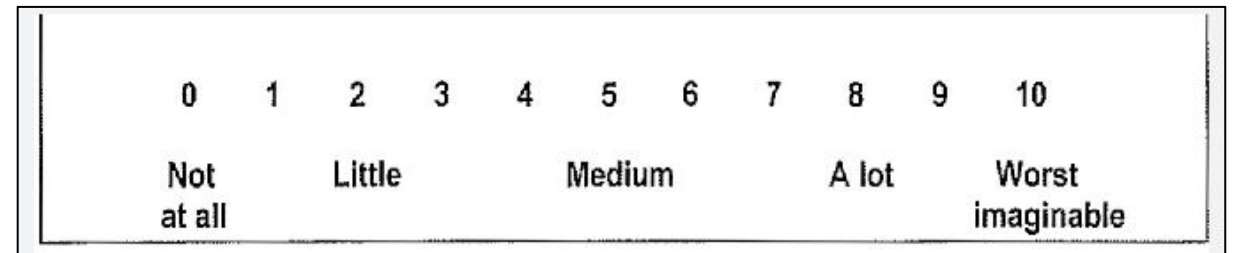


More *support ideas*

- Set specific times to share worries/circle times- normalize anxiety (we all worry sometimes), model healthy ways of coping
- Drop in worry boxes
- Offer activities and opportunities to build resilience
- Buddy system
- Relaxation technique of the week
- Worry tree-problem solving-in class as whole exercise a regular weekly slot and class can work together –sense of connection to each other and school

What does this therapy look like?

- Imagine you live near a train. In the beginning you will hear it all the time, it will drive you mad, but eventually you won't even be aware of it. This is what this therapy effectively does- it helps you become accustomed to something. Consider scaling it.
- We need to face our anxieties and fears! But- small steps are needed.
- E.g. Fear of reading in whole class situations-
- Initially read 1:1 in a quiet space with nobody else around- achieve success and build confidence.
- Then reading in a small group outside the class.
- After that, possibly echo reading...then reading a sentence. Next...



Think about all the things we already
do...what else can we do?



THE TURTLE TECHNIQUE



STEP 1
Recognise that you feel anxious.

STOP!



STEP 2
Think "STOP".



3
2
1

STEP 3
Go into shell, take 3 deep breaths and think calm thoughts.



STEP 4
Come out of shell when calm and thinking of a solution.

