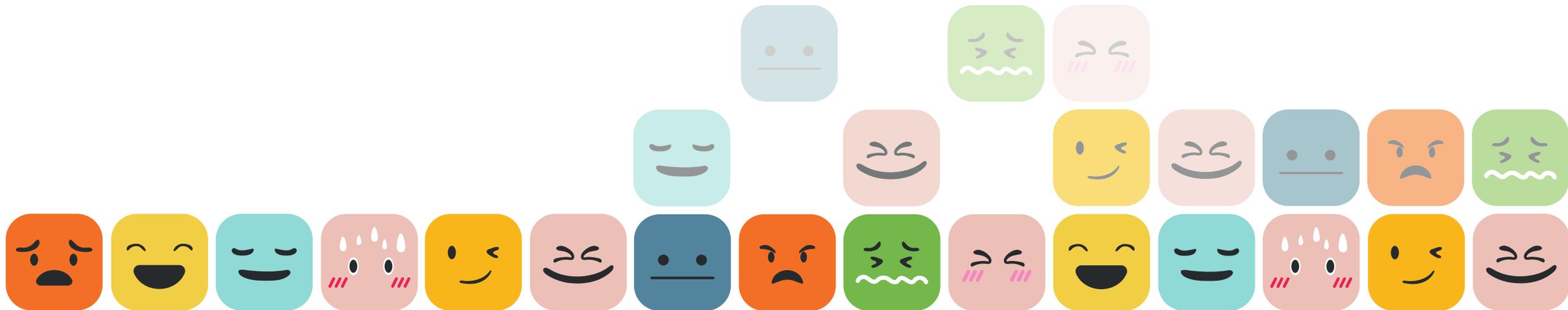


Understanding and Supporting your Child with Anxiety

Presenter: Sandra Hooper (Primary Mental Health Worker)

Co-Presenter: Dan Setterfield (Matrix)



Ground Rules



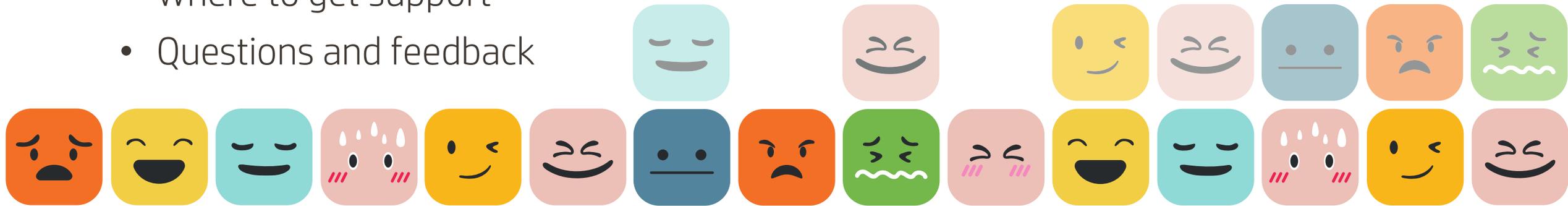
- Confidentiality - everything we talk about today will remain confidential. The only exception to this rule is if someone shares something that makes us worried that someone is at risk of harm.
- If you have any questions, we should have space at the end of presentation to discuss these.
- Respect each other - including comments, questions and viewpoints. This is a safe space!
- Please do not share any personal information or details outside of this meeting.



What we will Cover:



- What is anxiety?
- Common fears and worries experienced by children
- The causes of anxiety
- Exam Stress
- Recognising the physical symptoms of anxiety
- The cognitive behavioural therapy model of anxiety
- How to help your child manage their anxiety
- When to be concerned about your child
- Where to get support
- Questions and feedback



What is Anxiety?

“Anxiety is a normal, human feeling of fear or panic. When we face stressful situations, it can set off our brain’s in-built alarm bell system, which tell us something isn’t right and that we need to deal with it.”



YOUNGMINDS

- All children and young people feel worried sometimes and this is normal.
 - For example, the first day at school or before an exam.

Think about a time when you have felt anxious, how did it **help** and how was it **not helpful**?

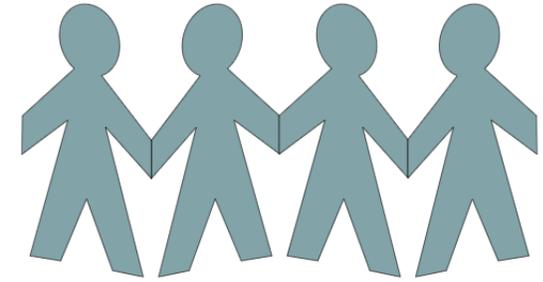
- having a job interview
- meeting new people



Common Fears and Worries Experienced by Children

Type of anxiety	Description
Specific Phobias	A fear of a particular place, object or situation. A fear that leads to avoidance or extreme discomfort when faced with the feared object (or place or situation)
Social anxiety	Child is anxious about a variety of situations in which they fear doing something embarrassing, that people will think they are stupid, judge them negatively or will react badly to them.
Generalised anxiety	Child worried excessively and finds it hard to get worries out of their mind. The worries tend to be about a range of different concerns, rather than a single issue.
Separation anxiety	Some children find it extremely difficult to be apart from a parent or carer. This often relates to a fear that if they are separated from their carer they will not see each other again.

Causes of Anxiety



Genes

- Anxiety runs in families
- 1/3 of what makes a child anxious is explained by genes (so mostly influenced by environment)
- Inherit particular characteristics rather than anxiety itself e.g. sensitivity

Adverse life events

- Stressful life events may have more impact on anxious children ie covid lockdown

Learning by example

- Picking up fears from parents or others

Learning from other people's reactions

- How others respond when they are anxious

Coping experiences

- Missed opportunities to learn how to face fears and develop skills

Going through distressing or traumatic experiences in which they do not feel safe, such as being bullied or witnessing or experiencing abuse

Having responsibilities that are beyond their age and development, for example caring for other people in their family

What Makes Young People Anxious?

Being around someone who is very anxious, such as a parent

Experiencing family stress around things like housing, money and debt

Experiencing lots of change in a short space of time, such as moving house or school

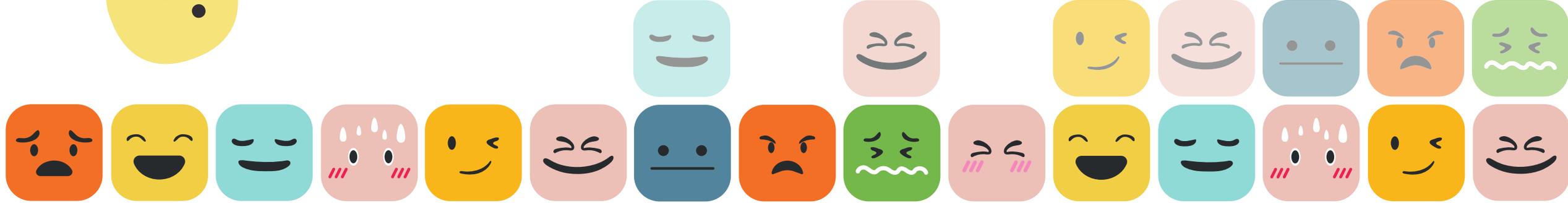
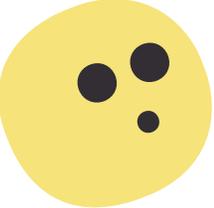
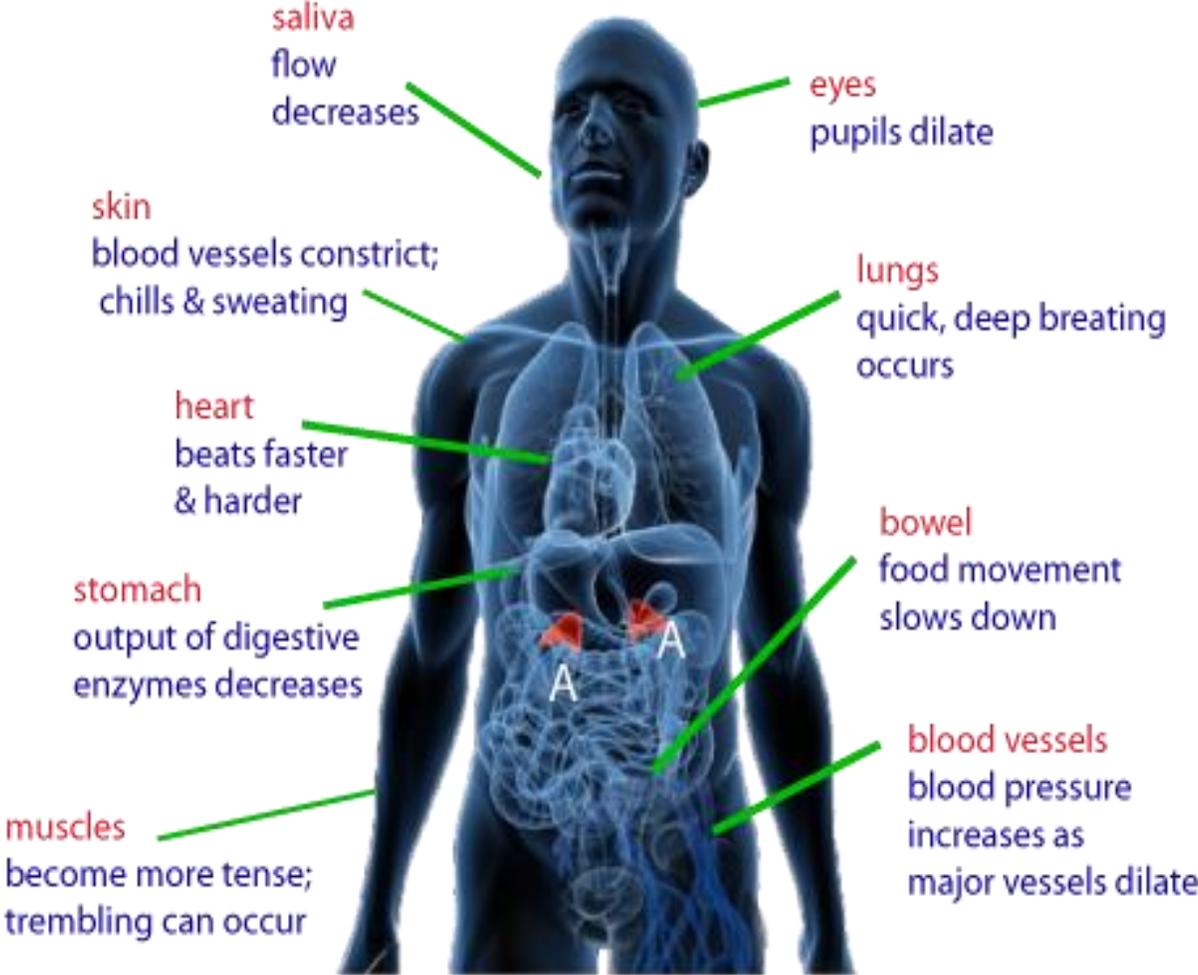
Struggling at school, including feeling overwhelmed by work, exams or peer groups

Fight, Freeze, Flight



What Happens in the Body?

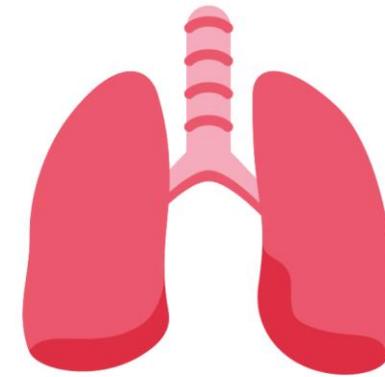
Once the danger is over and you are safe the alarm system switches off. This can take up to an hour



Recognising the Physical Symptoms of Anxiety

Often children with anxiety will experience physical sensations which may make them feel as though they are unwell. These include

- Headaches
- Stomach aches
- Needing to go to the toilet
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Feeling sick



They may struggle to identify this as anxiety and will need help to understand that this is our bodies way of telling us and others that we are worried.



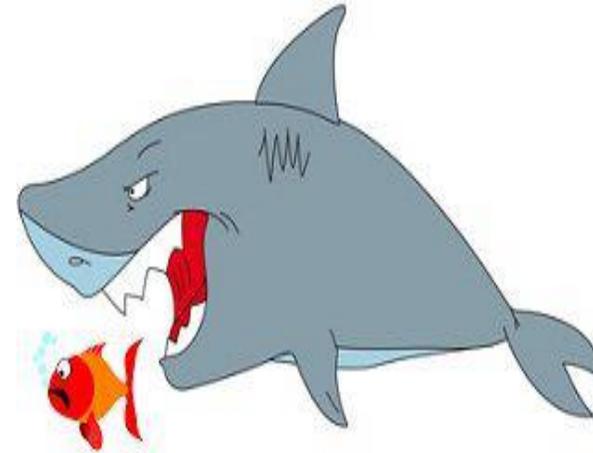
Sometimes Things can go a bit Wrong...

The worry alarm system is there to protect us but sometimes we worry even when we are not in any immediate danger ie smoke detector

The alarm system can be set off by thoughts about the future, ourselves or how we see the world around us.

When there is no danger to fight or flight, there is nowhere for the chemicals to go - this can make us feel anxious and unwell. Ie danger related thoughts..."what if...."

FEAR



Stress Response from Immediate Danger!

ANXIETY



Stress Response just from your Thoughts!



Thoughts

'I can't cope'

'I feel bad so it must be bad'

'Something terrible is going to happen'

Feelings

Anxious, fearful

Physical sensations of anxiety

Behaviours

Avoid, escape or freeze

Try to cope by doing things that help me feel better or keep me safe



Exam Stress

- Watch for signs of stress
- worry a lot
- feel tense
- have headaches and stomach pains
- not sleep well
- be irritable
- lose interest in food or eat more than normal
- not enjoy activities they previously enjoyed
- be negative and have a low mood



How to Help your Child During Exams

- Having someone to talk to about their work can help. Support from a parent, tutor or study buddy can help young people share their worries and keep things in perspective.
- Encourage your child to talk to a member of school staff who they feel is supportive. If you think your child is not coping, it may also be helpful for you to talk to their teachers.
- Try to involve your child as much as possible.



Helping During Exams—The Basics:

- Make sure your child eats a balanced diet to feel well
- Help your child get enough sleep to improve concentration ie 8 to 10 hours' sleep a night
- Allow ½ hour wind down time before going--to help them get a good night's sleep.
- Cramming all night before an exam is usually a bad idea. Sleep will benefit your child far more than a few hours of panicky last-minute study.
- Be flexible during exams—don't worry about chores or untidy bedrooms



Helping Your Child During Exams:

- Staying calm yourself can help.
- Remember, exams do not last forever.
- Ask them how you can support them with their revision.
- Help with their revision
- Come up with practical ideas to help with revision ie drawing up a revision schedule or getting hold of past papers for practice.
- To motivate your child, encourage them to think about their goals in life and see how their revision and exams are related to them.



Helping Your Child During Exams: Normalise

- Talk about exam nerves
- Remind your child that it's normal to feel anxious. Nervousness is a natural reaction to exams. The key is to put these nerves to positive use.
- If anxiety is getting in the way rather than helping, encourage your child to practise the activities they'll be doing on the day of the exam. This will help it feel less scary. ie doing practice papers



Helping Your Child During Exams

- Exercise can help boost energy levels, clear the mind and relieve stress.
- Activities that involve other people can be particularly helpful.
- Do not add to the pressure
- *Childline* says many children who contact them feel that most pressure at exam time comes from their family.
- Listen to your child, give them support and avoid criticism.



Helping Your Child During Exams: Stay +

- Before they go in for a test or exam, be reassuring and positive. Let them know that failing is not the end of the world.
- After each exam, encourage your child to talk it through with you.
- Discussing the parts that went well rather than focusing on the questions they found difficult. Then move on and focus on the next test, rather than dwelling on things that cannot be changed.



Helping your Child During Exams: Rewards

- Make time for treats
- With your child, think about rewards for doing revision and getting through each exam.
- Rewards do not need to be big or expensive. They can include simple things like making their favourite meal or watching TV.
- When the exams are over, help your child celebrate by organising an end-of-exams



How to Help Your Child to Manage Their Anxiety

- Ask them *open questions* to help them think about whether there is anything in particular that's making them feel anxious e.g. 'what is it about going to school that you don't like?'
- *Validate* their feelings (no right/wrong feeling)
- Encourage your child to *name the emotion* they are feeling
- Encourage your child to write their thoughts down



Being a Positive Role Model

Children learn how to cope with difficult situations by watching what other people (their role models) do and listening to what those people say.

It is important to be mindful of how you act and what you say in situations that you find anxiety provoking as your children will mirror you.

- Show understanding, compassion and kindness
- Name the emotion you are feeling
- Use humour
- Take responsibility for your actions
- Reach out for support and support others
- Stay positive
- Let go of being perfect
- Stop and rethink
- Be patient



Acknowledge, Contain and Distract

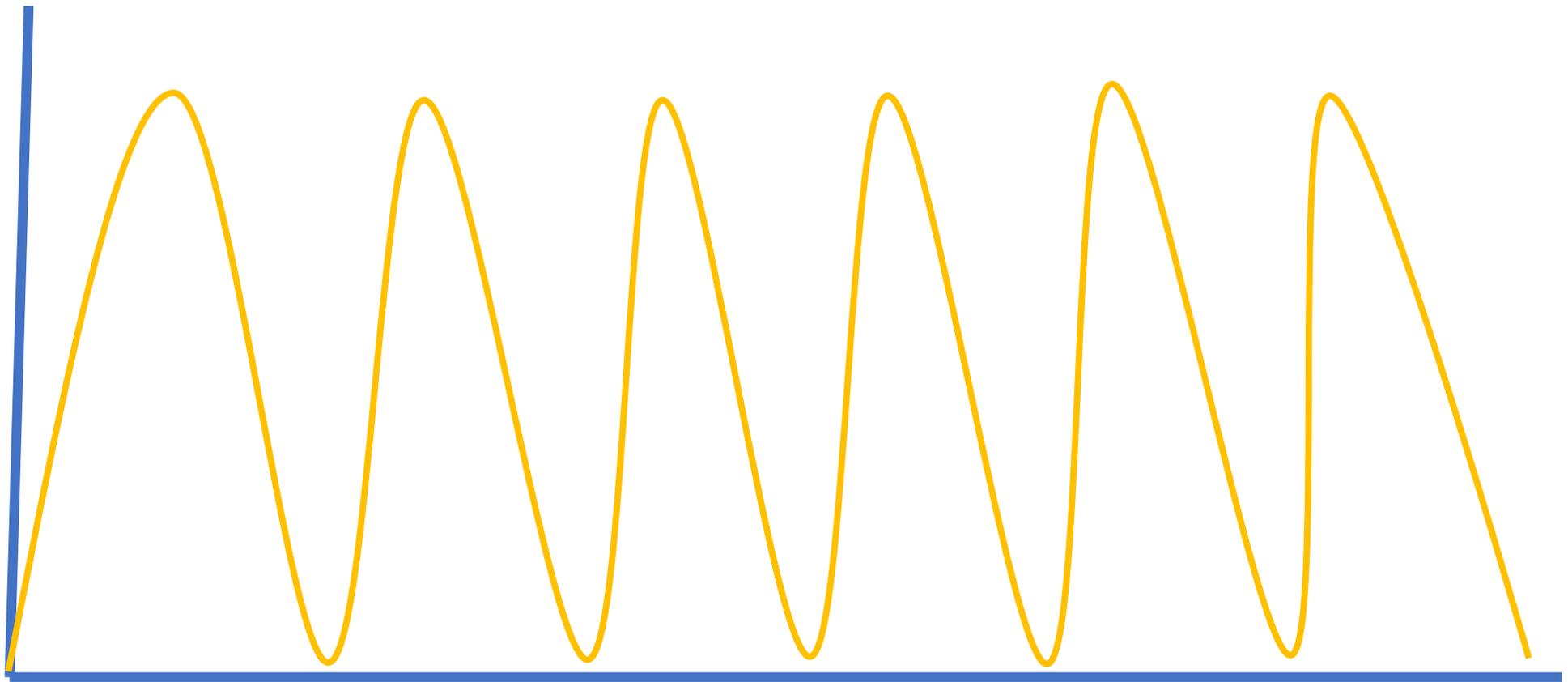
- **Acknowledge:** that you can see how they are feeling and name the emotion (so they feel understood)
- **Contain:** talk to the child in a calming and soothing tone of voice. Be clear, concise, consistent and bounded in your approach. Give a clear instruction of the behaviour you do want to see.
- **Distract:** re-direct their attention to another activity.
- **Reflect:** once the child has had time to calm and settle down, talk through the situation.

“I can see that you are feeling anxious. Come out of your bedroom and help me lay the table”



Cycle of Avoidance

Anxiety Level



Time



A Step-by-step Approach

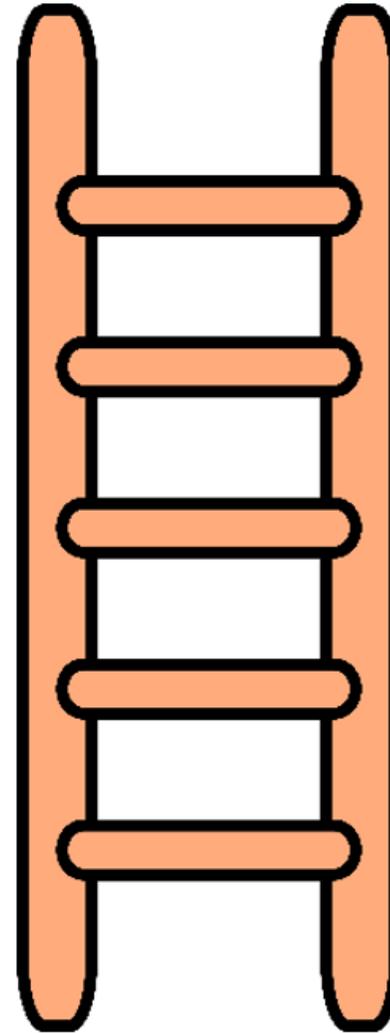
Work with your child and make a plan together:

Break the worry down into manageable steps and use gradual exposure to reach a goal.

Practice each step more than once! (until your child is confident or bored!)

Reinforce the learning with praise and rewards

Clear specific praise!



Going to a place I have never been before with my sister

Going to a place that is further away with my sister

Going to town that is further away with group of friends

Going to town close by with group of friends

Going to the local park with group of friends



Types of Anxious Thoughts

- **Anxious thoughts** – usually more specific to a situation or thing “they’re judging me”, “everyone will laugh”, “mum’s late so she might have been in a car accident”
- **Worry thoughts** – usually “what if I fail the exam?..” Something bad happens in the future. These can be split into worries we can do something about, and some we cannot.. We’ll use the worry tree for these..



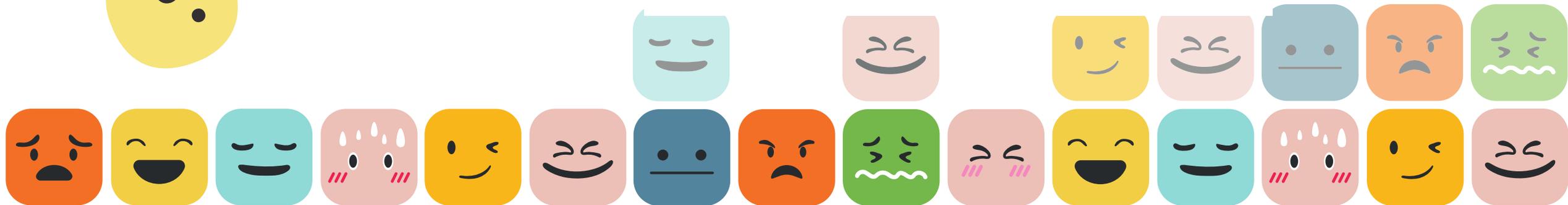
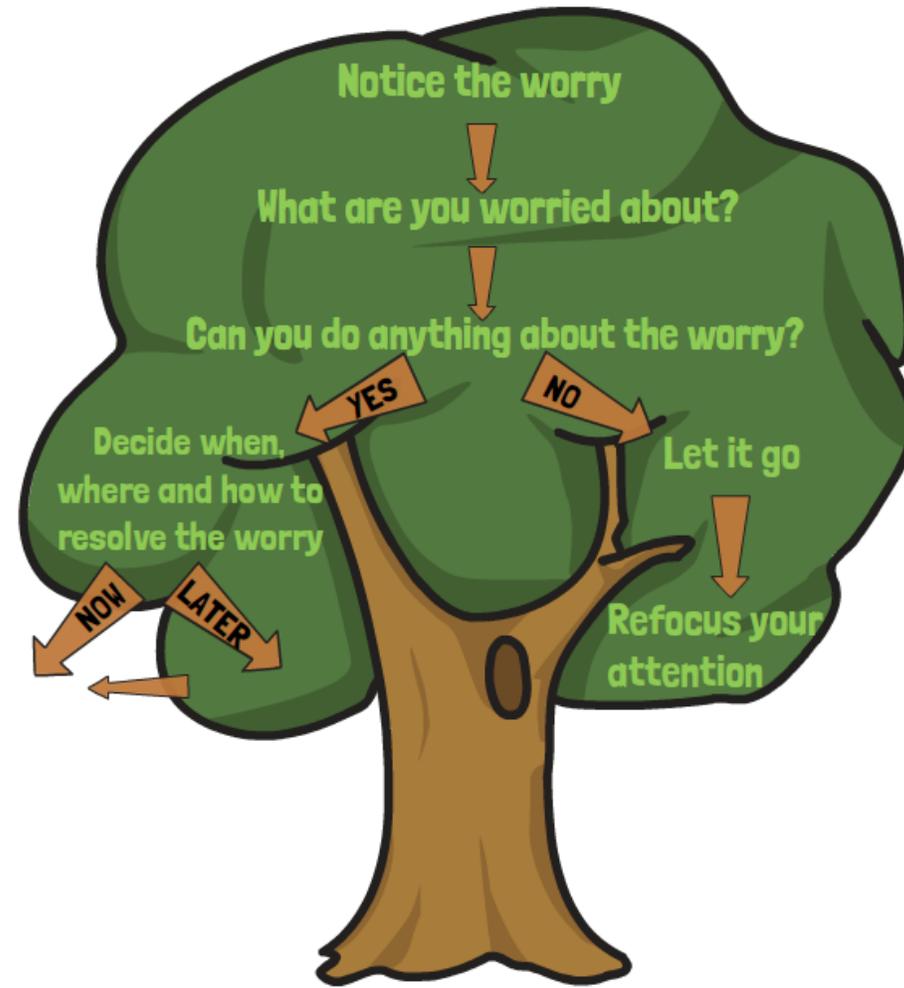
Challenging Anxious Thoughts



- 1. Try to catch unhelpful thoughts
- 2. Collect evidence for & against the thought – what are the facts?
 - “Is there evidence this thought is true?”
 - How likely is it to happen? Will it matter in a day, a month, a year?
 - What happened last time you did this?... Did you cope?
 - What would you say to a friend who has this thought?
- 3. Think of a more helpful or alternative thought



Worry Tree – to manage worry thoughts ie exams



Letting go of Worries

- Letting go of worries can be hard! When we are anxious, our brain wants to focus on the perceived threat and it can be harder to think clearly.
- Mindfulness—as a tool to give less attention to worries ie clouds in the sky drifting by
- It can help to come up with a plan of things your child can do when they feel anxious to help them calm down. It can be anything that will help them but it is beneficial to include things that will get their brain focussing on something other than their worries.
- It might be helpful to try different activities and then rate how well they worked.

- Some examples may be:
- Drawing
- Playing an Instrument
- Exercising/ Sport
- Reading
- Cooking/ Baking
- Playing a Game
- Calling a friend



Problem Solving



1. List all the possible solutions
2. Write down the pros and cons for each solution
3. Is each of the solutions doable?
4. Rate each solution out of 10
5. Pick a solution, plan when to do it.
6. Have a go, and review how it went!



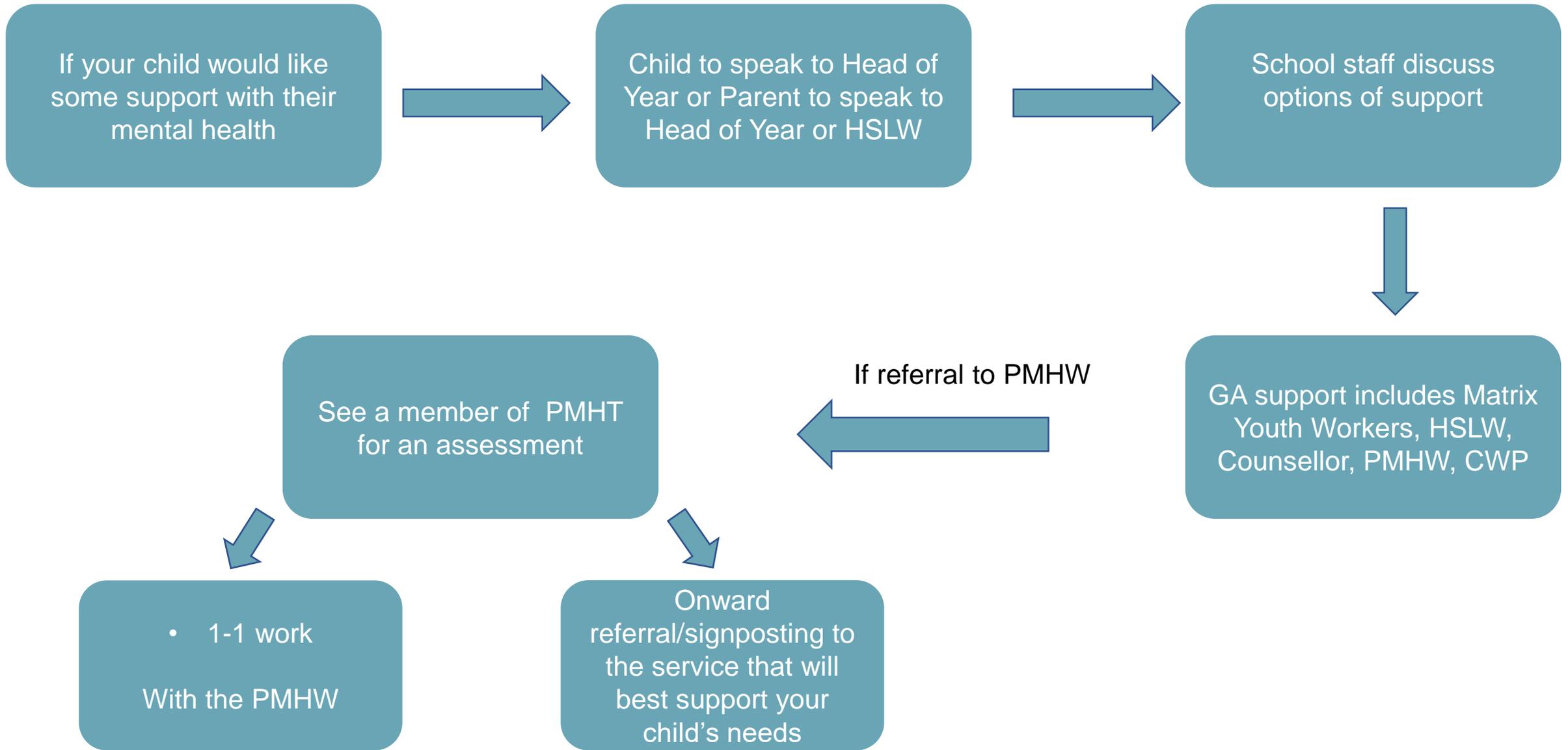
When to be Concerned

When there's been a change in their normal behaviour, its impacting on their functioning & it has been persistent for a period of time.



- Avoiding certain situations
- A drop in academic performance
- Change in sleep pattern
- Change in appetite/ eating patterns
- Weight loss or gain in a short period of time
- Complaining of physical symptoms
- Not caring about self, others and things
- Relationship or friendship difficulties
- Lack of motivation
- Low self esteem





Other Support



- **School**
 - Head of Year
 - Class Teacher / Tutor
 - Other Pastoral Support at George Abbot includes School Counsellor, Home School Link Worker (HSLW), School Nurse, Matrix Youth Workers, Child Well Being Practitioner (CWP)
- **General Practitioner/Doctor**
- If anxiety is significantly affecting your child, a referral can be made to **Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)** by your child's school or GP
- **Getting help as an adult:** If you feel you would benefit from support for your own mental, please contact your GP. You can self-refer to Surrey Mind Matters (NHS)



YOUNGMINDS
fighting for young people's mental health

Mindworks
Surrey

ChildLine
0800 1111 

THE MIX
Essential support for under 25s

Young Minds (has a parent help line)
www.youngminds.org.uk

Mindworks Surrey
<https://www.mindworks-surrey.org/>

Anxiety UK - National charity helping people with Anxiety
www.anxietyUK.org.uk

NHS Choices
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anxiety-disorders-in-children/>

Childline
www.childline.org.uk

The Mix
www.themix.org.uk

Exam Stress Resources

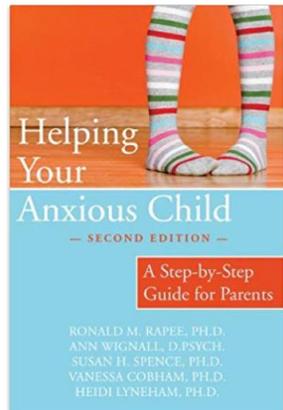
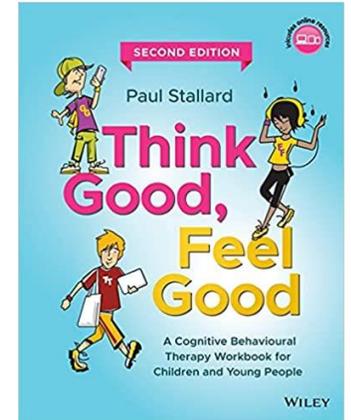
- Family Lives website [coping with exam stress: Exam stress | Family Lives](#)
- See Childline's advice on [exam stress and pressure](#).

Book Recommendations

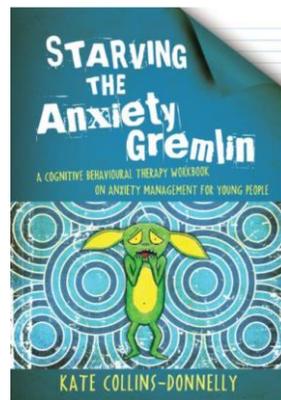


Helping Your Child with Fears and Worries – Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts. A self-help guide for parents

Think Good - Feel Good: A Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Workbook for Children and Young People Book by Paul Stallard



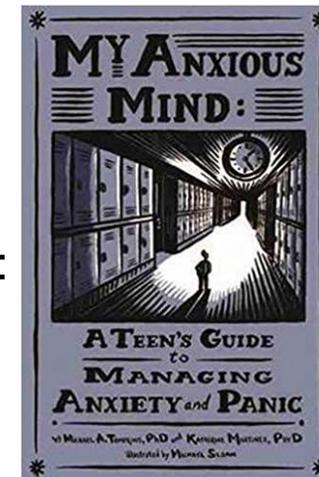
Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step-by-step Guide for Parents By Ronald Rappee



Starving the Anxiety Gremlin for Children: A CBT Workbook on Anxiety Management by Kate Collins-Donnelly
There are two age versions to this book, 5-9 and 10+

Also part of a series:

Starving the self-esteem thief
Starving the anger gremlin



My Anxious Mind: A Teen's Guide to Managing Anxiety Book by Katherine A. Martinez and Michael A. Tompkins

Good health apps can make a real difference to your health & wellbeing.

We've reviewed thousands of apps and handpicked the best.

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Find apps to help manage conditions including:

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- Low Mood
- Mindfulness
- Sleep
- Anxiety
- And more



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sabp.orchaco.uk
or scan our QR code with your phone's camera.

NHS
Surrey and Borders
Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust

ORCHA (sabp.orchaco.uk)

Apps rated based on:

- Data Security
- Clinical Assurance
- User Experience

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wellbeing and mental health service

Thank you for listening!

Any questions?



Find out more at
mindworks-surrey.org

