

An introduction to

anxiety

parent workshop

by the Mental Health Support Team



Workshop aims:

- Understand normal and problematic anxiety.
- Build confidence in identifying different types of problematic anxiety.
- Understand factors that create and maintain anxiety.
- Build confidence in spotting and managing factors that maintain anxiety.



What is anxiety?



Anxiety is a normal emotion that everyone will feel at some point in their lives. It can be difficult to control and can impact lives by making it difficult to do certain things.

Anxiety can affect many different aspects of an individual's life including: school, socially / friendships, sleep, emotions / mood, hobbies / activities and home life / family relationships.

However, anxiety can be helpful as it protects us when we're in danger and can help us prepare for things. For example, if we're standing near the edge of something without a barrier – the feeling of anxiety encourages us to move away and protect ourselves.

Anxiety in children

Not all children's emotions are logical. Small children ordinarily have fears of the dark, insects, ghosts, kidnappers, getting lost or abandoned.

Such fears are common and normal in all children.

They will usually grow out of these fears but sometimes they persist as the child grows up.



Common symptoms of anxiety

Muscle ache /
tension

Dry mouth

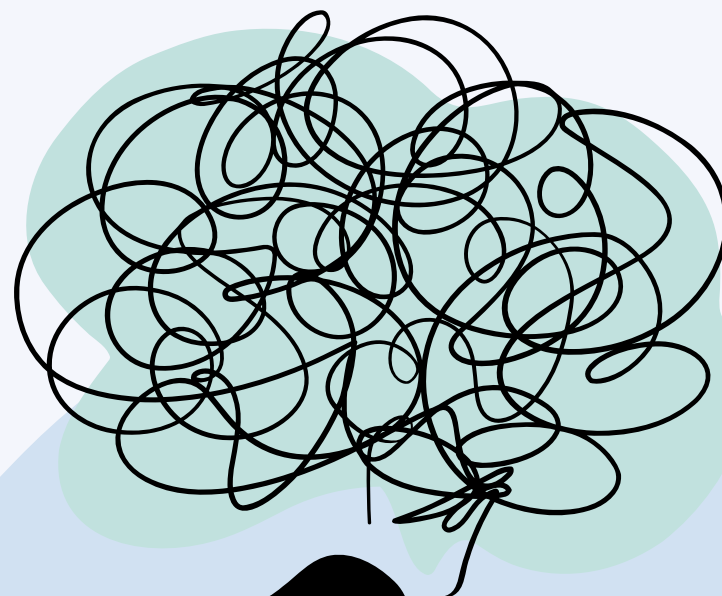
Noticeably fast,
strong or irregular
heart beat

Feeling
restless

Dizziness

Headaches

Frustration



Feeling
sick

Trembling

Sweating

Feeling overwhelmed
or full of dread

Feeling scared

Pins and
needles

Feeling sad

Shaking

Difficulty
concentrating

Nervousness

Panicky

Feeling
frightened

Feeling irritable

Stomach ache

Reasons why a child might be anxious



Friendship
issues

Illness

Diet

School - homework,
underlying diagnosis,
peer pressure, bullying,
image, self-confidence

Specific fear -
spiders, dogs,
the dark

Inconsistent
parenting

Changes to
routines

Questioning sexuality

Hormones

Normal changes - child to
adolescence

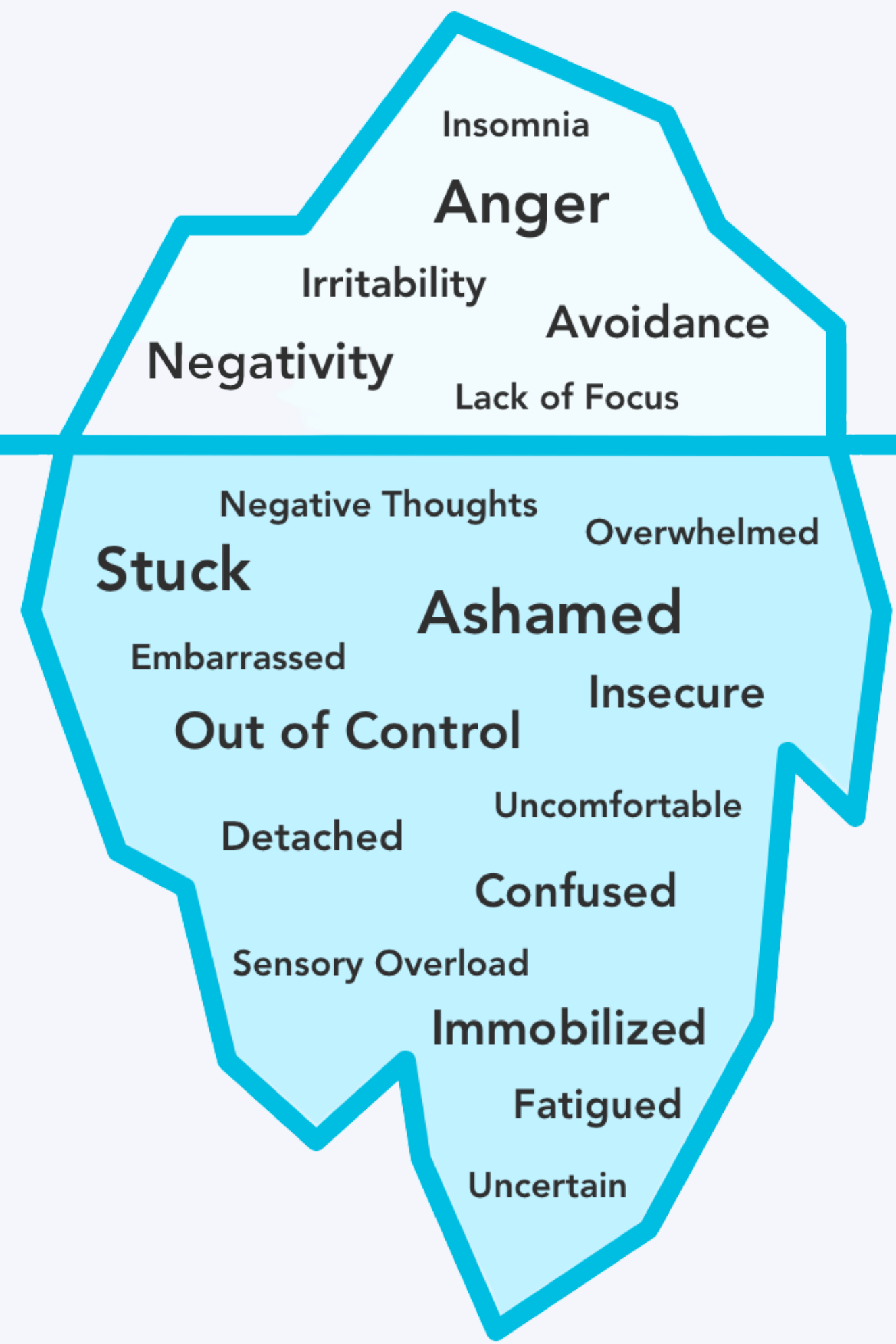
Family issues - divorce, grief
and loss, domestic abuse,
parental health/mental
health, finances

Lack of sleep

Anxiety Iceberg

WHAT YOU SEE

WHAT YOU DON'T SEE



The Anxiety Iceberg illustrates what anxiety can look like on the outside, but shows that there is so much more going on underneath the surface.

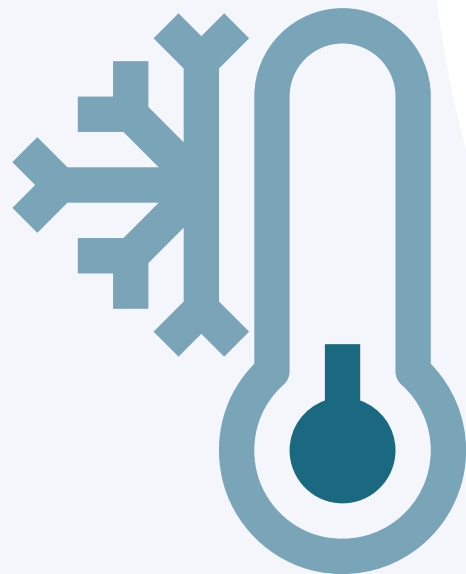
Fight, flight, freeze



Humans developed the fight, flight, freeze automatic response as cave men as it was a much more dangerous time to live back then (think running away from saber tooth tigers and hunting for food).



The fight, flight, freeze response meant that cave men's bodies went into survival mode whenever their brains sensed danger. This meant their heart rate and blood pressure would increase so they had a better chance of running away or fighting the danger.

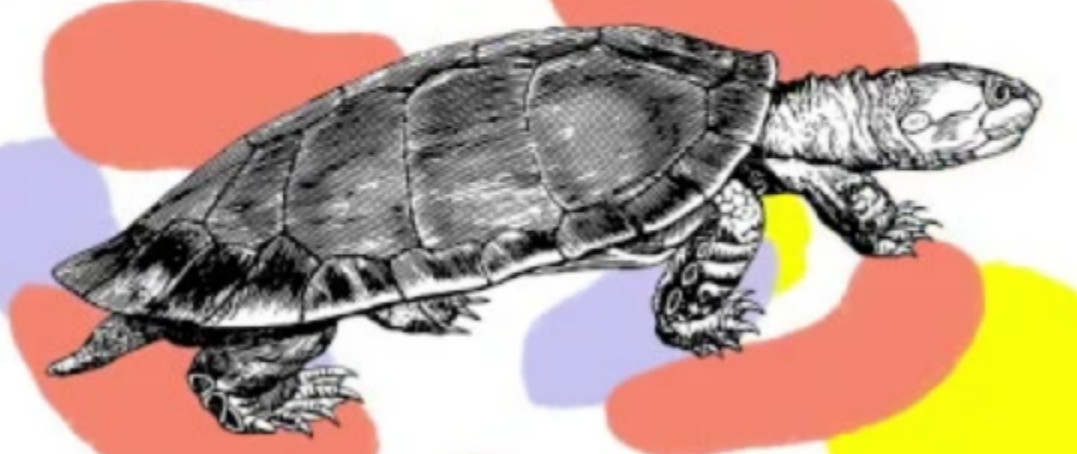


Even though we don't face the same dangers today, our brains and bodies still react in the same way to the things we perceive as dangerous, scary or worrying. This means our increased heart rate and blood pressure causes us to feel anxious.



FIGHT

FLIGHT



FREEZE

Types of anxiety:

Generalised Anxiety

Excessive worry which seems uncontrollable. The worry interferes with your ability to relax, concentrate and enjoy activities.

Phobia

Fear of specific things such as flying, small spaces, dogs - this can also lead to panic.

Panic

Thoughts of something bad happening, causing physical symptoms of anxiety such as hyperventilation, shaking and a fast heart rate. This can cause them to avoid certain places or situations for fear of having a panic attack.

Separation Anxiety

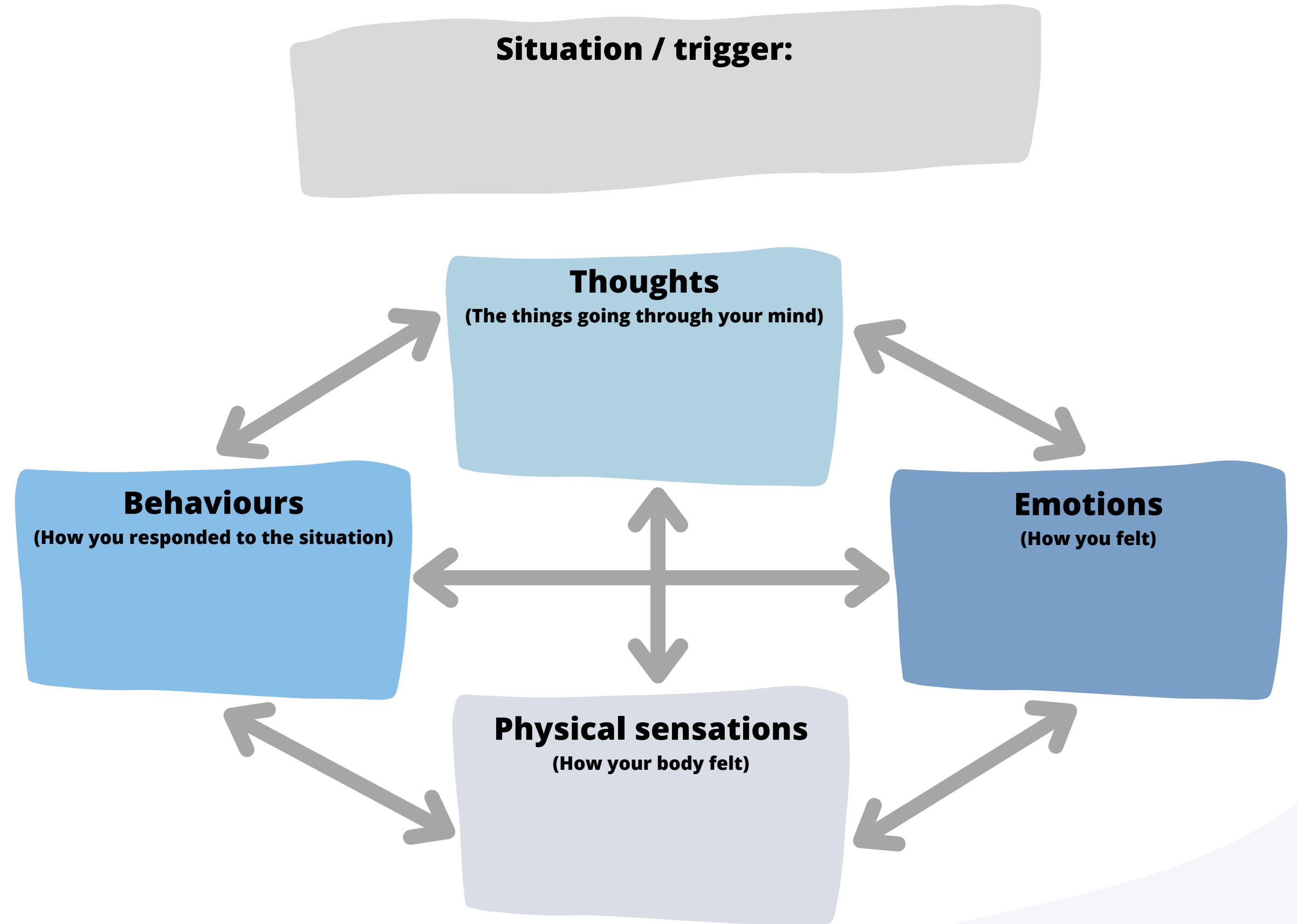
Worries about being away from family members or thinking something bad will happen to family. This can lead to not wanting to go to school or social events.

Social Anxiety

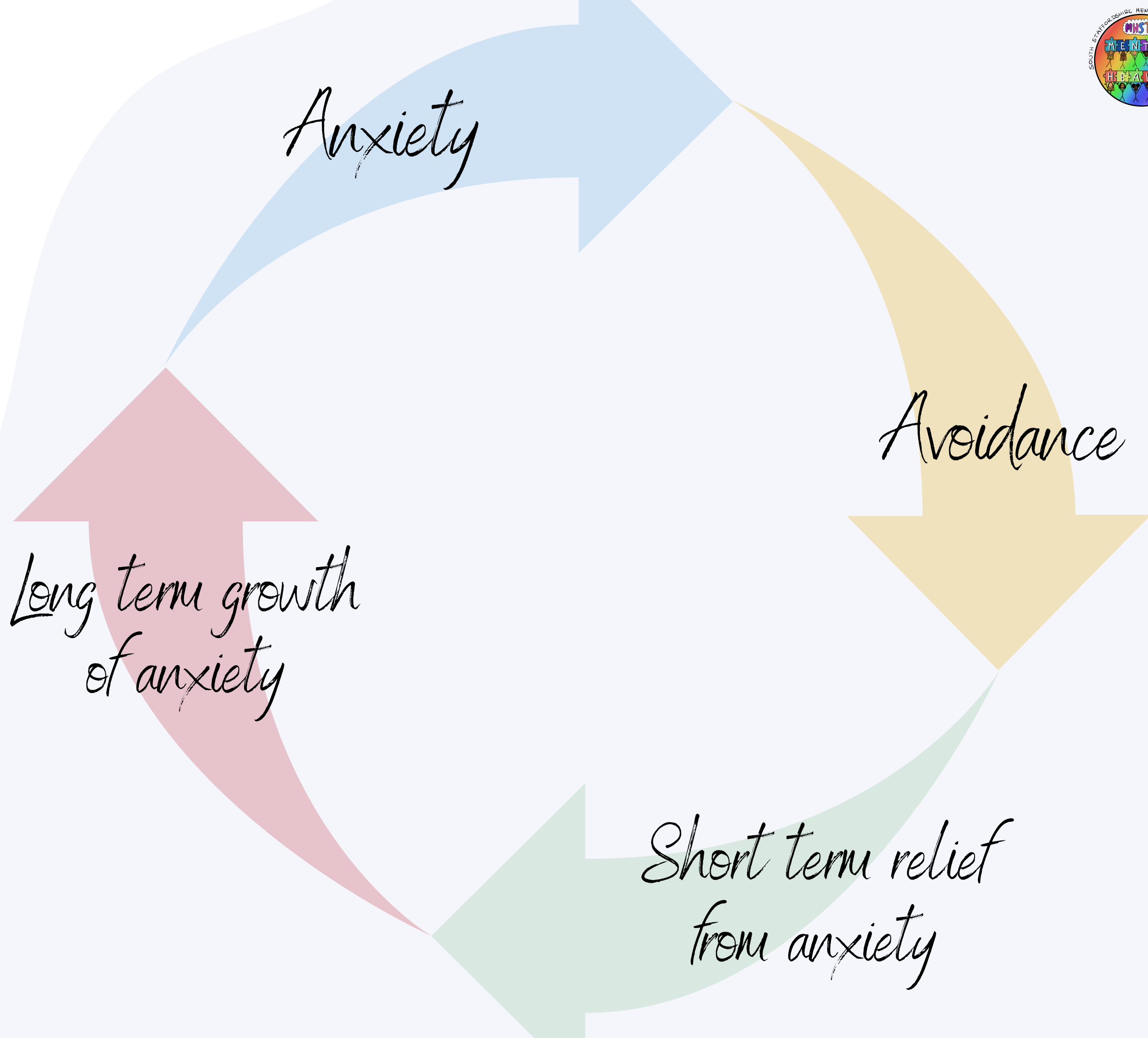
Fear of people judging them, thinking they are stupid or thinking that people will laugh at them in public places. This can also lead to avoid social situations and talking in front of others.

The cycle of anxiety

5 areas



The cycle of anxiety



Getting caught in this cycle without testing the ability to cope reduces belief in the ability to cope.

What keeps anxiety going?



Behaviour:

When a child feels anxious, they can avoid certain situations/ places or ask for reassurance. These are called safety behaviours or unhelpful habits and whilst they can make them feel better, they can keep anxiety going.



Thoughts:

What children think about a situation or what they think is going to happen impacts on how they feel. Thinking in an anxious way, they tend to overestimate the likelihood of danger and underestimate their ability to cope with it.



Environment:

The surroundings or conditions in which children live can have an impact on how they feel. Ongoing stress or problems in their lives can keep problematic anxiety going for example, parental conflict or bullying.



Behaviour of others:

If those closest to a child get frustrated or upset when they are anxious, this can make a child feel more anxious. Parents also need to be aware not to maintain anxiety by supporting a child to avoid situations as this will only keep anxiety going.

Negative automatic thoughts

DID YOU KNOW?

We all have lots of thoughts that go through our mind every day, between 70,000 to 100,000 in total!!

Some of these thoughts can be unhelpful and make children feel bad, we call these Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs) or sometimes ANTs. They come when they want to, without choice and they can be difficult to stop. They present themselves as facts and children often believe them.

Examples of NATs:

I'm a failure...


Bad things are always my fault...

I can't do it...

Someone will laugh at me...

I'm stupid...

Nobody likes me...

 It is important to remind your child that thoughts are NOT facts and they can learn how to change them. It is really important to be able to spot NATs so they can challenge them.

How to help your child



- Talk to them.
- Actively listen.
- Encourage them to write their thoughts down.
- Support in exposure to the feared situation.
- Relaxation/grounding techniques.

Tips on how to start conversations about mental health with your child



Be receptive

- You look sad/upset today, do you want to have a chat/is there anything I can do?
- I've got time to talk / would you like to go for a walk?
- I noticed you seemed upset yesterday. I wanted to talk to you when we were alone. I'm really concerned about how you're doing.

Use open questions

- I care about you and I've noticed you haven't been yourself lately. You seem more frustrated than you've been in a while, and I'm wondering how you're doing?
- Tell me more, how did that make you feel?

It is unhelpful to:

- Pressure your child to 'snap out of it', 'get their act together' or 'cheer up'.
- Tell them how lucky they are and they should be happy and grateful for what they have.
- Tell them that you have real worries and dismiss theirs.
- Stay away or avoid them.
- Assume the problem will go away and ignore it.



The importance of active listening



- Listen to what the your child has to say without interrupting.
- Be open-minded and non-judgemental.
- Be patient - don't rush them or fill the gaps unnecessarily.
- Avoid telling them what to do.
- Remove distractions - phones, TV etc.

The worry tree



Step 1 Write down your problem in 1 or 2 sentences.

Step 2 Write down all the ideas you can think of to solve the problem (no matter what they are!).

Step 3 Make a table and write down ALL of the good things and ALL of the not so good things you can think of for each of your ideas.

	Good things	Not so good things
Idea 1		
Idea 2		

Step 4 Choose one idea that looks like it could work (if you struggle, see which one has the most good things). Ask yourself, is my idea realistic? If it isn't, choose a different idea.

Step 5 Make a plan! Write down the answers to these questions to create your plan of action!

- 1) What will you do?
- 2) When will you do it?
- 3) How will you do it?
- 4) Who will you do it with?
- 5) Could there be any difficulties? If so, what could you do to overcome these?

Step 6 DO IT!

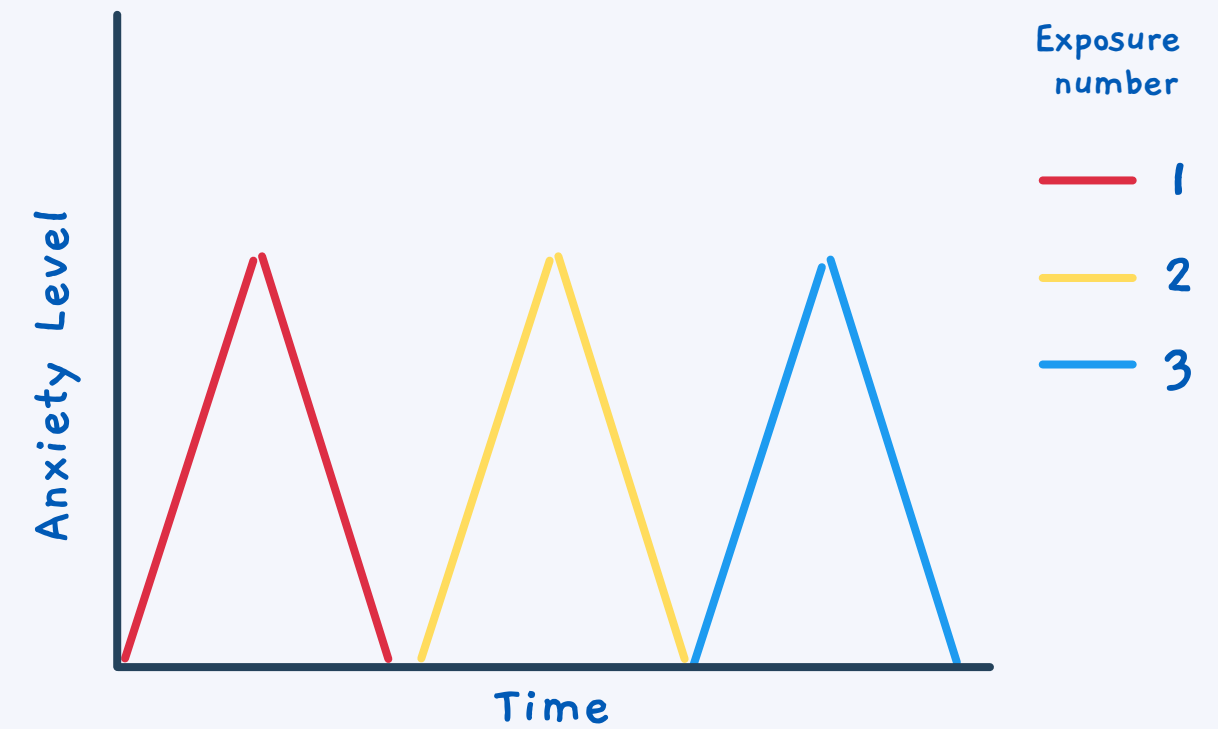
Problem solving

If your child is struggling with a practical worry, it can be helpful to use a step by step guide which helps to break the problem down and solve it in a more manageable way.

Practical worries can feel overwhelming and it's easy to put them off. However, it's much better in the long run to solve the problem now rather than later.

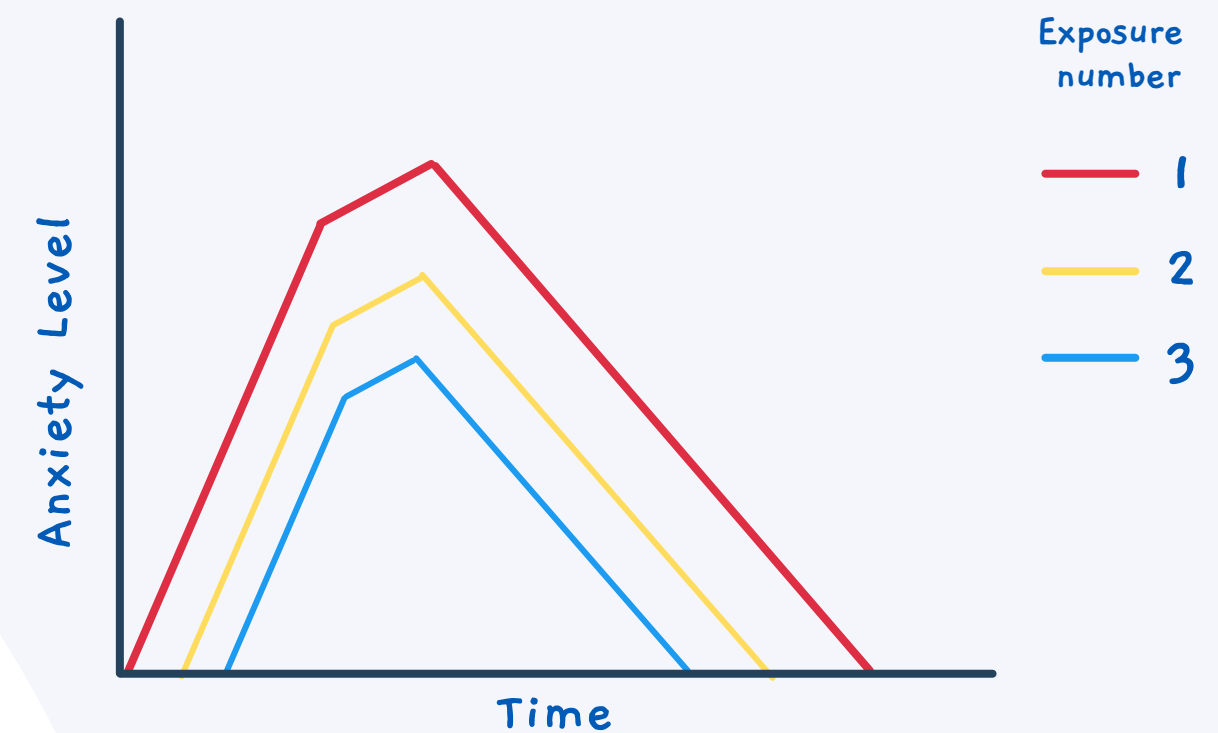
Maintaining anxiety

When children are faced with, or think they are faced with, a threatening or dangerous situation the fight/flight response is triggered and they feel scared or anxious. Usually their anxiety increases quickly as soon as the threat is detected. If they then escape or avoid the threat their anxiety reduces quickly.



Facing fears, otherwise known as exposure, is the most effective way to overcome problematic anxiety. By breaking things down into small steps and helping your child to gradually face the situations they fear they can overcome avoidance and learn to cope with anxiety.

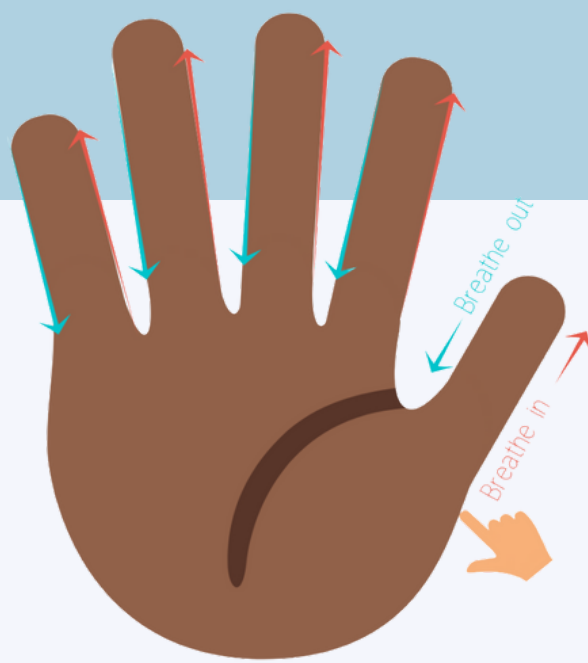
Your child's body can only physically stay extremely anxious for a short amount of time before it starts to get tired so, if they stay in the situation, their anxiety will come down on its own. Also, by staying in the situation, they are teaching their brain and body that nothing bad will happen.



Breathing techniques

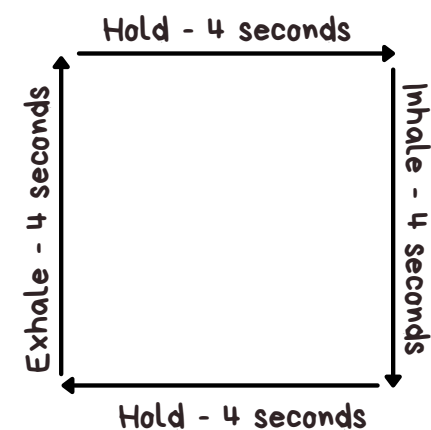
Finger breathing:

- Use your index finger to trace around the edges of fingers on your opposite hand.
- Count 1,2,3,4 and breath in as you go up the first finger.
- Count 1,2,3,4 and breath out as you go down the finger.
- Repeat until you have traced up and down all five fingers breathing in 1,2,3,4 and breathing out 1,2,3,4 each time.



Square breathing:

- Imagine you are drawing a square with your finger in the air.
- Breathe in whilst counting 1,2,3,4 as you draw the top line and then pause.
- Breathe out whilst counting 1,2,3,4 as you draw the line down the side and then pause.
- Breathe in whilst counting 1,2,3,4 as you draw the bottom line and then pause.
- Breathe out whilst counting 1,2,3,4 as you draw the line up to complete the square and then pause.



Belly breathing:

- Take a deep breath in and fill your belly like you're inflating a balloon.
- As you do this, count 1, 2, 3, 4 to breath in and fill the balloon in your belly.
- Pause and then let all of the air out of your belly like you're letting a balloon deflate.
- As you do this, count 1, 2, 3, 4 to breath out and let the balloon go down from your belly.

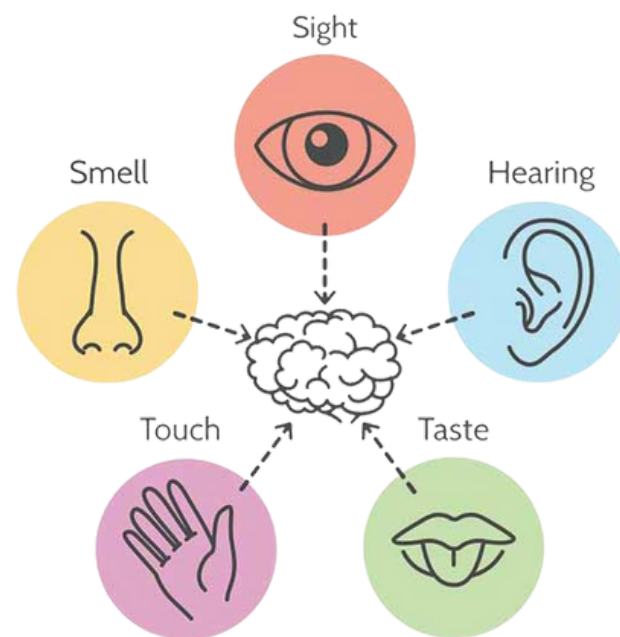


Calming techniques

5, 4, 3, 2, 1:

Take notice of your senses by thinking of:

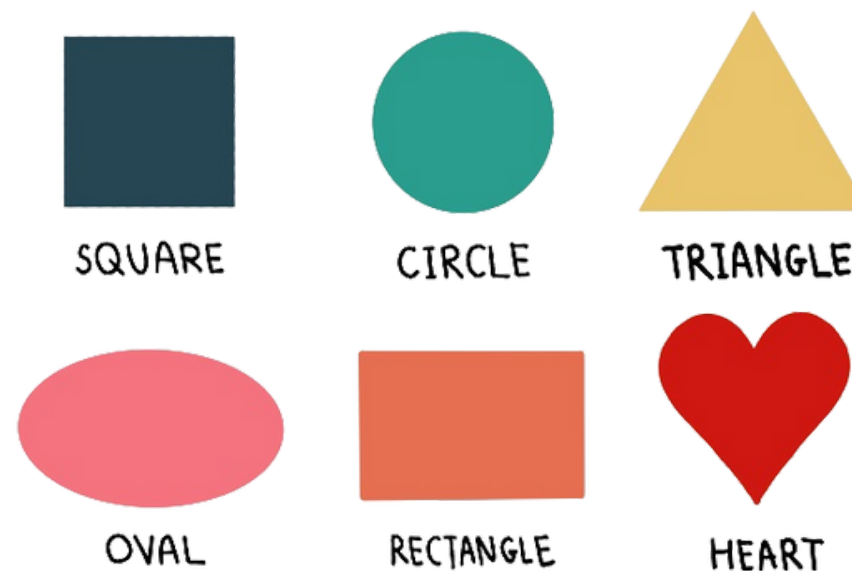
- 5 things you can see,
- 4 things you can hear,
- 3 things you can feel/touch,
- 2 things you can smell,
- 1 thing you can taste.



Search the room:

Think of a category and search the room for it. For example, look for:

- Everything that is a ... colour,
- Everything that is a ... shape,
 - Things that feel of...
 - Things made of...



Stating facts:

Think about and name facts about what is going on right now. For example, think:

- My age is...
- My name is...
- I am wearing...
- The weather is...



Referring your child for support

If you feel your child needs support, speak to your Schools Mental Health Lead who will support you to make a referral to the Mental Health Support Team.

Anxiety

Assemblies

Talking about
mental health

Workshops

Sleep
hygiene

Feelings and
emotions

Worry

Exam
stress

Low Mood

Healthy relationships

School staff training

Additional support



☎ 116 123



☎ 01283 566696



✉ Text: SHOUT
to 85258



☎ 0300 303 0923



24h Mental Health
Access Team
☎ 0808 196 3002



☎ 01782 627 017



🌐 www.youngminds.org.uk



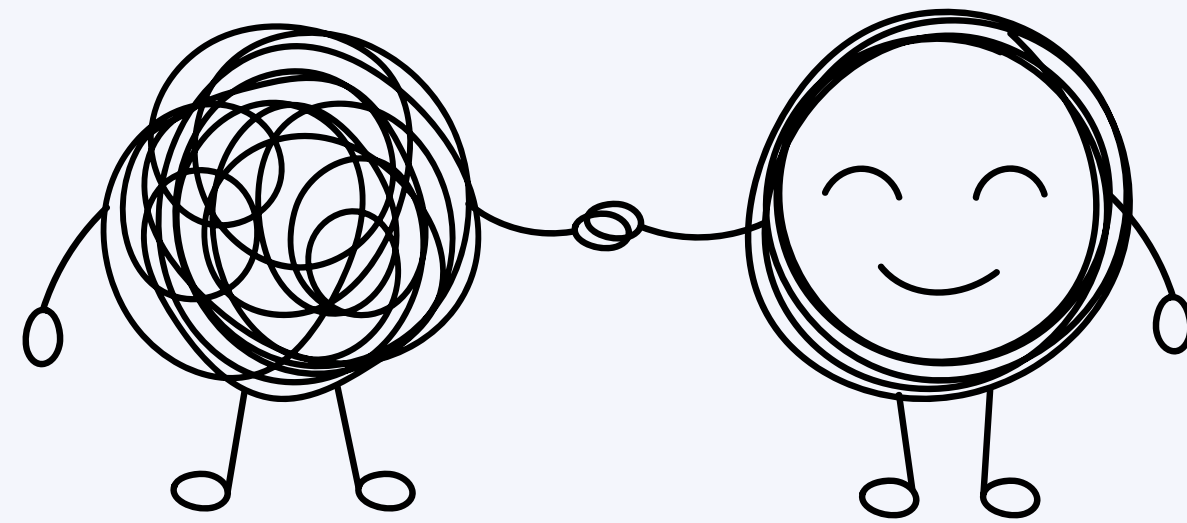
☎ 0808 808 4994



🌐 www.sandbox.getcerebral.co.uk



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Thank you

from the Mental Health Support Team