



Supporting
your child
with anxiety

Aims

To understand what anxiety is and when it becomes problematic

To learn how it presents in children

To learn about what influences the development of anxiety and what can keep a child 'stuck' feeling anxious

To learn techniques to calm your child down when they are experiencing anxiety and encourage them to be more confident

What is anxiety?

Anxiety is our body's natural response to perceived danger or threat

Fight/Flight/Freeze reaction causes changes to:

Thoughts- quick, focused, circular/rumination – overestimating danger / underestimating ability to cope

Feelings - heart racing; shallow, quick breathing; tense muscles,

Behaviour – escape / avoidance

When does anxiety become a problem?

- When we perceive danger that isn't there, isn't as extreme as we think, or we experience anxiety long after the situation has passed
- Problematic anxiety is like a smoke detector

Padesky's Anxiety Equation

$$\text{Anxiety} = \frac{\text{Estimate of Danger}}{\text{Estimate of Coping}}$$

Factors influencing development of anxiety

Biological factors – 1/3 of anxiety attributed to genetics

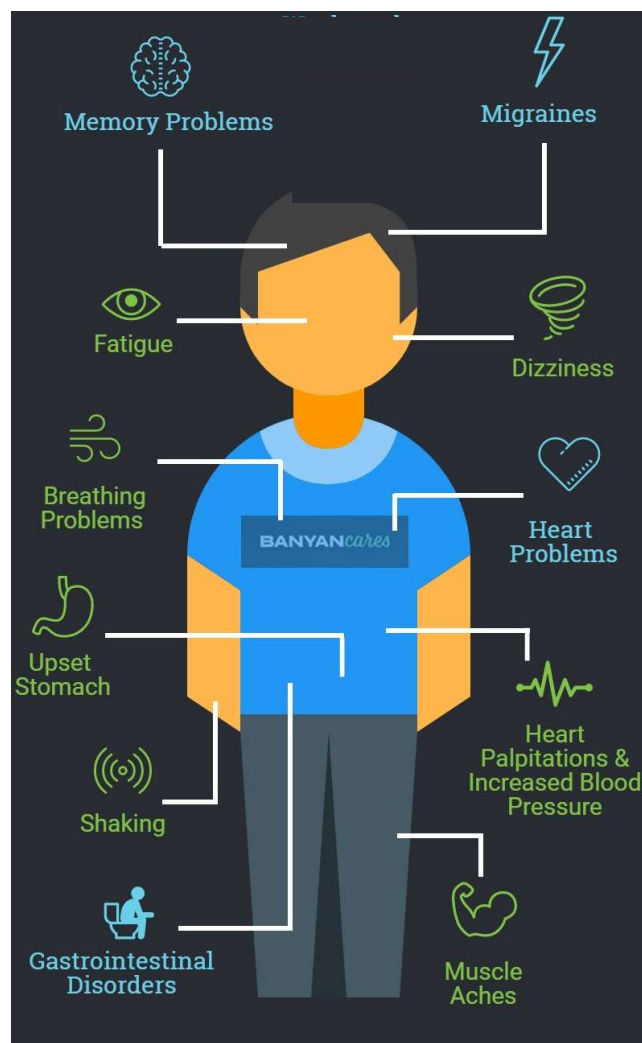
Difficult life events – bereavement, familial conflict, bullying

Learning by example – e.g. adult is afraid of dogs

Learning by others' reactions – e.g. adult gets visibly stressed when child is around feared object / situation

Missed coping opportunities – avoids going down the path where dogs are

Common physical symptoms of anxiety



Heart: Starts beating faster in order to pump more blood to the muscles and enhance your ability to fight or run away.

Lungs: Your breathing becomes quicker and shallower to take in more oxygen to power the muscles. If we don't fight or run away to use this oxygen we can start to feel dizzy and lightheaded.

Mouth: Digestion shuts down during dangerous situations so that energy can be diverted to the muscles. This causes a dry mouth.

Stomach: Blood is directed away from the digestive system which can lead to nausea and feelings of "butterflies".

Bladder: Bladder and bowel muscles sometimes relax in response to extreme stress creating the urge to go to the toilet.

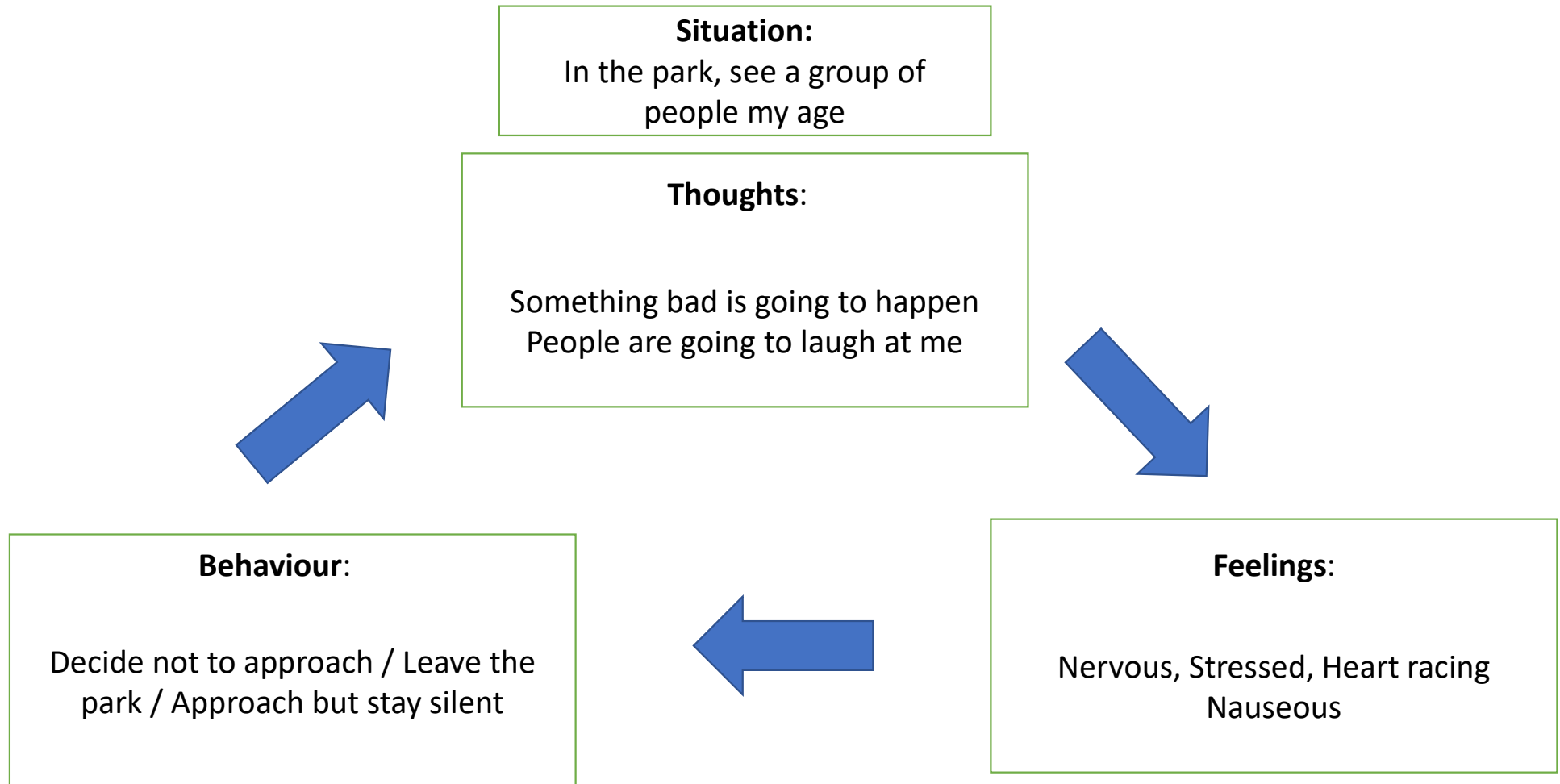
Hands: Hands can become cold as blood is directed towards major muscle groups. Palms become sweaty as the body sweats to keep cool.

Muscles: Muscles all over the body tense in order to get you ready to fight or run away. They may also shake or tremble if you stay still.

Vision: Vision can become acute in order to focus on danger and you may notice 'tunnel vision' or vision becoming sharper.

Thoughts: Fast thinking helps us to evaluate the danger and make quick decisions. It can be very difficult to concentrate on anything apart from the danger when the fight/flight response is active.

Vicious cycle of anxiety



What can keep the anxiety going?

Anxious thoughts

something bad is going to happen and thinks they will be unable to cope

Looks for evidence to support this

Anxious feelings/Bodily Symptoms

Interpreted as a sign that something bad is happening

Awareness can reduce confidence in coping with challenges

Can be unpleasant so can increase avoidance

Anxious Behaviours

Avoidance keeps fears going

Reassurance can prevent young person from learning that they can cope independently

Others' responses

Learning by others' reactions – e.g. adult gets visibly stressed when child is around feared object / situation

Missed coping opportunities – avoids going down the path where dogs are

How can I support my child with 'big' feelings

Emotion Coaching

Step 1: Recognising the child's feelings and **empathising** with them

Step 2: **Validating** the feelings

Step 3: problem solving

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?	LIST ALL THE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS (NO MATTER HOW WEIRD OR WONDERFUL!)	WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I CHOSE THIS SOLUTION? (IN THE SHORT TERM E.G. IMMEDIATELY? IN THE LONG TERM E.G. A FEW DAYS LATER? TO MY ANXIETY IN THE FUTURE?)	IS IT POSSIBLE TO DO THIS PLAN? YES/NO	HOW GOOD IS THE OUTCOME? RATE 0-10 (10 = BEST)	SELECT PLAN. WHAT HAPPENED?

Belly Breathing

Belly breathing is a great way to calm down when you are upset.

Imagine that there is a balloon in your belly.

As you take a big breath in through your nose, try to fill up the balloon so that your belly puffs up.

Now breathe out through your mouth (like blowing bubble) and let all of the air out of the balloon.

Take slow breaths. Try to count to 4 as you breathe in and count to 4 as you breathe out.

Inhale...2...3...4

Exhale...2...3...4

Repeat until you are calm.

Remember to practice every day until it becomes easy to use when you need it.



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Search

When you see
the candle



gently blow
on the flame



Candle and Flower Breathing - Mindful and Calming Breathing Technique


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5 4 3 2 1


SLOW DOWN & CALM DOWN


FIRST- TAKE 3 SLOW BELLY BREATHS!

5 List 5 things you can SEE 

4 List 4 things you can FEEL 

3 List 3 things you can HEAR 

2 List 2 things you can SMELL 

1 List something you like to TASTE 

FINISHED? - TAKE ANOTHER 3 SLOW BELLY BREATHS

Building up brave behaviour

It's important that children learn to become **independent** in order to overcome their anxiety and to increase their sense of **accomplishment**.

They need to learn that they can fight their own battles, without a parent coming to the rescue and have the opportunity to have a go for themselves

An effective way to do this is through promoting 'brave behaviour' and getting them to **gradually** face their fears

This helps them to test out their 'fear beliefs' and update them

Building up
brave
behaviour:
TOP TIPS



Be aware of your responses - try to model calm behaviour and be confident in your child's ability to cope

Explain and normalise physical symptoms and learn ways to manage them

Get your child to think about what anxiety is stopping them from doing vs all the positives that could come from having a go

Allow and encourage them to be independent - help them find solutions rather than providing reassurance, give them choices instead of taking over

Slowly build up what your child can do – respect their struggle

Building up Brave Behaviour: Praise and Rewards

Social Rewards

- Verbal Praise (specific & non-specific)
- School reward system – e.g Dojo chart, praise points
- Joining their play, showing interest/excitement in their activity

Tangible Rewards

- Inexpensive Items
- Special Choices and Privileges – extra time on computer, getting to bring in favourite toy to school
- Special Activities - e.g. going to a movie, trip to the park, riding bicycle
- Special time with child - choosing a board game to play, baking or watching movie

A word on reassurance



Unhelpful reassurance – repeatedly telling the child they will be fine in order for them to face the fear



Helpful reassurance – encouraging children to give things a go, acting curious - try things out

Thank you for
listening!

General Evaluation (Parents, Carers
and Professionals)



- If you would like to contact BICS, please **call our Support Line** on **0208 359 3130** (*open 09:00 – 17:00*)
- **To make a referral or access our online workshops / podcasts,** visit <https://www.barnet.gov.uk/children-and-families/support-parents-and-carers/barnet-integrated-clinical-services-bics>