



# Healthy Minds Lincolnshire

## Worries and Anxiety

### A support pack for parents/ carers

#### What is anxiety?

Anxiety is an emotion that we can experience when we feel scared and fearful about something or suspect we are in danger. We all feel anxious at one time or another and this is a normal emotion. In fact, a little bit of anxiety can be a good thing as it can keep us safe from harm. For example, a fear of fire can stop us from putting our hand too close to a flame.

Different things make different people anxious. For example, some people are scared of spiders, others are scared of rollercoasters. We are all different. When we experience anxiety, it can produce some really uncomfortable feelings in our body.



#### The Fight or Flight Response

The good news is that, although these physical feelings can seem really uncomfortable, anxiety cannot harm us. When we believe there is some sort of threat or danger, even if it is not real, our brain sends a message, a bit like an alarm, to release adrenaline into our body. This adrenaline is intended to help us either escape from danger or fight against it (fight or flight) by increasing the blood flow to parts of our body that need it most, such as our muscles, and take it away from areas that don't require it, such as our digestive system.

The sensations that we experience when we feel anxious are caused by our body working hard to get adrenaline, oxygen and blood where they need to be. When our body is working hard it can get hot and sweaty, cause us to breathe faster and our heart to beat faster, just as it would when we exercise.

Our anxiety alarm and response is really helpful where there is a real danger or threat but less helpful when there isn't. The way our body responds is so quick that it can trick us into believing that there is a real danger and that we need to react, even if we don't.



## Physical sensations

When we experience anxiety, it can produce some really uncomfortable feelings in our body. Here are some different ways this can affect our bodies – you may notice you experience some of these things when you feel angry. Have a look below and circle which feelings apply to you and your child in different colours:

### Brain hijacked

Thoughts race, making it hard to think clearly and rationally. This may feel “unreal” or you may feel detached.



### Eyes widen

Allows more light in –improves (or blurs) vision.



### Body heats and sweats

A side effect of all the speeded up systems is that the body rapidly heats. Sweating allows the body to cool again, and to become more slippery to allow escape.



### Mouth dries

Caused by narrowing of the blood vessels.



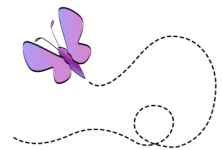
### Heart beats faster

Blood pressure and pulse increase as the heart pumps more blood to muscles, allowing us to run away or attack.



### Butterflies

Adrenaline reduces blood flow and relaxes muscles in stomach and intestines causing nausea, butterflies or churning.



### Fast and shallow breathing

This helps us take in more oxygen, which is then transported around the blood system. Sometimes experience a choking feeling.



### Hands tingle - legs tremble or “Jelly legs”

Blood is diverted to large muscles, and small blood vessels constrict, causing tingling, trembling or numbness.



### Light Headed

As we are breathing a lot faster.



### Muscles tense

Blood, containing vital oxygen and glucose energy, is sent to the big muscles of the arms and legs – ready for fight or flight. Can also cause aches and pains.



### Bladder relaxes

Inner sphincter muscle relaxes so we might feel the urge to wee.

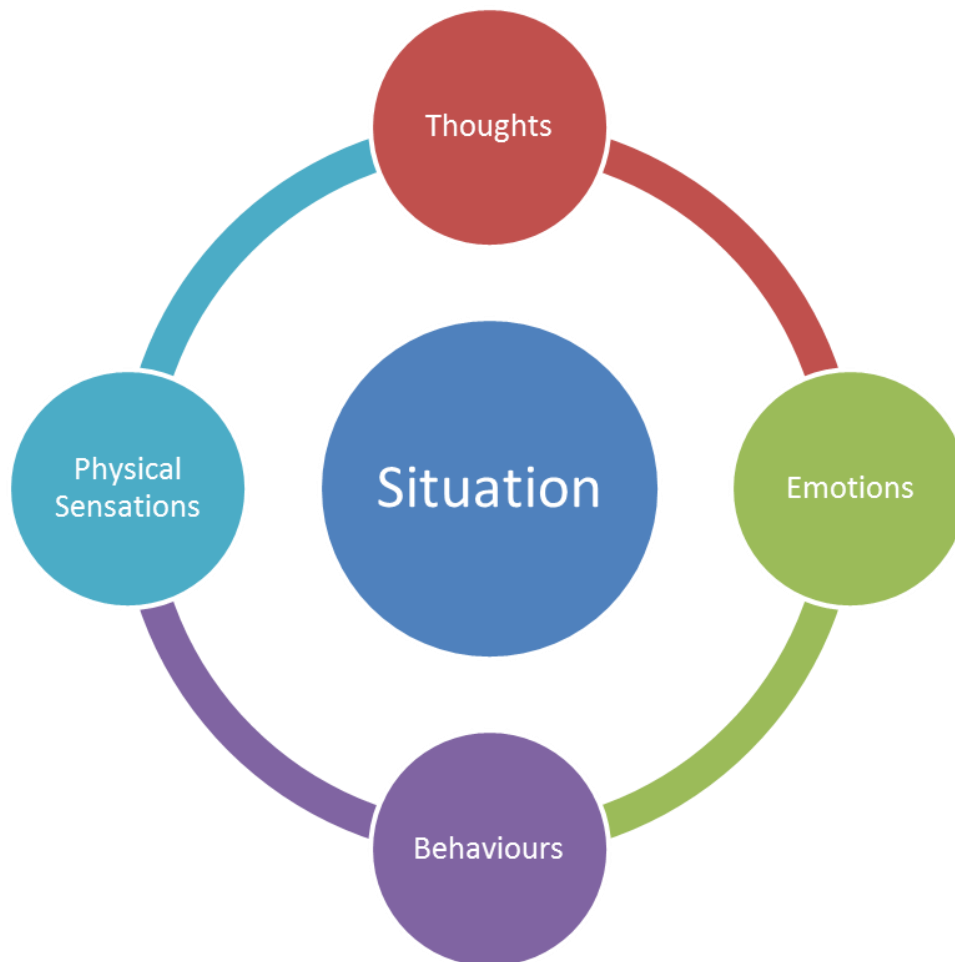


Something else (please state):

## What keeps the anxiety going?

### What keeps the anxiety going?

Healthy Minds Lincolnshire recommends using the 5 areas cognitive behavioural model to understand and explain to the young person why they are feeling anxious or worried and what they need to do to break the cycle. It is useful for the young person to keep a diary to jot down negative thoughts and how this makes them feel.



*(Padesky, 1986)*

**Situation** – What might trigger the feelings of anxiety? Explore situations that the young person has experienced or is avoiding.

**Thoughts** – Can the young person recognise the thoughts that they are having in relation to that situation? E.g. I am useless, nobody likes me, something bad is going to happen.

**Emotions** – What emotions are they experiencing? Are they feeling sad, lonely, angry, disappointed?

**Physical Reactions** – What physical sensations are they experiencing? Do they feel tired, generally unwell, suffer from frequent headaches or often feel sick? Or do they describe sensations such as butterflies in their tummy, a racing heart, shaking hands?

**Behaviour** – What is the resulting behaviour? Are they avoiding situations? Have they stopped doing activities they used to enjoy? Are they showing more irritability through a short temper, arguing more with others etc?

## So, how can you help?

### **Talk to your young person**

Tell them that you have noticed they seem to be feeling worried or anxious recently. Ask them if they would like to talk about it and ask them how you can help. They may already know what will help but haven't felt able to ask.



### **Listening and validation**

When talking to your young person try not to jump in and solve everything for them immediately. Just listen at first and validate how they are feeling. Validation is the recognition and acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviours as understandable. Try to understand what is going on for your young person in a non-judgemental way. Show that you understand by reflecting back what they are saying or guessing at how they may be feeling. E.g. 'you must be feeling nervous about doing a presentation at school. I think I would feel that way too'.

A great example of validation can be found in a video clip of the film Inside Out, which you can watch here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT6FdhKriB8> If you have not received this document electronically, simply type 'inside out validation clip' into Google and the YouTube video will appear in the search results.

### **Help your young person to understand what is going on for them**

Use the 5 area model above to explore thoughts, feelings, behaviours and physical sensations. Help your young person to pick any thoughts and behaviours that are unhelpful and help them come up with some different, more positive thoughts or look at changing some behaviours that might be keeping the problem going.



## Diet, Sleep and Exercise

It is important to remember that physical health and mental health is closely linked. For example -If we don't eat a balanced diet we may end up with vitamin deficiencies that can leave you feeling lethargic and depressed, if we don't sleep sufficiently we feel tired and emotional and this can lead to problems both physically and mentally.

**Diet** - modern diets are often high in sugars, fats and salt and low in fibre, essential fatty acids and vitamins and minerals.

- \* Children should eat a balanced diet of three meals a day including breakfast.
- \* Try and avoid artificial additives, reduce pre-prepared meals and takeaways.
- \* If you find it difficult to get your child to eat a balanced diet consider a multi-vitamin and mineral supplement and essential fatty acids (Omega 3)

See the NHS Eat Well guide for more information: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide/>



**Sleep** - children and young people need significantly more sleep than adults to support their rapid mental and physical development. Sleep routine is important for us all to feel refreshed and motivated. Encourage your child to go to bed at the same time each night and to get up at the same time each morning. To get a good night's sleep it needs to be dark – ban electrical equipment from being used in the bedroom. As well as being over stimulated, light from this equipment prevents melatonin production which the body makes to control our natural sleep/wake cycles.

**Children age 6-13 need 9-11 hours of sleep a day, Teenagers should have between 8 and 10 hours sleep.** See: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/sleep-and-tiredness/healthy-sleep-tips-for-children/> for more advice.

**Exercise** - We all know that exercise and physical activity is beneficial for our physical health. It helps us maintain a healthy weight, strengthens our bones, muscles and internal organs and reduces the risk of some disease. Exercise also increases our ability to deal with stress, gives us more energy and improves our sleep. When you are active your brain releases endorphins which can calm anxiety and lift your mood. See: <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise/physical-activity-guidelines-children-and-young-people/> for more advice.

**Support your young person to use specific strategies** – the Healthy Minds practitioner you have had contact with may have sent you/your young person some more specific strategies that can help to manage anxiety and worries. Help your young person to practice these strategies regularly. And remember, it is ok to have set backs and forget to use strategies at times. Be kind to yourself and your young person and keep going!

See: <https://www.lpft.nhs.uk/young-people/lincolnshire/young-people/helping-you-help-yourself> for lots more useful information.