



# Anxiety in Young People

Flitwick Mental Health Support Team



**We care**  
**We respect**  
**We are inclusive**



**East London**  
NHS Foundation Trust

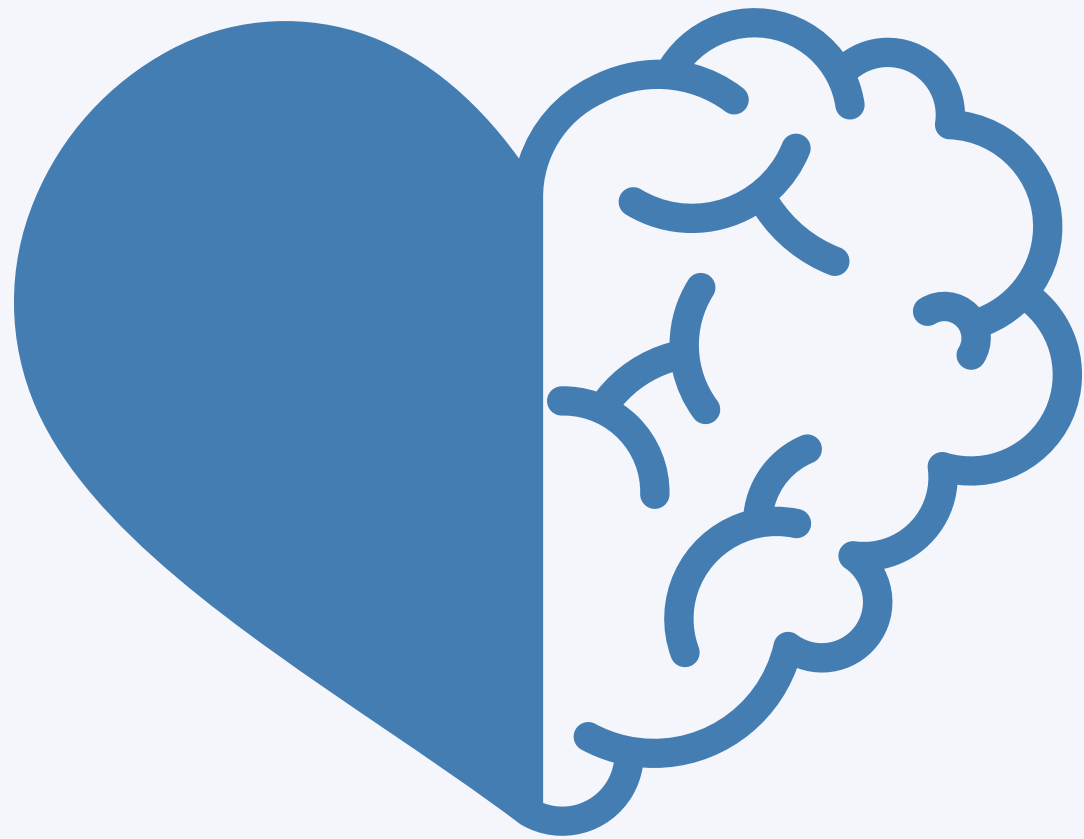
# What is Mental Health?

We all have mental health. Mental health affects how you feel, think and act.

Mental health refers to your emotional, psychological and social wellbeing.

Your mental health can change daily and over time and can be affected by a range of factors, such as friendship difficulties, change of school and stress.

Take a minute to reflect on your young people and what factors could impact their mental health.



# What is Anxiety?

Everyone experiences anxiety from time to time. It alerts us to threats, protects us from danger and helps us reach important goals.

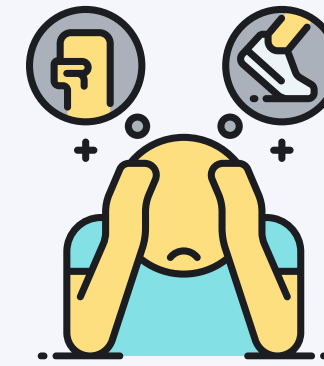
However, anxiety becomes a problem when it starts to affect everyday life; social life, academic performance and mood.

Anxiety normally presents itself in two ways: worries and avoidance.





# Fight, Flight, Freeze



Humans developed the fight, flight, freeze 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).

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.



# Symptoms of Anxiety

What  
symptoms of  
anxiety does  
your young  
person  
experience?



# Symptoms of Anxiety

Muscle ache /  
tension

Headaches

Feeling overwhelmed  
or full of dread

Difficulty  
concentrating

Feeling irritable

Dizziness

Sweating

Pins and  
needles

Nervousness

Dry mouth

Frustration



Noticeably fast,  
strong or irregular  
heart beat

Feeling  
sick

Feeling sad

Stomach ache

Feeling  
restless

Trembling

Feeling scared

Shaking

Panicky

Feeling  
frightened

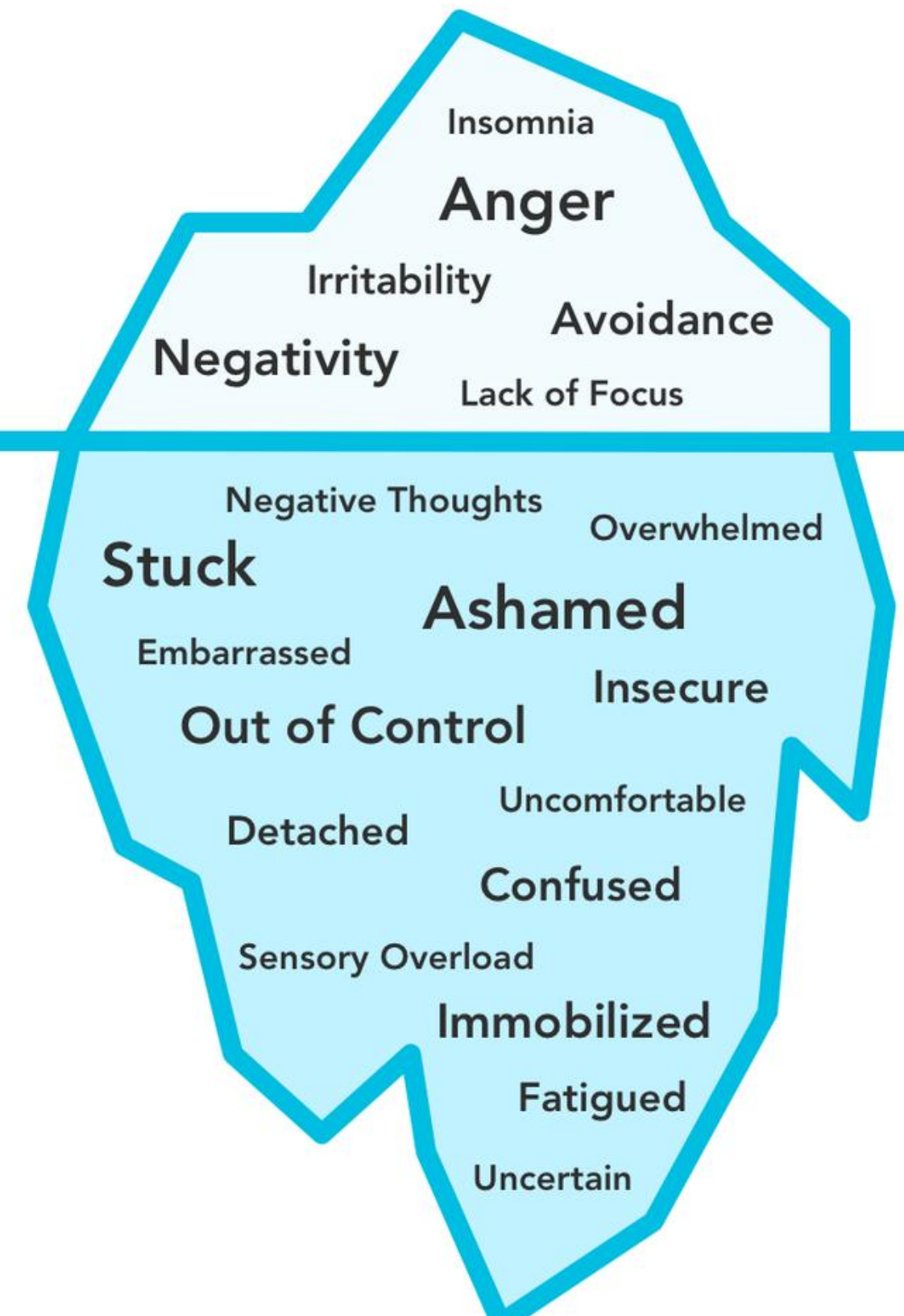
# Anxiety Iceberg

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.

## Anxiety Iceberg

### WHAT YOU SEE

### WHAT YOU DON'T SEE



# Childhood Anxiety

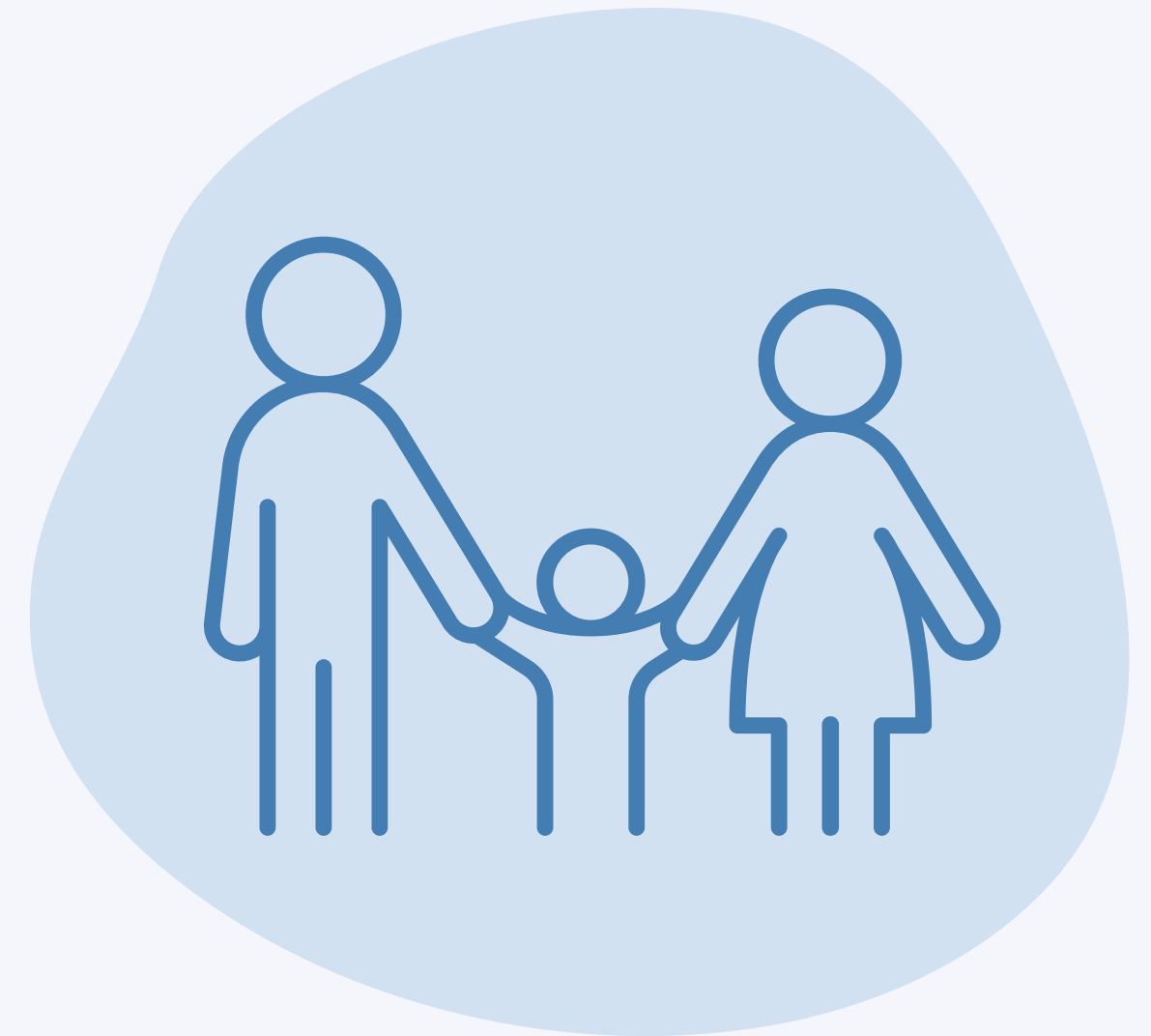
Anxiety runs in families.

1/3 of what makes a child anxious comes from their genes and the rest is the environment around them.

Children might have inherited sensitivity which makes them more likely to be anxious.

Children learn by example and learn from other's reactions.

Stressful life events can increase anxiety.



# The effect of environment

Help your child to recognise what makes anxiety worse.

Be aware of particular times of the day your child displays anxious behaviours such as in the morning before school, before bedtime, at meal times, during unstructured times or out in the community.

Consider your routine and ensure your child has a mixture of activities; Keeping touch with friends, exercise (no matter how little), and time to relax.

Have you recognised any environmental stressors?





# Anxiety Triggers

- School morning's
- Homework
- Tests
- Bullying
- Lack of sleep
- Hormones
- Peer pressure
- Friendship issues
- Performing in front of others
- Being away from a parent or the family home
- The news
- Parties
- Crowds
- Illness
- Changes to routine

Can you think of any other potential triggers?



# What might anxiety look like?

- Difficulties separating from parents/carers.
- Excessive worries/lots of 'what if' questions.
- Thinking about the future and expecting bad things to happen.
- Phobias or fears where the child avoids coming into contact with their fear.
- Avoids going to friends house – friends always have to come to their home.
- Problems sleeping – e.g. the child still sleeping in their parents bed.
- Experiences lots of physical symptoms and worries about these.





## Questions you could ask

Be  
receptive  
and use  
open  
questioning

What is it about (the situation)  
are you feeling worried about?

What do you think will happen?

What's the worst that could  
happen?

Have we done it before? What  
happened when we did?





# When and how to ask these questions?

*How* you ask a child about their worries and *when* you ask a child can be as important as *what* you ask them.

- Helping your child feel understood – empathising with them.
- Helping your child feel normal – normalising.
- Making suggestions
- Checking your understanding
- Labelling emotions
- Pick your moment
- Make it fun or rewarding if you can





# 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.

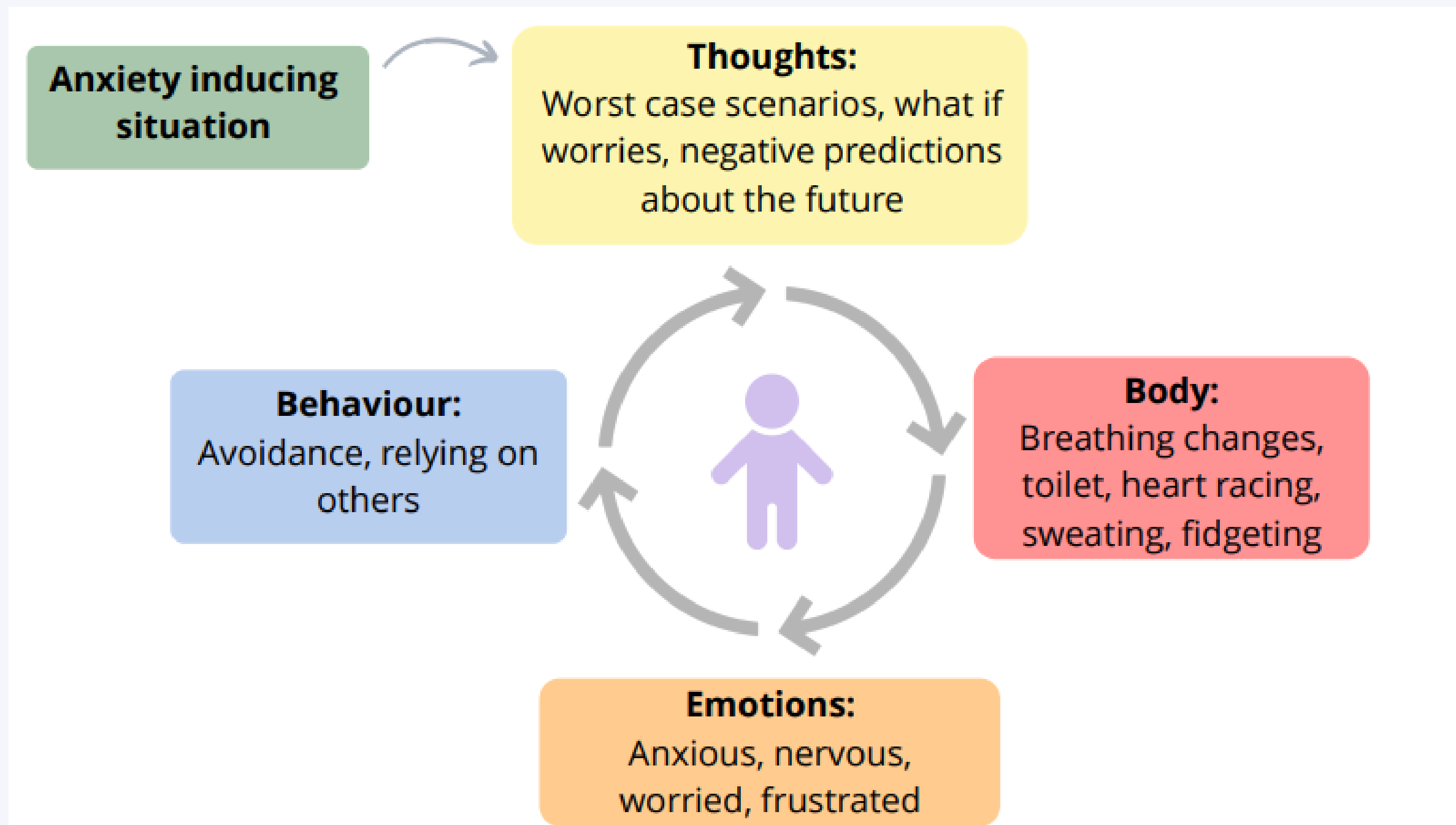
Avoid telling them what to do.

Remove distractions - phones, TV etc.

Normalise and validate feelings.



# How anxiety is maintained



# The effects of avoidance

Avoidance = instant relief from anxiety and fear

However, when we are faced with that same situation again, we feel just as worried or scared.

We are encouraged to avoid the situation, given the relief we felt last time. Nothing will ever change, as we haven't had the opportunity to learn!



# Facing the situation

Our body can't physically stay at a high level of anxiety, so by exposing ourselves to the situation, our anxiety naturally reduces.

This happens at a slower rate than if we were to avoid the situation, so the unpleasant feelings can last a while, but each time we face the situation our peak anxiety level will be less and less until we no longer feel worried or scared.





# Reassurance

Reassurance is a natural response to anxiety. If we see someone is struggling, we might want to say "it's going to be OK, don't worry".

Reassurance can prevent children from learning that they can cope independently, becoming dependent on reassurance means that the child doesn't learn their own skills to cope.





# What to do when a child is seeking reassurance

Identify when it is happening:  
There is a difference between seeking information and seeking reassurance.

Slowly decrease how much reassurance you give each day.

ASK questions that will help your child to answer their own questions.





# Strategies, Techniques and Tools



# Breathing Techniques

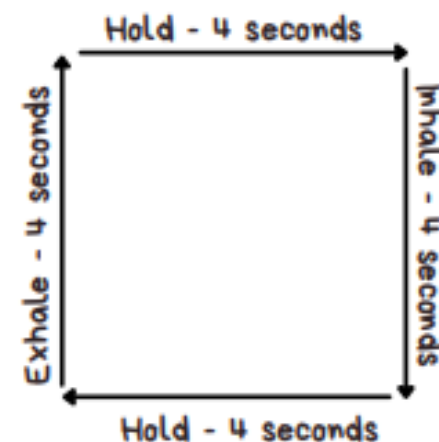
## Finger breathing:

- 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.

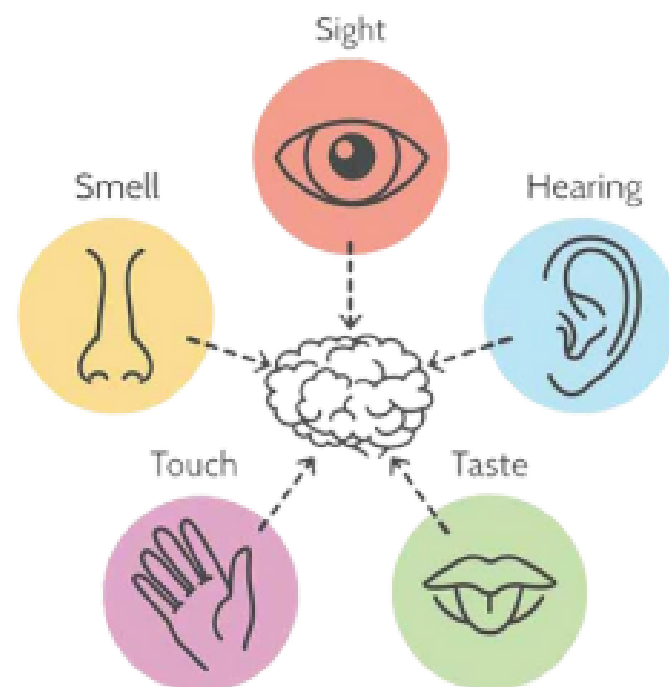


# Grounding Techniques

## 5, 4, 3, 2, 1:

Take notice of your senses by thinking of:

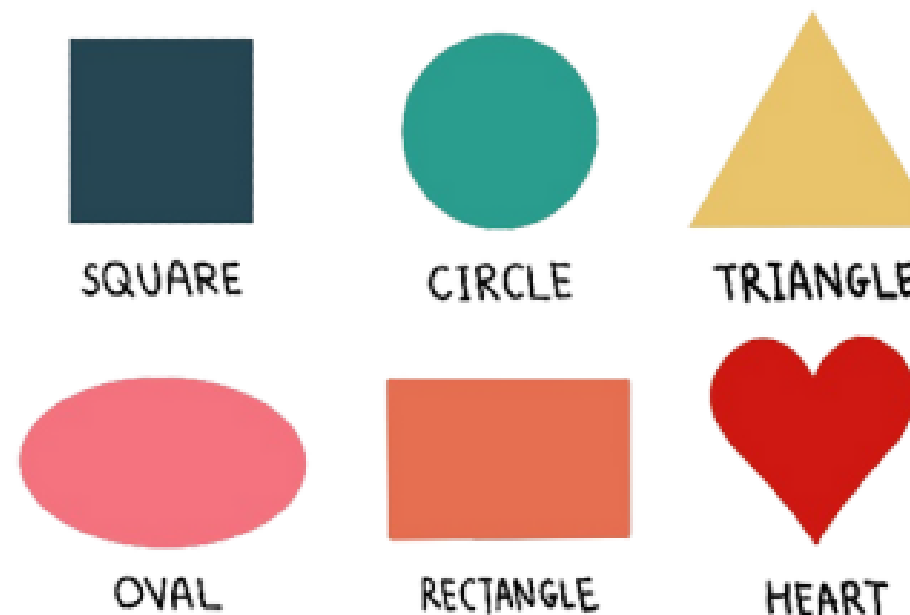
- 5 things you can see,
- 4 things you can hear,
- 3 things you can feel/touch,
- 2 things you can smell,
- 1 thing you can taste.



## 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...



# Distraction Techniques

## A-Z

Name things beginning with the letters of the alphabet.

Some ideas are:

- Animals
- Disney characters
- Food
- Names
- Countries
- Colours



## Making lists

Make a list either on some paper or in your head.

Some ideas are:

- Characters from your favourite TV show
- Football teams
- Good names for dogs or cats
- Musical instruments



## Numbers

Try one of the following in your mind:

- Count backwards in 7's from 1000
- Go through the 8 times table
- Choose any number and work out how many ways you can make it



# Strategies, Tools and Techniques

## Problem solving



Encourage them to voice their worries in different ways such as writing them down or drawing them.



Support them in exposure to the feared situation.



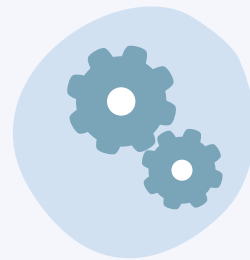
**Review it**  
Did it work? If yes... complete the steps for the next problem.  
If no... return to step 4 and pick another solution to try.



# What you can do right now!



Check in with your child.



Validate your child's worries.



Discuss the techniques they could use to help them when they are feeling anxious.



Model the calm response you want to see from your child.



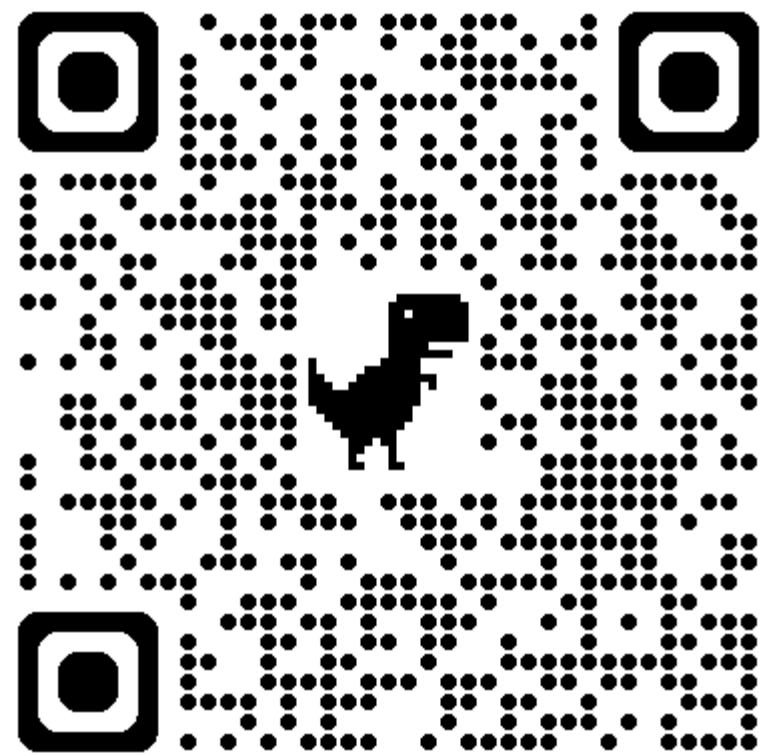
# Self-Help

There are self-help guides available and lots of videos if you feel that you need more information or a greater range of techniques to try.

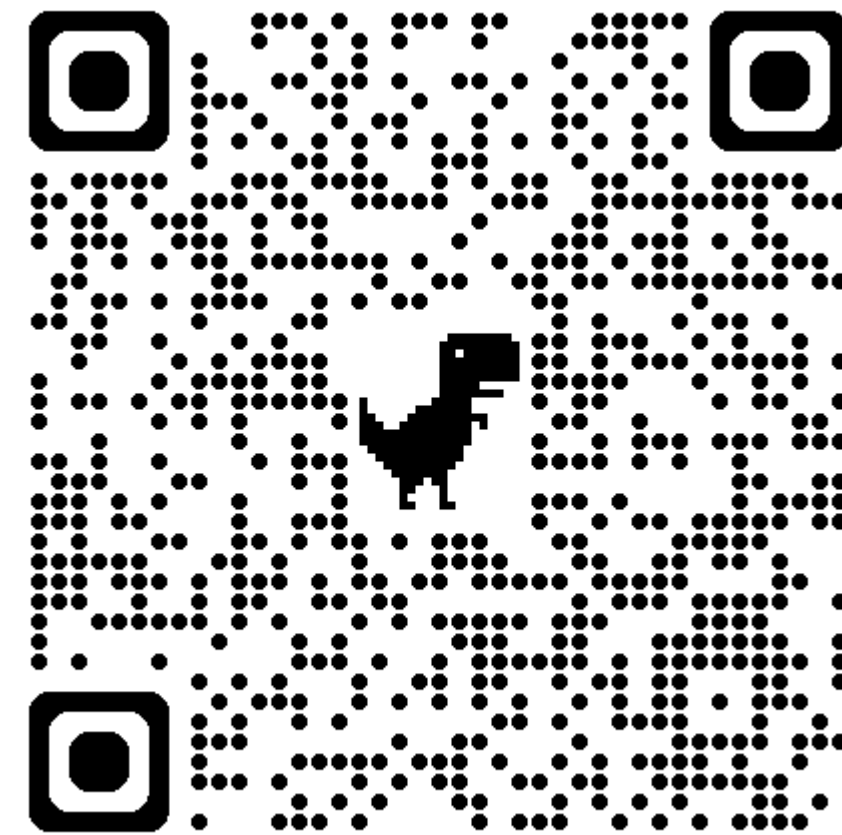




# Further Resources



Parent/Carer  
Padlet



Child/Young Person  
Padlet





# Feedback



**WE WANT YOUR  
FEEDBACK**





Any Questions?

