

Anxiety and separation anxiety



MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM (MHST)
Emotional Health Service
Achieving for Children
42 York Street
London TW1 3BW




Introduction to the MHST

- The Mental Health Support Team (MHST) is an **early intervention**, multi disciplinary team of clinical specialists, mental health clinicians (counselling psychologists, art psychotherapists, dramatherapist, dance movement psychotherapist, music therapist) and education wellbeing practitioners (EWPs)
- We support **children and young people's emotional health and wellbeing** through work with children, young people, families/carers and staff in **school settings**, within Kingston and Richmond.
- The teams are delivered by Achieving for Children as part of our Emotional Health Service.

Plan for today

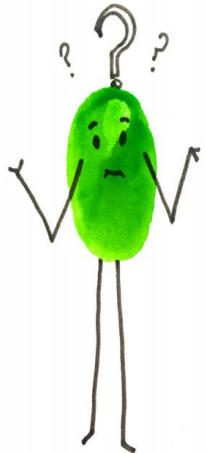
- Understanding anxiety
- Strategies to manage children's anxiety
- Questions, ideas & feedback



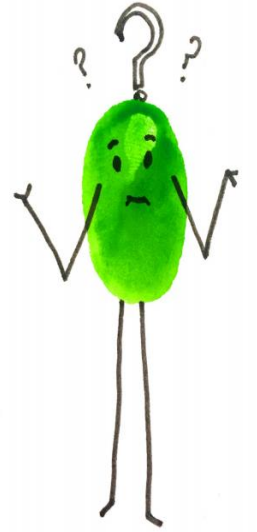
**You are the
expert on your
child!**

Reflective Task

- ★ *How do you feel being away from your child?*
- ★ *How does it make you feel when your child is distressed?*
- ★ *How might you react emotionally to your child when they are in distress? What might your immediate response be?*



What is anxiety?



Anxiety can have a **lot of names** - worry, apprehension, dread, fear. Essentially, you are **expecting that something bad is going to happen.**

Anxiety is a **normal emotion** and it is not always bad. It can help to keep us to stay safe and motivates us to be prepared and do our best.

However, too much anxiety too often can interfere with our day to day life.

This is why it is important that children can learn and practise ways of managing these feelings.



This is going
to be AWFUL!

Anxiety =

Overestimation of threat

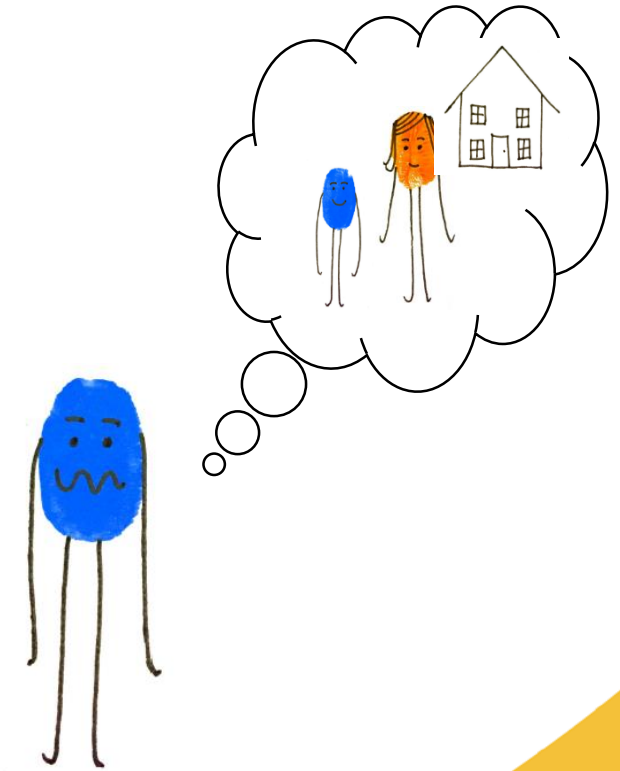
**Underestimation of ability
to cope**

I won't be
able to
handle this

What is separation anxiety?

Separation anxiety is anxiety related to being away from home and/or from people to whom the individual has a strong emotional attachment (e.g., a parent, caregiver, significant other or siblings)

Children are typically more worried about harm coming to their parent or caregiver, or something bad happening at home, rather than being worried they will be harmed while not in the care of their caregiver.



Things you might notice:

Excessive worry about getting lost from family

Refusing to go to school

Frequent stomach aches, headaches, or other physical complaints

Symptoms of panic and/or temper tantrums at times of separation from parents or caregivers

Repeated nightmares of getting lost

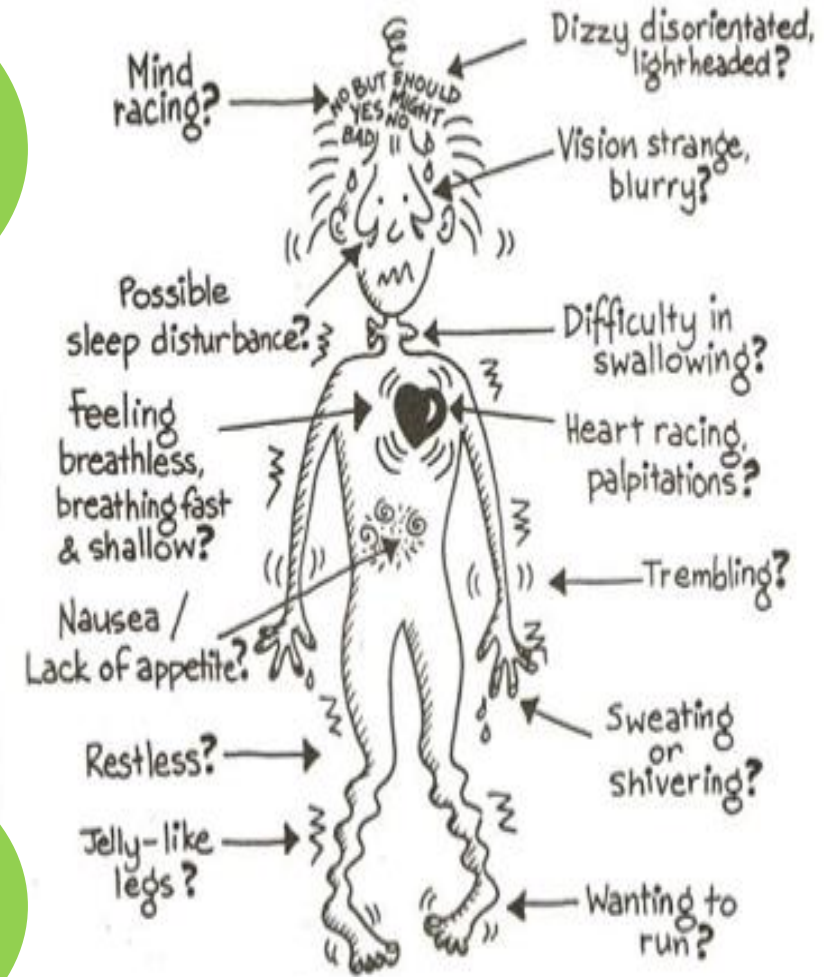
Excessive worry about or when sleeping away from home

Fearful and reluctant to be alone

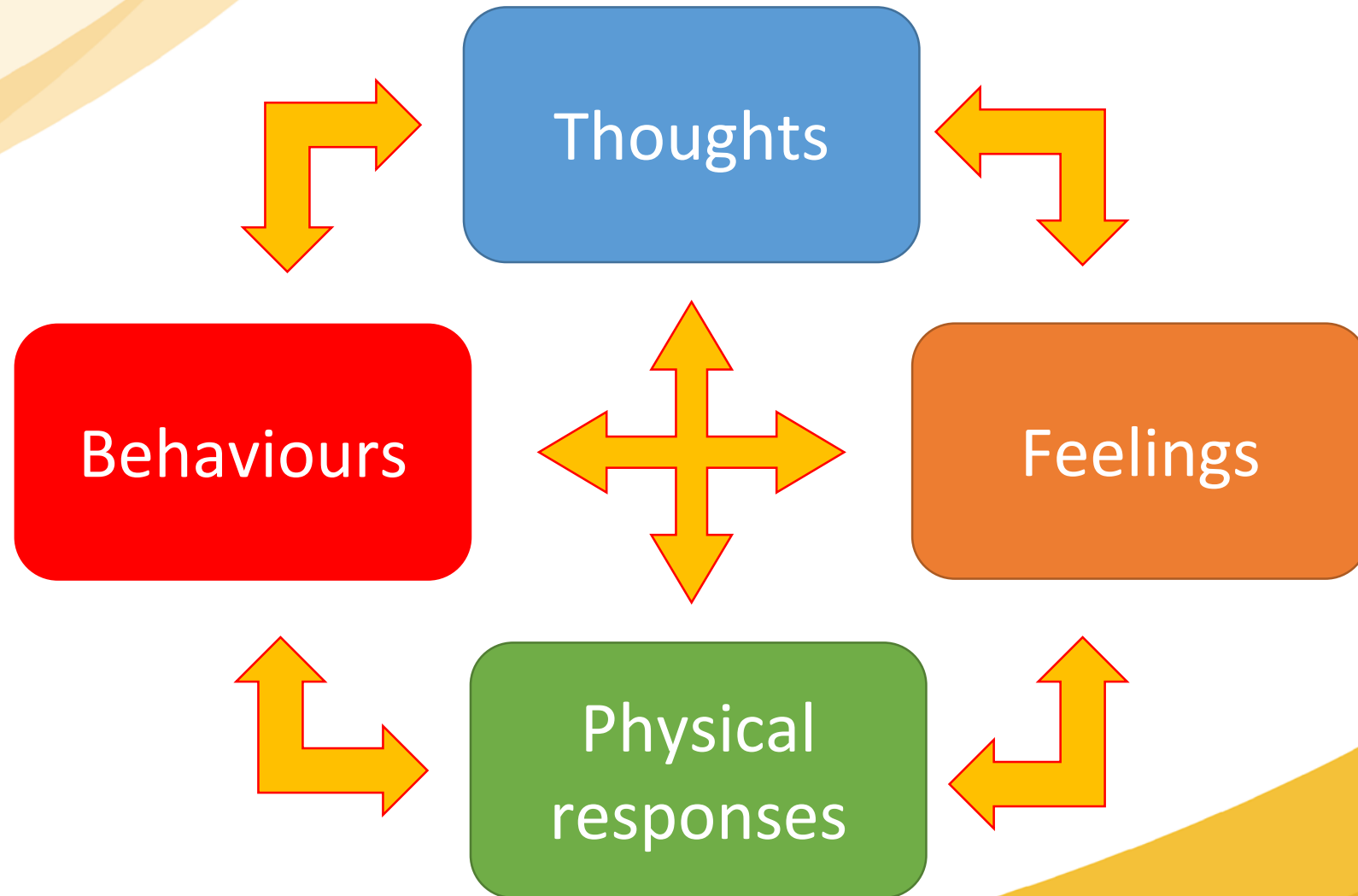
Excessive worry about the safety of a family member

Refusal to sleep alone

Excessive "clinginess," even when at home



The Cognitive Behavioural Model

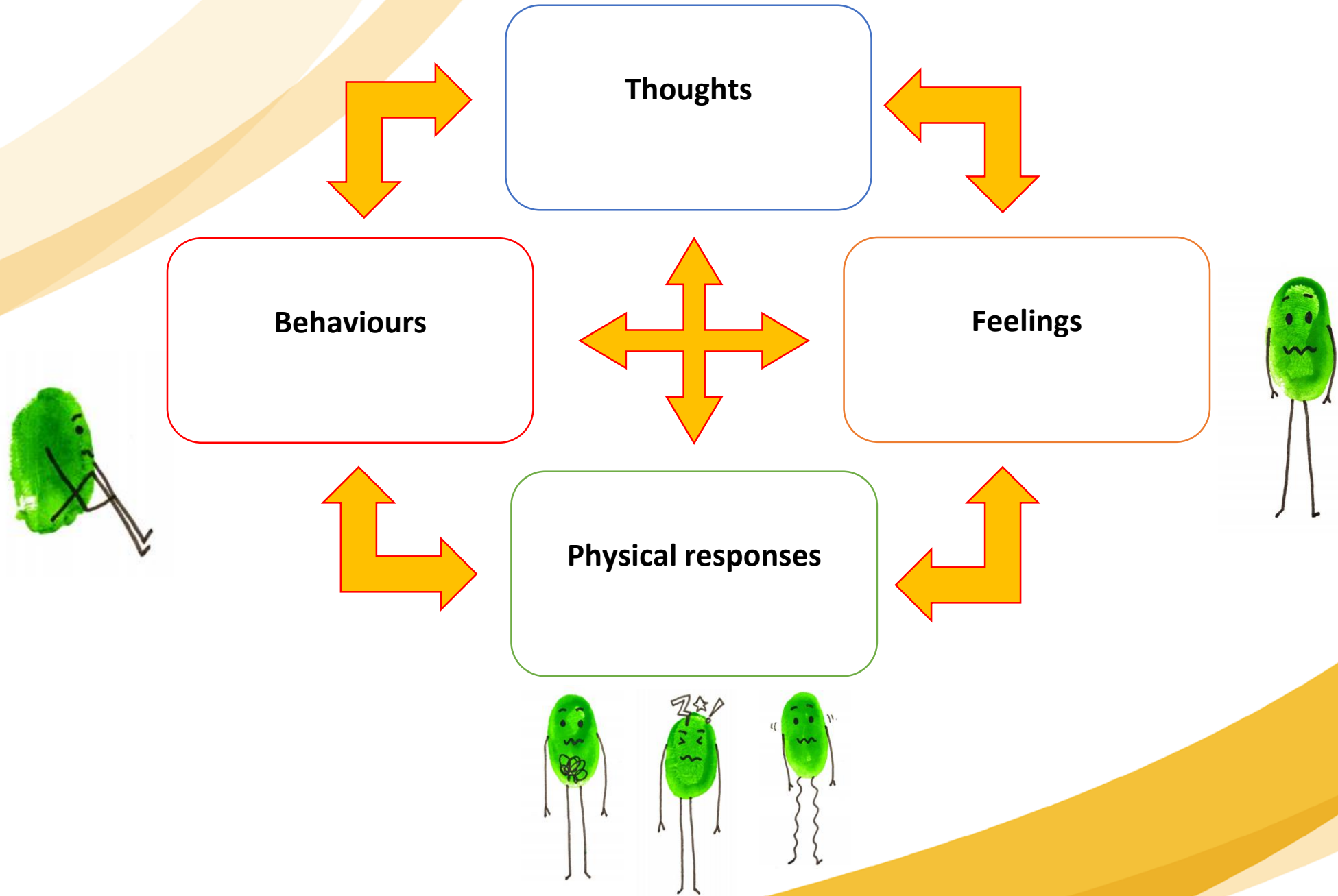


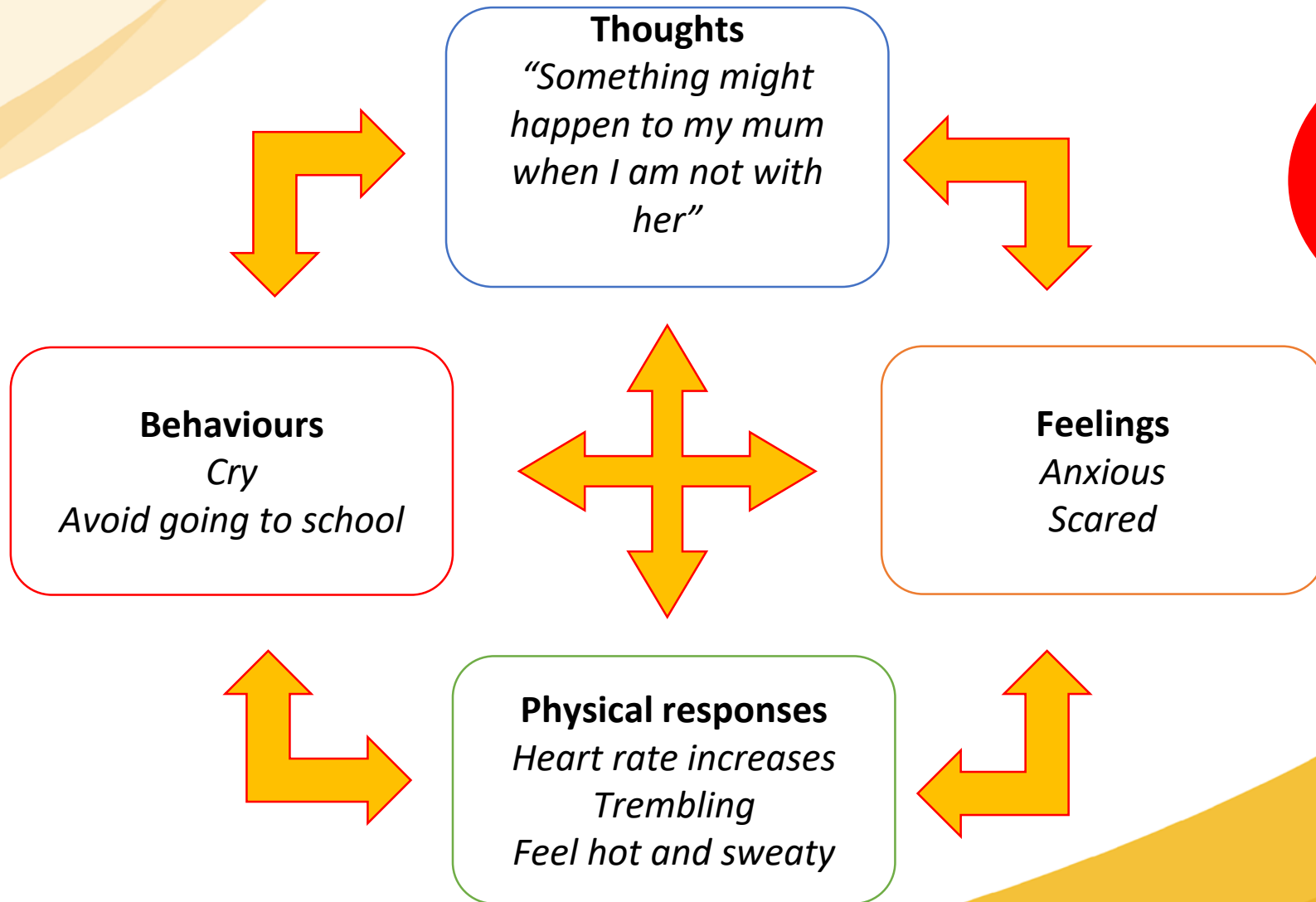
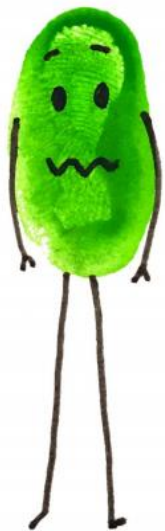
An example...

Sometimes applying things with a real world example is more helpful.

This is Arthur, and he is feeling anxious and struggles to go to school in the morning. We know this because of the way he is thinking, feeling and behaving.



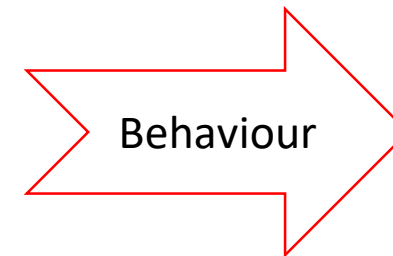
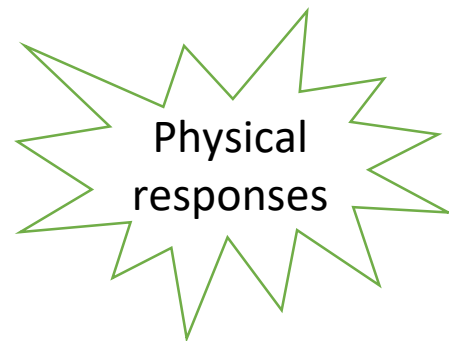




These responses create a vicious cycle that maintain anxiety

How can we help?

We can help by intervening at all 4 levels...



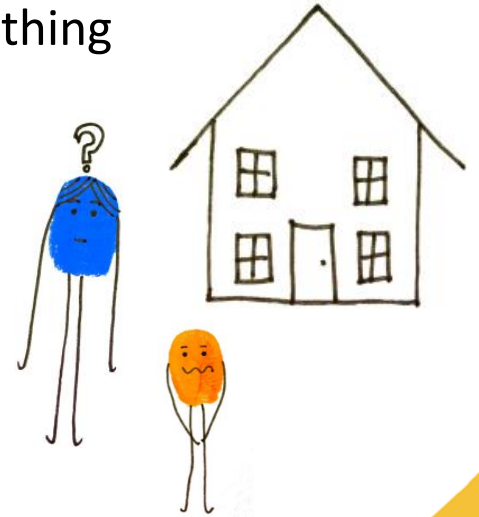
Intervening at the level of...

Emotions

We do this through providing time and space to listen and talk about feelings.

How can you help at home?

- **Don't be afraid** to approach the child and ask if they are OK or if something is bothering them
- **Active listening** is the **best support** you could offer
- **Wonder aloud** about what might be happening for the child
- **Name feelings** around events if they approach you to talk.
- Look beyond behaviour, **be curious** about what is happening for them.
- **Model emotion regulation**



Talking Tips

These tips can help open conversations to a point where the young person feels able to speak openly, without judgement:

- **Be curious:**

“I wonder if you’re feeling _____?”

“I wonder if you’re worried about _____?”

“I imagine that would feel _____”

- **Empathising/Validating**

“It sounds like that (situation) has been frustrating / upsetting / disheartening for you”

“I can tell that this is important to you...”

“It makes sense that you would be feeling disappointed / hurt / confused about this (situation)”

- **Normalising, making suggestions**

“lots of children feel / think about _____ when they are worried. Is that like what’s going on for you?”

- **Check their understanding**

“does that make sense?” **but also yours** – “have I understood that you feel _____ because of _____?”

- **Labelling emotions**

- **Make it fun or rewarding**

Pick your moment & make it rewarding

The 'right' time will differ for everyone

Talking about worries can be hard, scary, or boring - what might make it more appealing for your child?



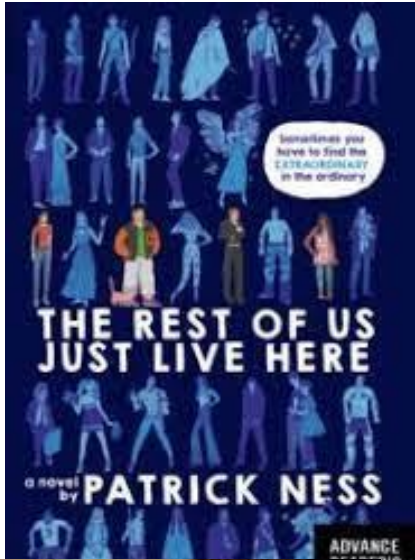
Remember: You don't have to fix the emotion, or solve the problem, simply listening and acknowledging is often enough.

Be creative

Zones of Regulation			
Blue	Green	Yellow	Red
			
Bored Lonely Sad Tired Unwell	Calm Content Focused Happy Ready to learn	Anxious Confused Excited Frustrated Worried	Angry Aggressive Terrified I need time and space



Creative Tools



Intervening at the level of...

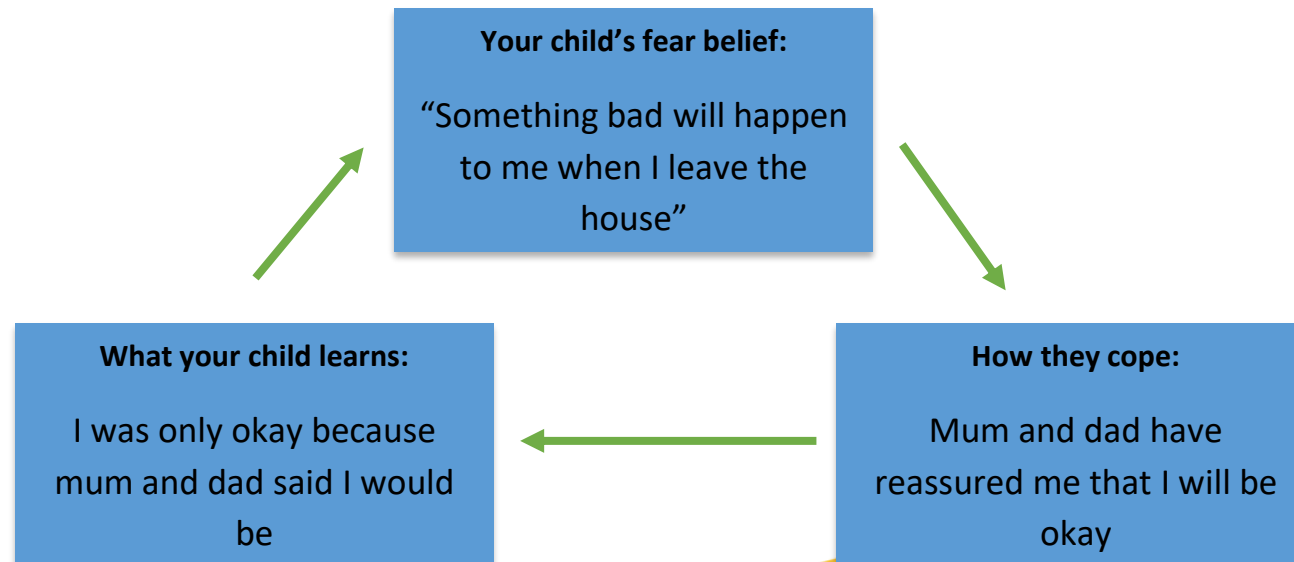
Thoughts

We do this by helping children find more helpful thoughts about situations and themselves

Reassurance

Some children ask for reassurance about the same situation over and over again e.g “will I be ok at school on my own?”

Most parents already know that giving reassurance over and over again is not only exhausting but also doesn't work.



Reassurance

Reassurance that promotes opportunities for new learning

Go on, have a go, you've done it before and it went really well

I really think you can do this. I was so proud when you asked a question in class last week

I really think you can do this. I was so proud when you asked a question in class last week

Reassurance that reduces opportunities for new learning

You'll be fine and you can always phone me if you get too worried

Don't worry, it will all be okay. I'm sure your classmates won't laugh and the teacher is bound to be really nice

It's okay, mummy's here

Thoughts

Positive and coping self-talk

When children are feeling worried they tend to be thinking the worst about themselves and their abilities.

“I can’t do it!” “I am not able to manage on my own” “I am not brave enough”

Instead we can encourage children to use positive and coping self- talk

Encourages
motivation

Builds
confidence

Helps us cope
with stress and
work through
challenges

Allows for
taking risks

Thoughts

Positive and coping self-talk

I am trying
my best

I am
capable

I am
focused

I can have
another go

I can take
my time

I cannot
do it YET!

I can relax
and
breathe

I put in the
effort

I am
learning

Intervening at the level of...

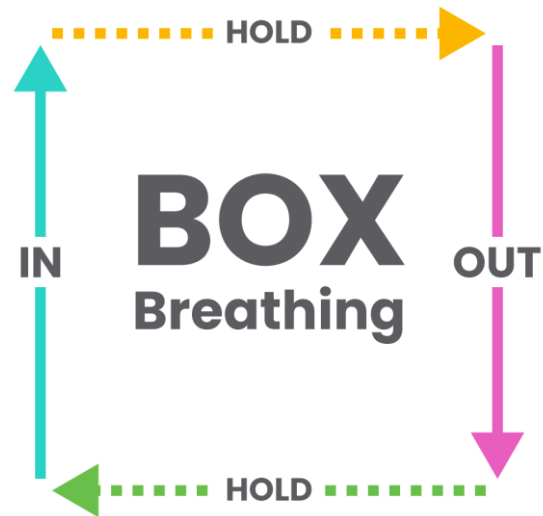
Physical
responses

We can do this by helping children develop techniques to relax and calm their bodies, making it easier for their minds to recognise they're safe

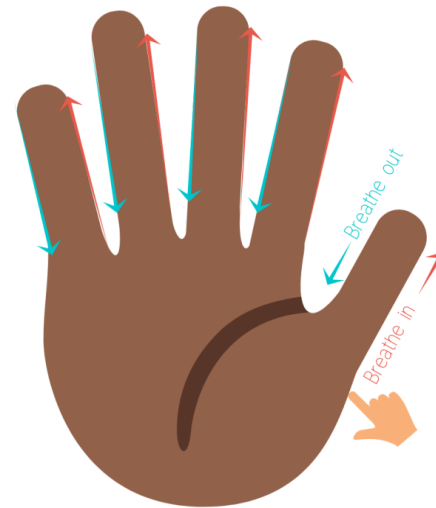
Physical responses

Deep breathing

Deep breathing is an excellent way to help re-set our bodies and keep them calm when we are feeling worried. Giving children something concrete to focus can make this easier.



5 Finger Breathing



Physical
responses

Grounding

When we are feeling worried we tend to be worrying about something that has happened in the past or jumping way in to the future. It can be helpful to reconnect to the present moment and environment. One way to do this is through our senses.

The 5 4 3 2 1 exercise is a grounding activity that invites us to notice:

**5 things we can
see**



**4 things we can
touch**



**3 things we can
hear**



**2 things we can
smell**



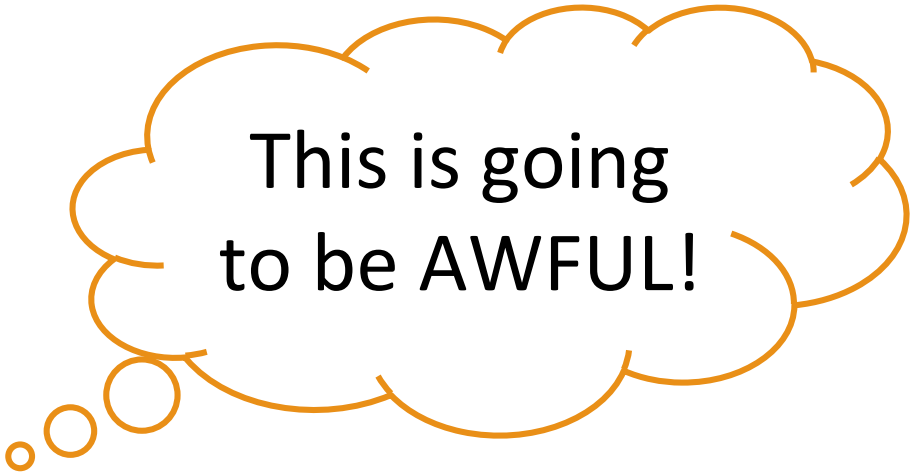
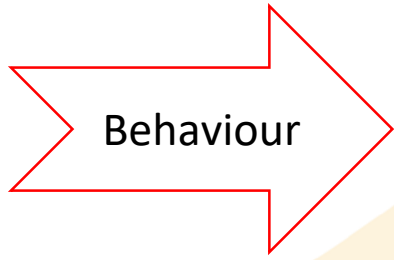
**1 thing we can
taste**



Intervening at the level of...

Behaviours

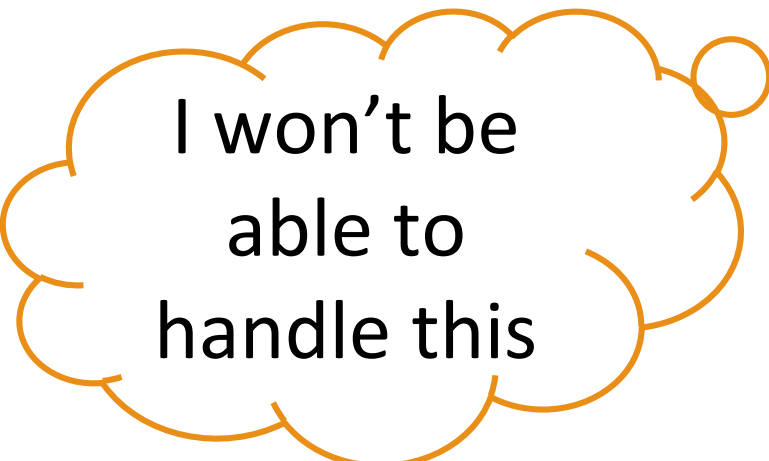
We saw earlier that the most common behaviour in the anxiety cycle is avoidance. To overcome anxiety, we need to do the opposite - face our fears with exposure to situations that make us feel anxious.

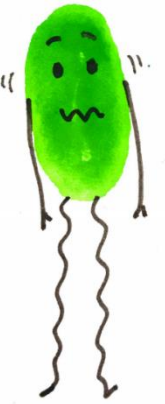
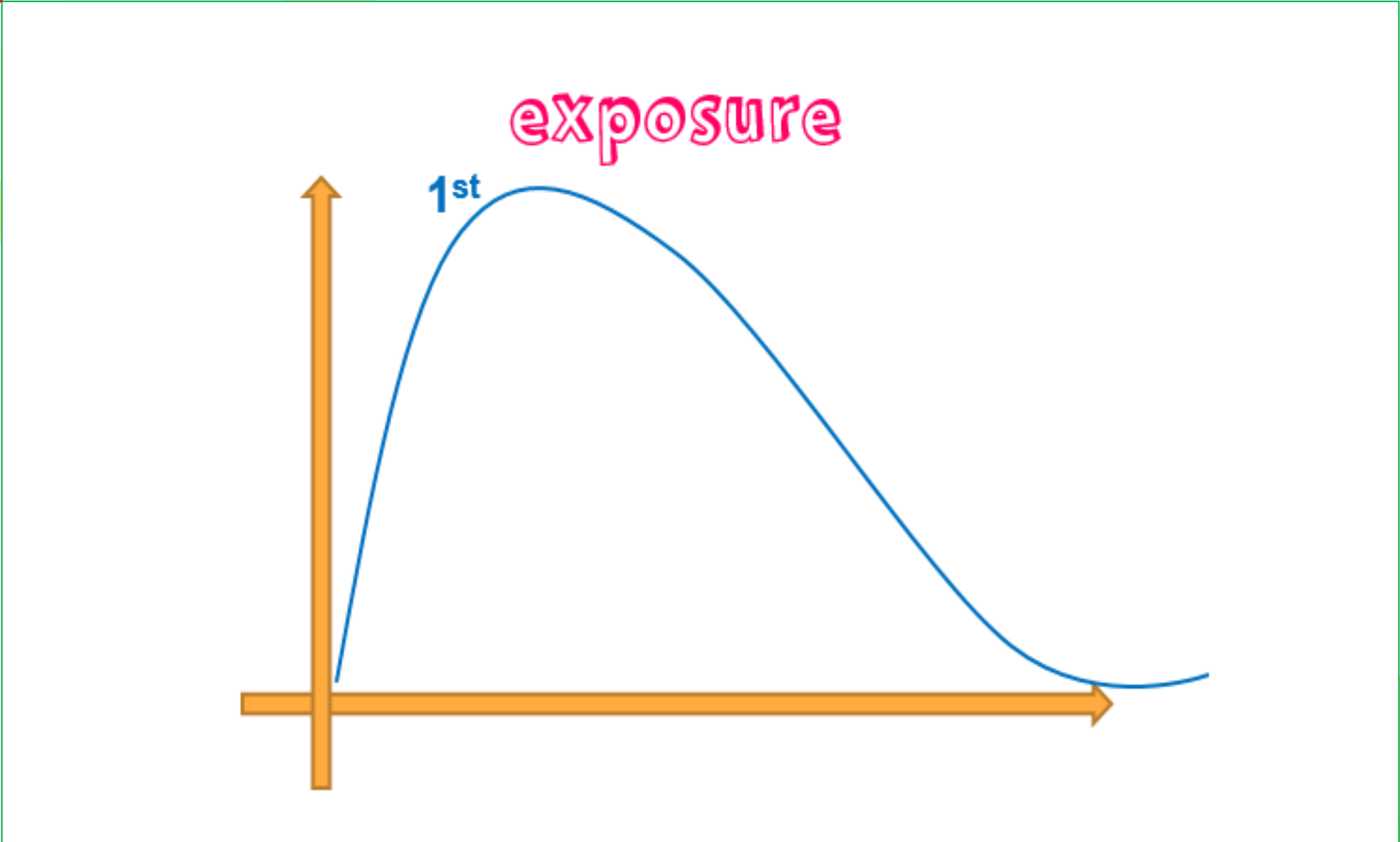
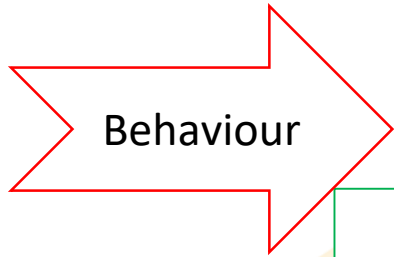


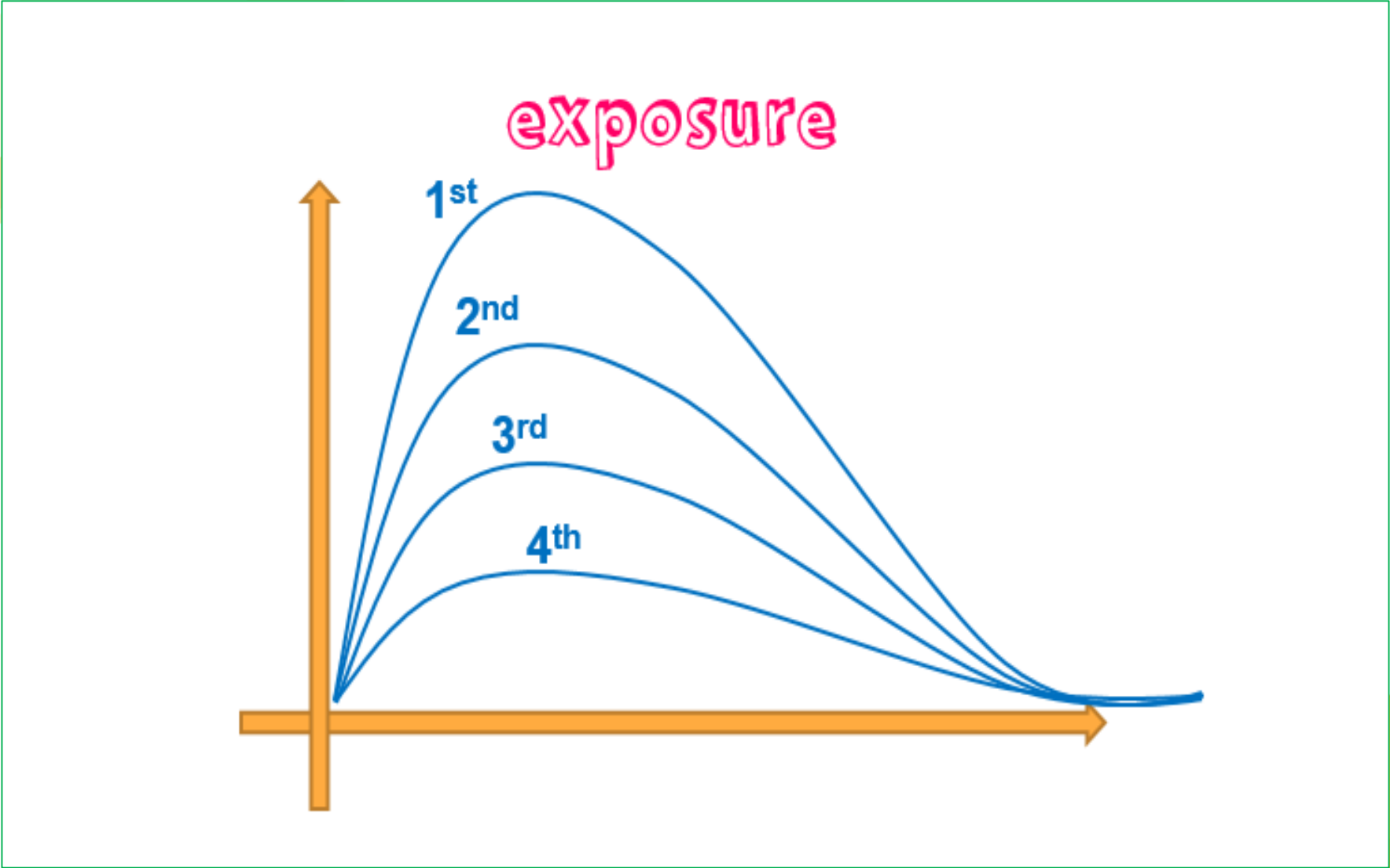
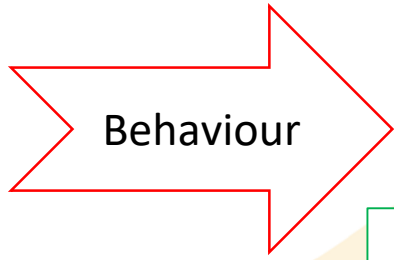
Anxiety =

Overestimation of threat

**Underestimation of ability
to cope**

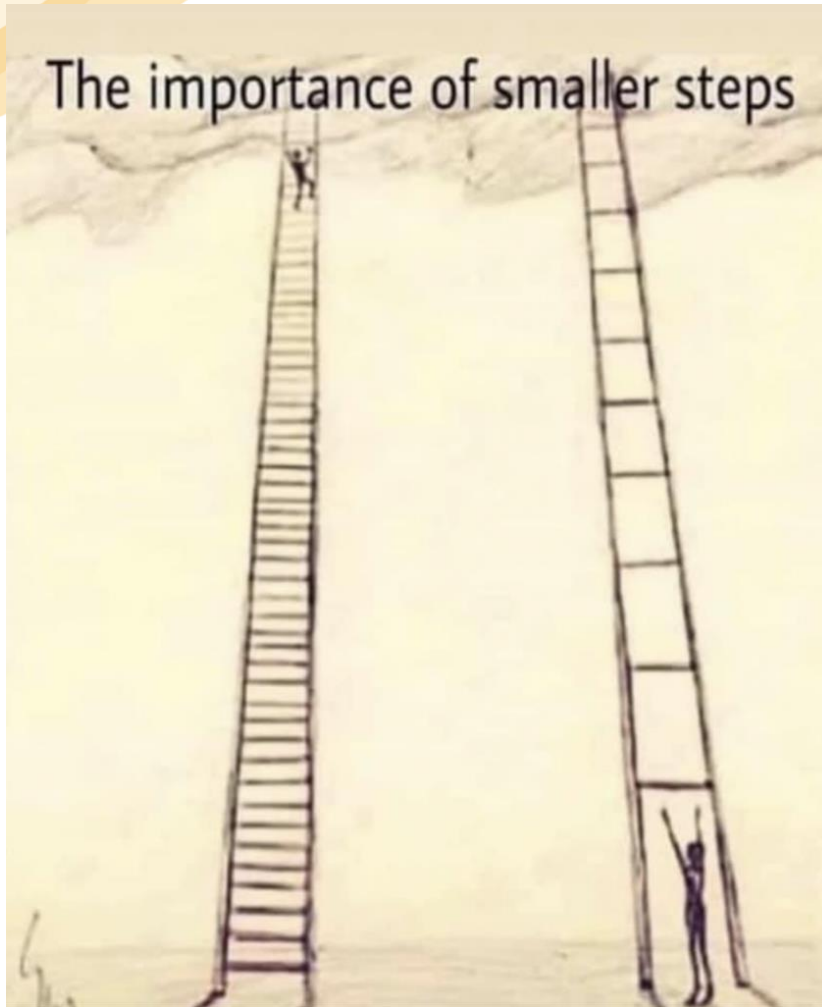






Behaviour

Taking things step by step



Goal: Answer a question in front of class

If a child is struggling with answering questions in front of the class how would you break this into smaller steps?

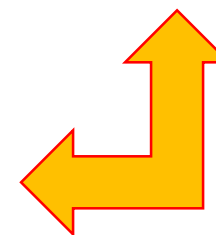
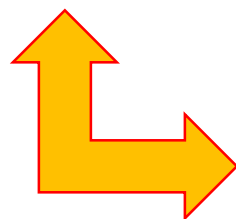
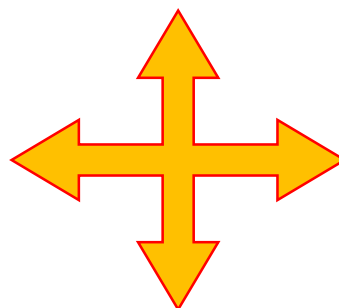
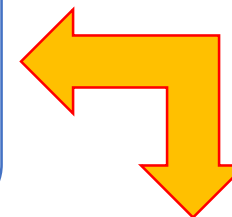
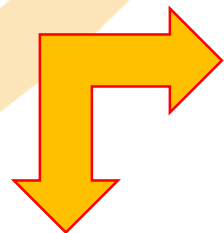
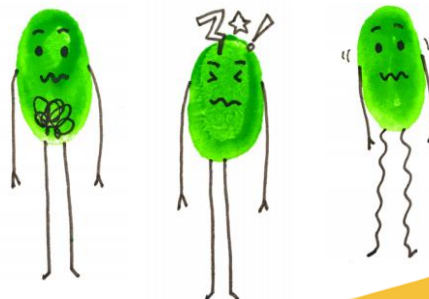
How would you support Arthur at each level?

Thoughts

Behaviours

Feelings

Physical responses



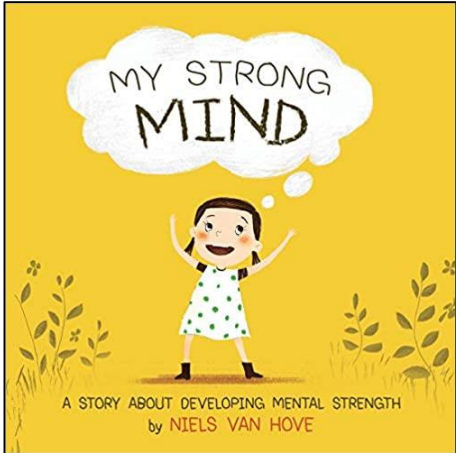
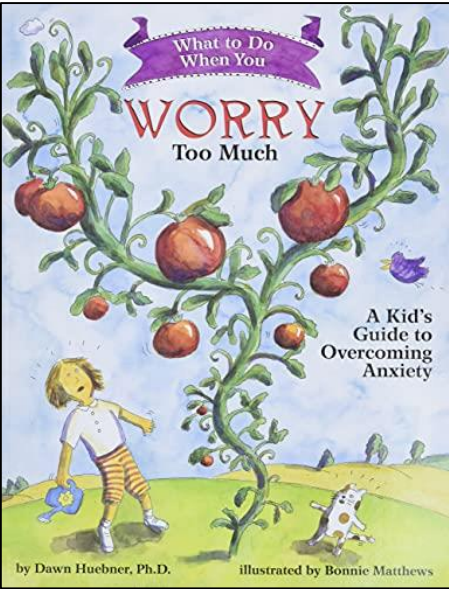
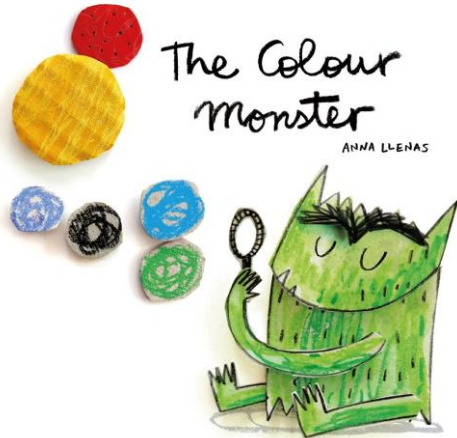
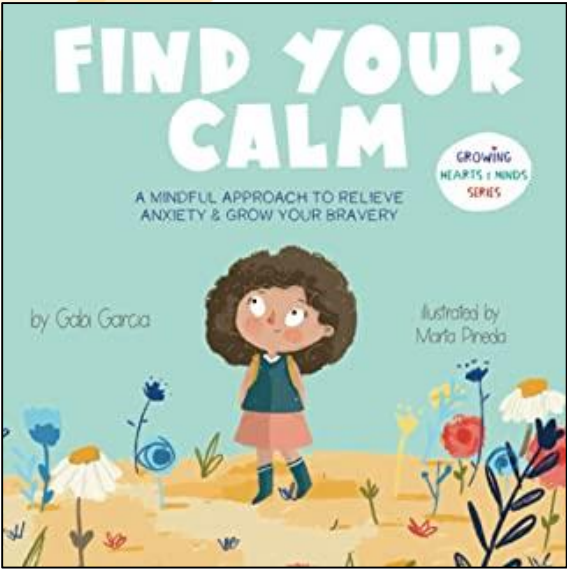
Seeking further support

If you are worried about your child's wellbeing make sure you ask for help.

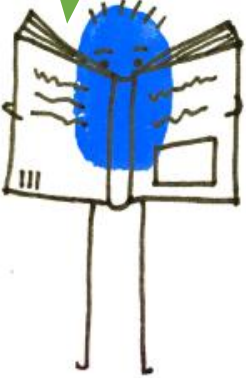
Who should I ask?

- Speak to your GP
- Speak to your child's class teacher or the school mental health lead

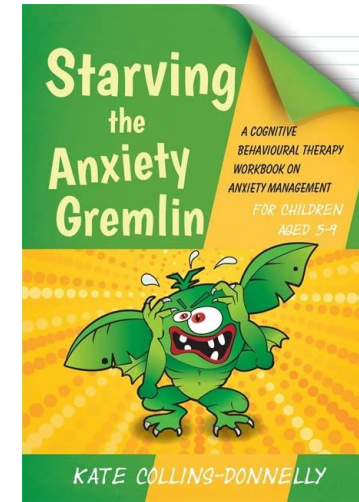
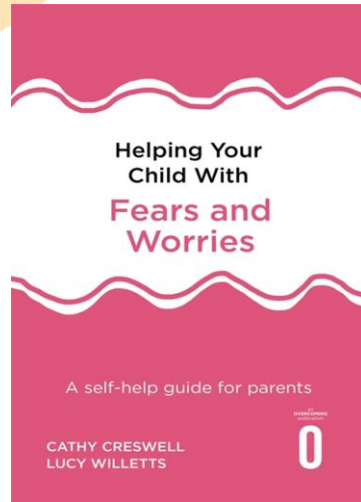
Stories



Check your local library...

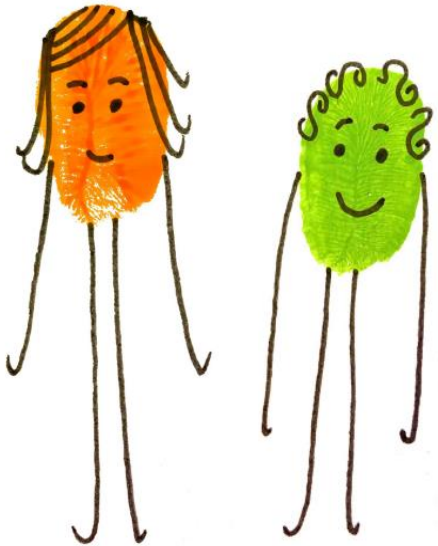


Additional resources



Looking after yourself

**PUT ON
YOUR
OWN
OXYGEN
MASK
FIRST.**



@michellesolomonart



Questions - Ideas - Feedback

**Please complete a
feedback form
before you leave**