

Managing Anxiety and Separation Anxiety Resource Pack






MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM (MHST)
Emotional Health Service
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Introduction

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 emotional wellbeing practitioners (EWP) who provide mental health support to 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.

This parent session is designed to provide you with some psychoeducation surrounding anxiety, and the separation your young person may be facing. We will be sharing the foundations of anxiety, how it presents in some teenagers, how their thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and physical feelings may be affected, and then strategies that can be used to reduce these feelings.

This resource pack will accompany tonight's presentation; providing reflective tasks for yourself, and your young person, alongside practical strategies and tips.

These workshops cover a wide range of topics around emotional wellbeing and mental health. These topics may be emotive at times for some people and therefore we ask that you take care of yourselves. If there is something that may be triggering please do take some time away from the workshop to look after yourself.

If you have any further questions you can contact the Mental Health support team at:
MHSTbusinesssupport@achievingforchildren.org.uk

Reflective Task

How do you feel being away from your child?

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.....

.....

How does it make you feel when your child is distressed?

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.....

.....

How might you react emotionally to your child when they are in distress?

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What might your immediate response be?

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Anxiety occurs as a physiological response to a perceived harmful event or threat to survival. The response is often called 'fight, flight or freeze'. It can become a problem when a person is experiencing anxiety regularly and it may start to interfere with daily life. We can there think as anxiety as the:

Anxiety

=

Overestimation of threat

Underestimation of ability to cope

What is separation anxiety?

What does separation anxiety look like for your child?

.....

Are there particular people your child feels scared to leave?

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Are there any triggers you can identify?

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How frequent does your child experience anxiety around separation?

.....

How long does your child experience anxiety?

.....

.....

What is separation anxiety?

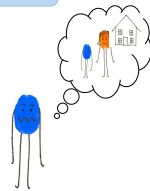
Separation anxiety is anxiety related to being away from home and/or from people to whom the individual has a strong emotional attachment (e.g., a parent, caregiver, significant other or siblings)

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.

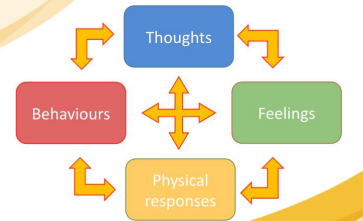
They are overestimating the threat of being separated from their caregiver and underestimating their ability to cope without their presence. This leads to unhelpful thoughts and behaviours and unpleasant physical responses...

Things you might notice:

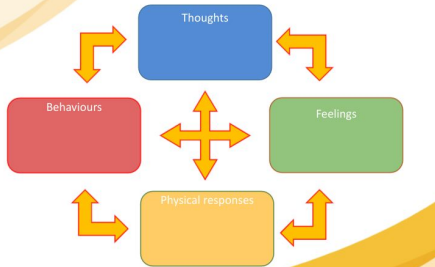
- Refusal to sleep alone
- Repeated nightmares of getting lost
- Excessive worry about the safety of a family member
- Excessive worry about getting lost from family
- Refusing to go to school
- Fearful and reluctant to be alone
- Frequent stomach aches, headaches, or other physical complaints
- Excessive worry about or when sleeping away from home
- Excessive "clinginess," even when at home
- Symptoms of panic and/or temper tantrums at times of separation from parents or caregivers



The Cognitive Behavioural Model

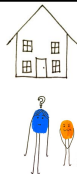


Use the below blank versions on the next page to record what you notice, you may like to complete this together:



Feelings

What can you do to help at home?



- **Actively Listening is the best support you could offer:**
- **Wonder aloud**
- **Name feelings**
- Look beyond behaviour, **be curious** about what is happening for them.
- **Model emotion regulation**
- **Ask for help**

Talking tips: The conversation

Asking questions – being curious:

- "I wonder if you're feeling _____?"
- "I wonder if you're worried about _____?"
- "I imagine that would feel _____?"

Empathising

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

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

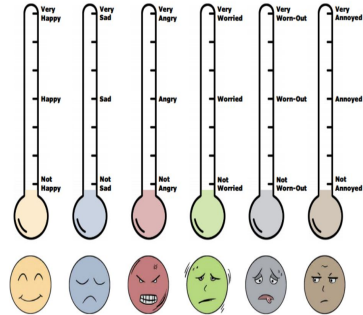


Talking about difficulties

- Externalising the anxiety may help by asking questions like...

"What name would you give to the feeling you are having?"
"If it was a character what would it look like?"
"How does the anxiety get in the way of you going to school?"
"When is the anxiety in control, and when are you in charge?"

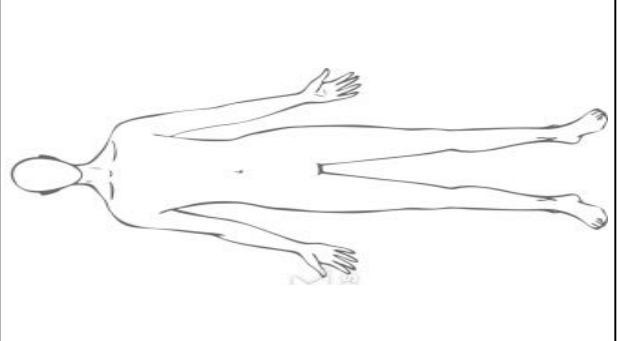
- Using body maps can help the person to locate the sensations in their body and help to explain how anxiety works.
- Using a scale (from a scale of 1 - 10) to show how strong the feelings are and where in the body they present.



What happens in your body when you feel anxious or scared to leave home/parents/carers ?

What happens for your child when they feel anxious or scared to separate from you?

Talking about difficulties



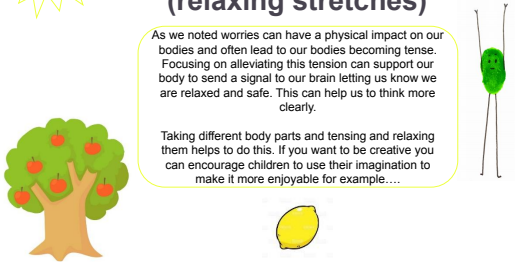
Physical responses

Physical responses

Progressive muscle relaxation (relaxing stretches)

As we noted worries can have a physical impact on our bodies and often lead to our bodies becoming tense. Focusing on alleviating this tension can support our body to send a signal to our brain letting us know we are relaxed and safe. This can help us to think more clearly.

Taking different body parts and tensing and relaxing them helps to do this. If you want to be creative you can encourage children to use their imagination to make it more enjoyable for example....





Physical responses

Deep breathing

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

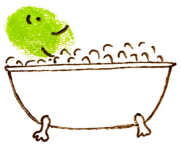
5 Finger breathing

Remember to remind them to breathe in through their nose and out through their mouth

Using our 6 Senses

- Vision
- Hearing
- Smell
- Taste
- Touch
- Movement



Self soothe with 6 senses

The collage includes: a lit candle, a KitKat Chunky bar, a dog's paws on a path, a pair of headphones, a camera, and a dog's face.

Thoughts

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.

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    graph TD
      A["Your child's fear belief:  
\"Something bad will happen to me when I leave the house\""]
      B["What your child learns:  
I was only okay because mum and dad said I would be."]
      C["How they cope:  
Mum and dad have reassured me that I will be okay."]
      A --> B
      A --> C
      C --> B
  
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Reassurance

Reassurance that promotes opportunities for new learning	Reassurance that reduces opportunities for new learning
Go on, have a go, you've done it before and it went really well	You'll be fine and you can always phone me if you get too worried
I really think you can do this. I was so proud when you asked a question in class last week	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
I really think you can do this. I was so proud when you asked a question in class last week	It's okay, mummy's here

Using positive and coping self-talk

Building Positive Affirmations
Mark each one on a scale of 1 - 10

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

Behaviours

Behaviours

In order to face our fears, we have to expose ourselves to them, and then learn that actually we can cope, and survive them. The graph below shows that the first exposure to a feared event, anxiety will be high, but so long as we stay in the situation, it will decrease. The second time we expose ourselves to the event, our anxiety will be lower, and decrease quicker, and so on until we don't feel as anxious.

We can break this exposure down into small steps, creating a ladder that has more manageable steps, to ensure anxiety doesn't become overwhelming.

Facing fears

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Resources

- ★ The Invisible String by Patrick Karst
- ★ What to Do When You Don't Want to Be Apart: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Separation Anxiety by Kristen Lavallee and Silvia Schneider
- ★ What To Do When You Worry Too Much by Dawn Huebner
- ★ The Huge Bag of Worries by Virginia Ironside
- ★ Helping Your Child with Fears and Worries: A Self-help Guide by Cathy Creswell & Lucy Willetts
- ★ Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step-by-step Guide for Parents by Ronald Rapee
- ★ Think Good Feel Good by Paul Stallard
- ★ When my worries get too big! a relaxation book for children who worry a lot by Kari Dunn Buron.
- ★ "The Headspace App" it is a good meditation app for children/young people <https://www.headspace.com/>
- ★ Headspace; Stop negative self talk; <https://www.headspace.com/mindfulness/stop-negative-self-talk>
- ★ "Relax Kids" Their website provides useful resources to help children cope with a range of stressful situations: <http://www.relaxkids.co.uk/UK/Home>