

Helping your child's fears and worries



The Tavistock and Portman
NHS Foundation Trust

WHO WE ARE

- ▶ We are part of a national initiative to improve access to psychological therapies for young people and families
- ▶ Children and Young Person Wellbeing Practitioners (CWPs) offer early intervention work for mild-moderate difficulties with anxiety, low mood and challenging behaviour
- ▶ ***Our team:***
- ▶ Tracey Grant-Lee: Clinical Psychologist and Service Development Lead
- ▶ Florence, Lizzie and Shannon: CWPs



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Aim of this session

The aim of this session is to:

- Think about anxiety, what it looks like in children & what might be maintaining this
- Introduce some useful strategies to support you to address your child's anxieties
- Use discussion and exercises to think about your own child and how you could implement these strategies
- At the end of the session we will speak more about the individual work the CWP Service offers parents

What do we mean by fears and worries?

- Everyone, children and adults alike, experience worries, fears and anxieties some of the time
- Anxiety is a normal emotion, and in the right amounts it can be useful
- Worries, fears and anxiety have 3 common characteristics:
 - **Physical sensations in the body**
 - Associated with adrenalin – preparing the body for action
 - E.g. sweating, heart beating faster, trembling, reports of tummy ache, headaches
 - **Anxious thoughts**
 - Over-estimate “danger” & underestimate ability to cope
 - **Anxious behaviour**
 - Looking out for danger (hypervigilance)
 - Avoiding worrying situations
 - Seeking reassurance

Question



- What fears or worries does your child have?

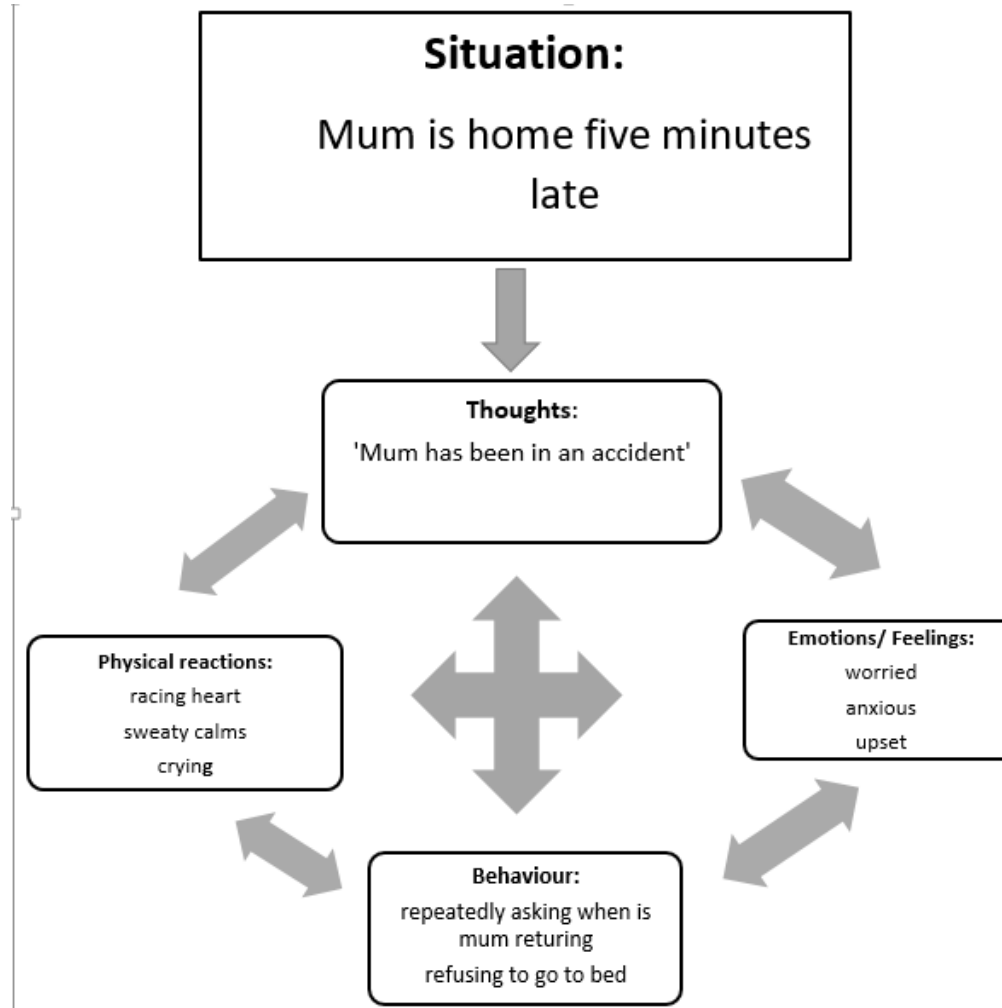
Common fears and worries among primary aged children

- Exam worry (academic performance & social comparison)
- Friendships (making & keeping friends)
- Anxious in social situations (e.g. worried people will think they are stupid or fear of being judged)
- Secondary school transition (new environment, teachers, making new friends)
- Separation anxiety (worry of being away from loved ones and/or fear of harm to loved ones)

What keeps children's fears and worries going?

Fears and worries are maintained by specific thoughts, feelings and behaviours which are interlinked.

- ▶ **Breaking the cycle:** we will be talking about strategies you can use to begin to break this cycle



How to talk about Fears & Worries

In the moment....

- ▶ Ask questions rather than reassure e.g.
 - what are you worried about?
 - what do you think is going to happen?
 - what is the worst thing that can happen?
- ▶ Make suggestions if they say they don't know - but accept they're response either way
- ▶ Normalise fear & worries - they're not the only ones, everyone gets worried about different things
- ▶ Empathise "I can see you're terrified and that must be horrible, what do you think will happen?"

After the moment...

- ▶ Raise topic outside of anxiety-provoking situation

Reassurance - replace with questions

While it might feel instinctive and soothing to reassure, it protects your child from their fears, meaning they don't get the chance to face them head on and discover that they CAN overcome them. Asking questions can get your child to think about how realistic their fears actually are...

“Why are you worried?”

“What is frightening you?”

“What do you think will happen?”

vs.

“You'll be absolutely fine, nothing bad will happen”

“I'll call every break time to make sure okay”

“Yes I'm absolutely sure I locked all the doors, but I will go back and check just for you”

Avoiding your fear

Allowing your child to avoid their fears is a normal parental reaction. After all, no one likes to see their child distressed. However, avoiding things reinforces the idea that your child should be afraid & the idea that you think they cannot cope. It also reduces their opportunity to develop their confidence in their ability to cope

What can I do as a parent?

- ▶ By entering into anxiety provoking situations, they learn new things. We all learn through our experiences.
- ▶ Encourage “give it a go” attitude & show confidence in your child. Children need to experience things to build their confidence.

Facing fears

The best way to overcome a fear is by facing the fear. We can do this by breaking the situation down into manageable chunks.

Event	Fear Rating	Reward
To sleep in my room alone all night	10	Have friends over for a sleepover
To sleep in my room alone all night and mum will check in every forty minutes until I am asleep	8	Trip to the cinema
To sleep in my room alone all night and mum will check in every twenty minutes until I am asleep	6	Dad will play a board game with me
To sleep in my room all night with my cousin staying with me	4	Pancakes for breakfast
To sleep in my room all night with dad in the same room on a camp bed	3	Praise from mum and dad

Fear Ladder

Name of fear →

Step 5

Step 4

Step 3

Step 2

Step 1

www.cordof6.com

Promote independence & “have a go” attitude in everyday life

By doing things by and for themselves, they will learn that they can cope & succeed

How can you do this?

Identify age appropriate activities your child can try:

- ❑ Follow a recipe for baking
- ❑ Order their own food at a café/pay for sweets at the shop
- ❑ Take care of personal belongings
- ❑ Look up some information for a family activity on the internet
- ❑ Water the plants
- ❑ Wake up to an alarm clock
- ❑ Be in charge of feeding the house pet



Question



- ▶ How do you currently promote your child's independence?

Praise



Giving attention & praise is an effective way to influence a child's behaviour

Top tips:

- Make praise specific -tell them exactly what you're praising them for
- Encourage your child to have a go! & convey confidence in them
- Don't just praise successes, praise effort & attempts (e.g. "I'm so proud of how you kept going")
- Convey that mistakes/failures/setbacks are okay, and a part of life
- Comment on how well they coped e.g. "wow, you did that without any help, that is so impressive!"

Effective ways to praise

- ▶ Praise needs to be clear and specific so your child understands exactly what it is that they have done that you are pleased about
- ▶ E.g. *“Your teacher told me that you asked a question in class today, Charlie. I bet that was a really scary thing to do, but you didn’t let that stop you. Well done!”*
- ▶ Often, adults will praise children using a label e.g. “Wow you did so well, you are so smart”. However, praising your child for being smart suggests that innate talent is the reason for success. Instead, focusing on the process helps children see how their effort leads to success meaning they will be more able to deal with natural setbacks/failures
- ▶ E.g. *“Well done, Irem. I know you worked really hard on your school poster, I am really proud of all your effort”*

Rewards

- ▶ Giving rewards is an effective way to motivate children to try new challenges. It lets them know you appreciate what they have done, and encourages them to continue with that behaviour.
- ▶ *Rewards don't need to cost money*
- ▶ They can include spending time with you e.g. watching a film or playing football with mum/dad or choosing the evening meal

Top Tips:

- ❑ Have a range of rewards to suit different achievements: match the achievement to the reward e.g. don't reward a small goal with a huge reward, as what will you need to do to reward a huge achievement?!
- ❑ Try to have rewards that are given immediately or soon after. Children rarely see distant events as incentives
- ❑ Make sure you would be willing to not give the reward if the behaviour isn't met



Parental responses

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWXOurnVTYg>

Parental attitudes, responses & modelling

- ▶ Children learn how to behave by watching others. Its important to keep an eye on your own behaviour & show your child how best to deal with fears. If there's an anxiety provoking situation - let them know you are worried, but are still going to face it.
- ▶ How others react to a child's fears e.g. protecting children from fears rather than encouraging a "have a go" attitude.
- ▶ Adults should respond helpfully to children's anxieties or concerns, and model an ability to cope i.e. facing challenges or expressing confidence in your child's ability to give it a go

Building my child's confidence - Activity

Questions



Other resources

- ▶ “Helping your child with fears and worries. A self-help guide for parents” by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts, 2019.
- ▶ <https://www.mindsetkit.org/growth-mindset-parents>

GROWTH MINDSET vs FIXED MINDSET

What Kind of Mindset Do You Have?



- ▶ The beliefs children have about intelligence, effort, and struggle impact the choices they make about learning.
- ▶ People tend to hold one of two different beliefs about intelligence:
 - ▶ Children with a **growth mindset** believe that intelligence can be developed. These students see school as a place to develop their abilities and think of challenges as opportunities to grow.
 - ▶ Children with a **fixed mindset** believe that intelligence is fixed at birth and doesn't change or changes very little with practice. These students see school as a place where their abilities are evaluated, they focus on looking smart over learning, and they interpret mistakes as a sign that they lack talent.

Further information: GROWTH MINDSET

Dr. Carol Dweck of Stanford University has identified two mindsets: a fixed mindset and a growth mindset:

- ▶ **A Fixed Mindset** is one in which a person believes that their basic qualities, such as confidence or intelligence, are fixed and that there is nothing they can do to change them. This fixed mindset can lead to a negative self-fulfilling prophecy. Individuals with a fixed mindset are less likely to develop their abilities or “have a go at” achieving something they consider to be beyond them
- ▶ **A Growth Mindset** is one where a person believes that their confidence or intelligence is not fixed, and that it can grow and evolve with engagement in certain activities. People with a growth mindset have been found to possess a higher self-esteem because they understand that their value as an individual is not dependent on a snap-shot in time (or setbacks/failures).
- ▶ The growth mindset empowers a person to become more resilient against set backs and more optimistic about their own abilities. It almost goes without saying that a growth mindset creates a confident, motivated and independent learner.