

Parenting Children with Anxiety: Becoming a *Parent Coach*

Dr. Susan Buchanan, Ph.D., C. Psych.
Psychologist

Frontenac Family of Schools Presentation
February 2014

Overview of Tonight

- 1st What is Anxiety?
- 2nd How Do Thoughts and Feelings Affect Anxiety?
- 3rd How Can Your Child Learn to Relax?
- 4th How Can You Help Your Child Learn to Manage Anxiety?

What is Anxiety?

- ✓ What Causes Anxiety in Children?
- ✓ Normal Fears?
- ✓ When Does Anxiety Become a Problem?
- ✓ Anxiety Disorders in Childhood

What Causes Anxiety in Children?

Children come with their own set of characteristics and abilities.

Environments also have a set of characteristics

- social
- cultural
- spiritual
- physical

“Normal Fears”

Fears are a normal & natural part of life:

- 9 months: fear of separating from caregiver & fear of strangers
- 2 to 3 years: natural fears develop
- 9 to 10 years: self-consciousness develops

How do you decide if your child's fear is “abnormal”?

NO SUCH THING AS ABNORMAL FEAR.

What you need to know about....

- Anxiety is normal.
- Anxiety is not dangerous.
- Anxiety is adaptive.
- Anxiety becomes a problem when our body reacts in the absence of real danger.

“Normal Fears”...



So, children with anxiety problems can simply be thought of as having normal worries that have become more extreme and more intrusive than those of other children.

When Does Anxiety Become a Problem?

- *Does your child's anxiety interfere or cause difficulties for your child?*

Key:

- ✓ If causing upset and distress.
- ✓ If stopping activities she or he previously liked.
- ✓ If affecting your child academically, socially, or in athletic pursuits.



When our body reacts in the absence of real danger...

- rapid heart rate
- rapid breathing, feelings of shortness of breath, or breath holding
- discomfort or pain in the stomach, nausea
- feeling very hot or cold
- sweating
- trembling or shaking
- numbness or tingling
- headaches
- chest pain or discomfort
- dizzy, lightheaded, or unsteady feelings
- feelings of a lump in the throat or choking
- feeling things are unreal or feeling detached from oneself



When Does Anxiety Become a Problem?

When your child...

- **avoids** situations (e.g., going to parties with friends, playing outside at recess)
- repeatedly asks for **reassurance** or asks questions
- engages in inappropriate **safety behaviours**



How Does Anxiety Affect Children?

Anxious children tend to...

- Have fewer friends
- Engage in fewer after-school activities.
- May do well at school, but not as well as they could.
- As adults, they may...
 - Be more likely to abuse alcohol and other drugs, be unemployed, have illnesses and visit medical clinics, be depressed and even suicidal.

Most adults diagnosed with anxiety recognize that their anxiety started in childhood.

Forms of Anxiety Disorders

Separation Anxiety Disorder	Generalized Anxiety Disorder	Social Anxiety Disorder
Specific Phobia	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	Post-traumatic Stress Disorder
Selective Mutism	School Refusal Behaviour	Panic Disorder

How do YOU help your anxious child?

- ✓ Identify Negative Aspects of Being Anxious
- ✓ Identify How Your Body Responds to Anxiety & Fear
- ✓ Teach the Language of Feelings
- ✓ Teach Your Child to Identify Anxious Thoughts
- ✓ Build New Coping Strategies

How Do You Help Your Anxious Child?

- FOCUS on identifying

What is MAINTAINING the anxiety?

(What keeps the anxiety going when the cause or trigger is over?)

- The way the child thinks.
- The way the child copes with his or her fears.
- The way that you and your child interact.

Identify Negative Aspects of Being Anxious

(Complete this form together)

- Can be your feelings, what you believe that your child feels, or an anonymous anxious person.
- Make a list of ways in which your child's life will be different when anxiety is no longer bossing him or her around.



Child's name: _____

Date completed: _____

In what ways does it feel bad? (crying, fighting, sadness, fear)

What does anxiety stop him or her from doing?
(friends, sports, clubs, outings, schoolwork)

**Being anxious makes
me.....**

Being anxious stops me from

**When I am not anxious I will
feel....**

**When I am not anxious I will be
able to**



What are the things he or she will be able to do? Where
will he or she be able to go? How will you feel?

POST THIS LIST ON THE FRIDGE

Identify the Body's Response to Stress & Anxiety

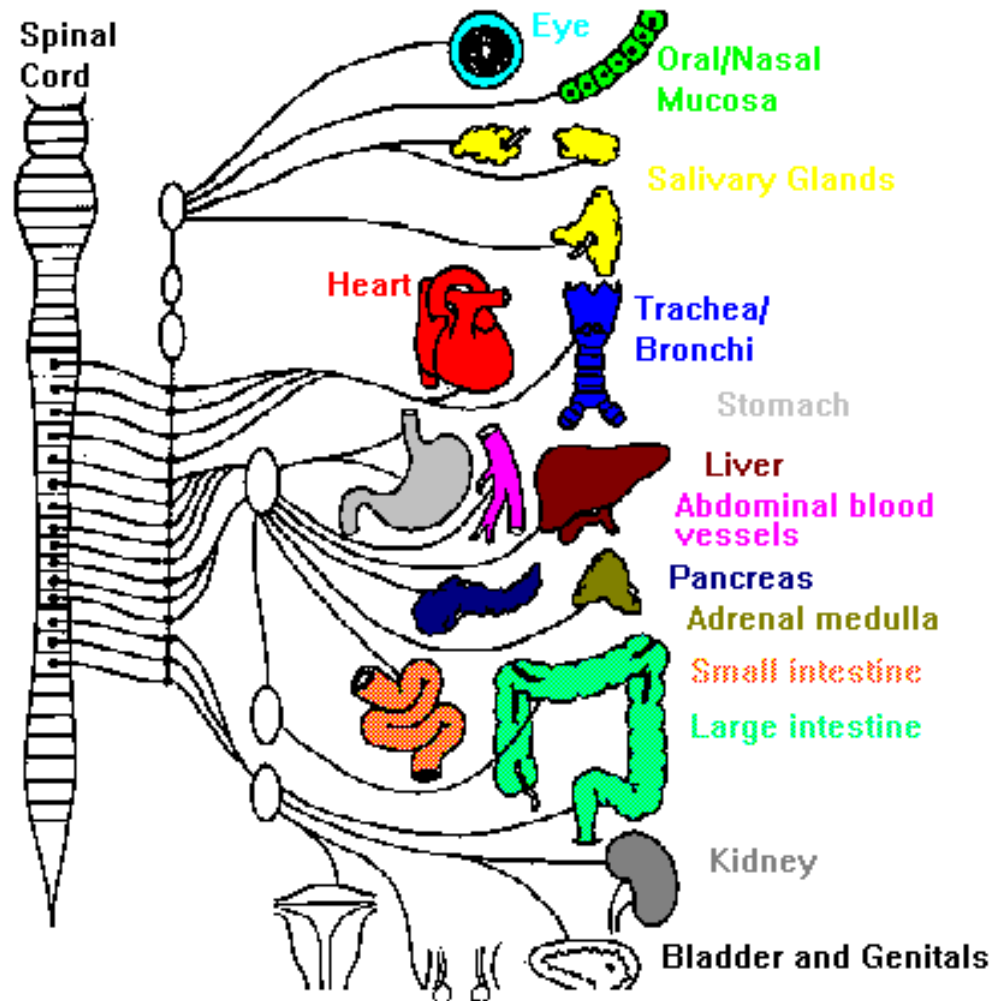


Fight/Flight/Fear Response

- Increased heart rate, blood pressure
- Breathing harder
- Shaky legs
- Sweaty hands
- Muscle tension
- Upset stomach



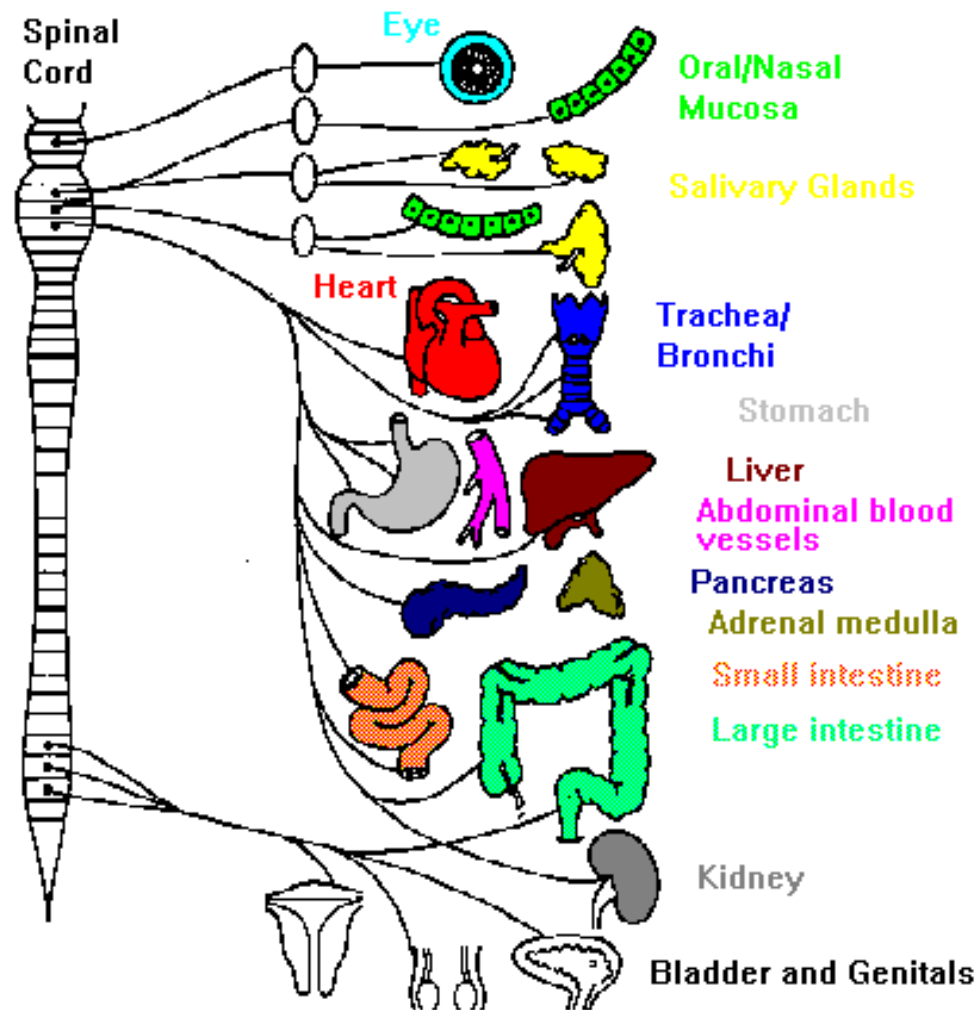
Sympathetic Nervous System



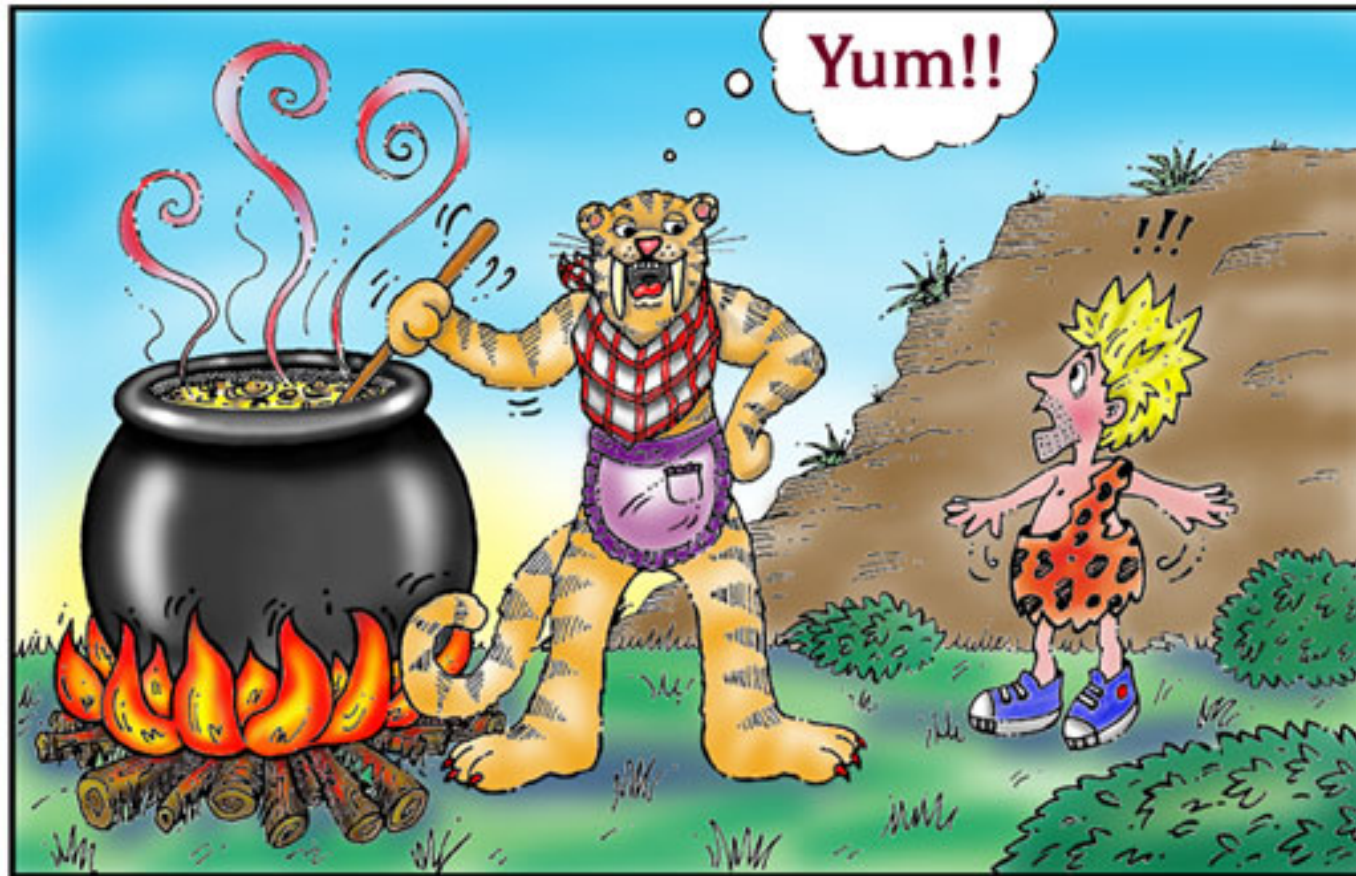
*“fight or
flight
response”*

*“stress
response”*

Parasympathetic Nervous System



“relaxation response”



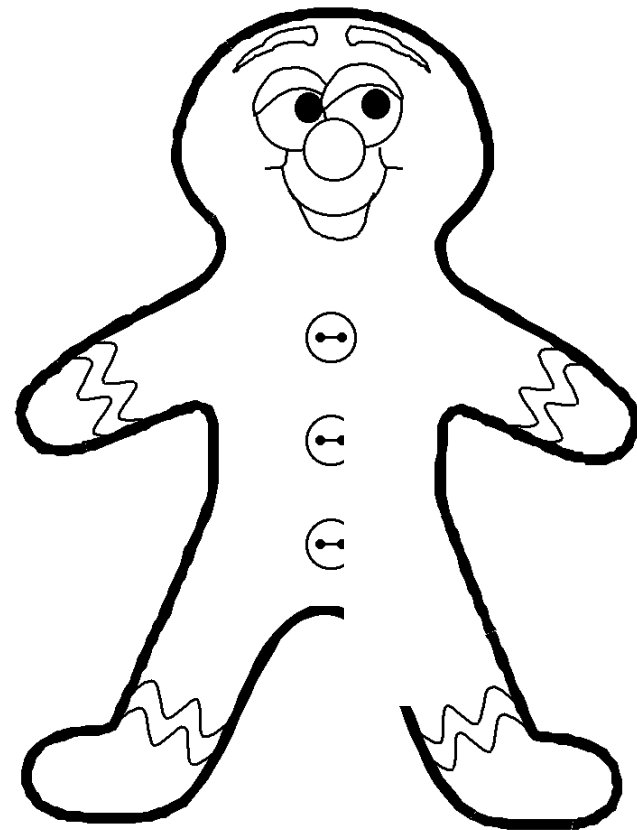
Our goal is to teach your child....

- About the body's response to fear.
- The fear response is the "fight or flight response."
- It won't hurt you and you will be OK.

How your body responds to anxiety and fear....

Fear response...

- ✓ Increased heart rate, blood pressure
- ✓ Breathing harder
- ✓ Shaky legs
- ✓ Sweaty hands
- ✓ Muscle tension
- ✓ Upset stomach



Relaxation Strategies

- What aspect of our body's functioning can we change and control?

Breathing



Relaxation Strategies

- ✓ Paced breathing or Calm Breathing
- ✓ Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- ✓ Visualization
- ✓ Mindful Meditation

GOAL: Give your child the skills to reduce his or her body's stress response.

Relaxation Strategies

Common elements:

- ✓ Quiet place away from distractions.
- ✓ Dedicated time. Same time, everyday.
- ✓ Comfortable furniture.
- ✓ Seated or laying position.
- ✓ Eyes closed or looking at ONE spot.
- ✓ Listen to Relaxation Recording.

Relaxation Strategies: Mindmasters CD

Practice with you, so
YOU can teach your child.

Paced Breathing

- Place your hand on your stomach.
- Breathe in through your nose.
 - Counting 1, 2, 3, 4. Pause.
- Breathe out through your nose or mouth.
 - Counting 1, 2, 3, 4. Pause
- If you breathe out with your mouth, keep it closed except for a small hole, the size you would use to suck on a straw.

KEY POINTS: Slow breathing. Filling and emptying lungs.

Blowing Bubbles

- Breathe in through your nose.
- Breathe out in slow, gentle, long breaths.
- Image blowing a bubble – big, rainbow bubbles.
- Imagine blowing the bubble higher and higher.

KEY POINT: Slow, gentle, long breath out.

Added visual image helps to engage children in the activity.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Make a fist. Hold it tight. Tighter. Feel the tension. Now, let go. Let your hand drop.
- Feel the tension draining out of your hands, down your fingers. Letting Go. Relaxing.

REPEAT THIS A SECOND TIME.

- Do this for different areas of the body: head/face, shoulders, arms, stomach, legs.

KEY POINT: Create tension in the muscles. Let go of tension. Feel the absence of tension. Relax.

Warm & Heavy

- Tell your arms that they feel *warm*. They feel *warm and heavy*.
- Repeat this two times. Repeat for each large area of the body.
- Tell your head that it feels *calm and cool*. Your forehead and head feels *calm and cool*.

KEY POINT: Visualizing the relaxed feeling in the body – feeling warm, heavy, and relaxed, BUT your head is calm and cool when it is relaxed.

Your Special Place

Visualization Script:

- Imagine in your mind, a place where you feel relaxed, calm, and happy. Write the story together.
- This image is specific to each person.
- Engage all of the senses: What does it smell like? Look like? Feel like? Sound like? Taste like?

KEY POINT: Engage all senses in the visualization. Focus the mind on pleasant, calming images.

Practice Goals

Relaxation training:

- Practice so the feeling is familiar.
- Practice so your child can use it in daily living.
- Practice will be able to shorten the time it takes to obtain the feeling.

Where can you use this in your life?

Relaxation Response

- Stops the stress response.
- Initiates the relaxation response.
- “Feel Good” (endorphins) hormones are released with relaxation training exercises, meditation...

How do YOU help your anxious child?

- ✓ Identify Negative Aspects of Being Anxious
- ✓ Identify How Your Body Responds to Anxiety & Fear
- ✓ Teach the Language of Feelings
- ✓ Teach Your Child to Identify Anxious Thoughts
- ✓ Build New Coping Strategies

Identify Emotional Experiences

Developing a New Language of
Feeling Words
“A Feeling Vocabulary”

Learning About Feelings



EXHAUSTED



CONFUSED



ECSTATIC



GUILTY



SUSPICIOUS



ANGRY



HYSTERICAL



FRUSTRATED



SAD



CONFIDENT



EMBARRASSED



HAPPY



MISCHIEVOUS



DISGUSTED



FRIGHTENED



ENRAGED



ASHAMED



CAUTIOUS



SMUG



DEPRESSED



OVERWHELMED



HOPEFUL



LONELY



LOVESTRUCK



JEALOUS



BORED



SURPRISED



ANXIOUS



SHOCKED



SHY

Learning About Feelings

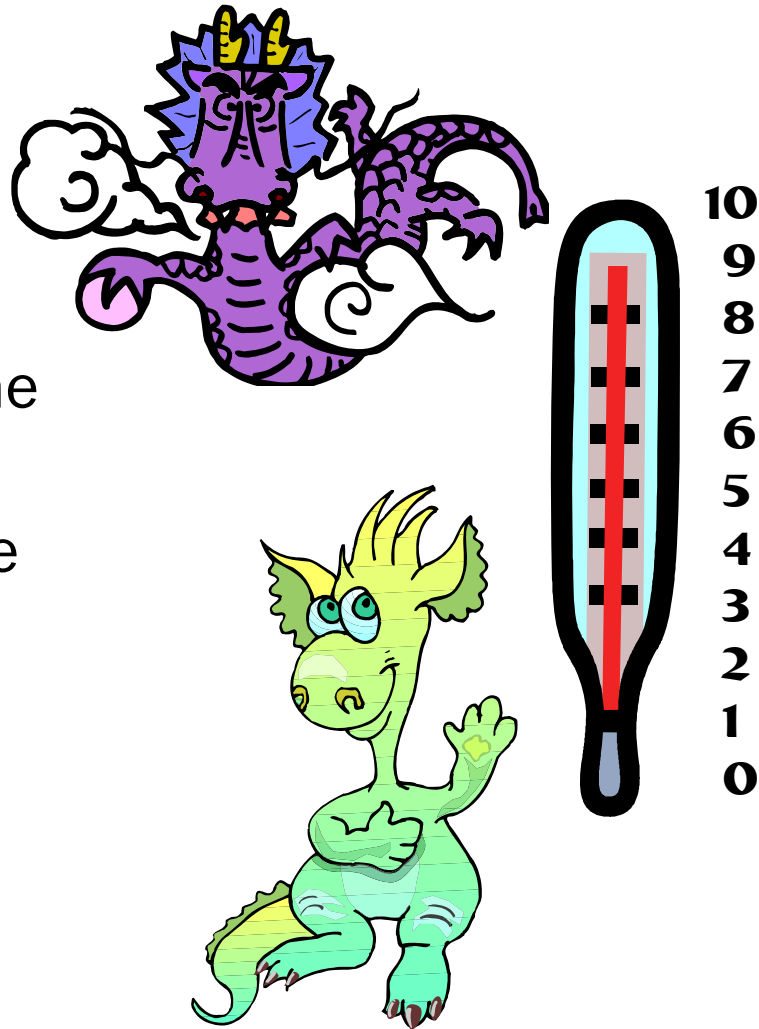
- Name the feeling.
 - Teach feeling words by playing games.



Learning About Feelings

- **The Worry Dragon**

- Introduce your child to the feeling thermometer.
- Measures intensity of the feeling.



Language to Use at Home

- *Feeling vocabulary: sad, worried, angry, mad, etc.*
- *How big is your Worry Dragon?*
- *Refer to the Feeling Thermometer – use the language of numbers*

“I am feeling _____ right now”

How do YOU help your anxious child?

- ✓ Identify Negative Aspects of Being Anxious
- ✓ Identify How Your Body Responds to Anxiety & Fear
- ✓ Teach the Language of Feelings
- ✓ **Teach Your Child to Identify Anxious Thoughts**
- ✓ **Build New Coping Strategies**

Identify Anxious Thoughts

Self-Talk or Automatic Thoughts

Identify Thinking Traps

Learn to Let Go and to

Train Your Brain to Think Right

Learning About Thoughts

- Thoughts are things we say to ourselves in our head.
- Thoughts are important because they cause feelings and behaviours.
- Thoughts can either be calm or worried.
- Worried thoughts can often be changed by being a good detective & looking for evidence.

Learning About Thoughts

- Understand what thoughts are
- Become skilled at identifying your own thoughts.
- Practice by keeping a journal or a worry jar/box



Linking Thoughts & Feelings

- Anxious feelings go along with thoughts of danger.
- Anxious children expect bad things to happen.
- *Worried thoughts* lead to fear, worry, shyness, or anxiety.

TRUE OR FALSE?

Your feelings depend on what you are telling yourself about a situation.

No one can make you angry. You make yourself angry.

Your BELIEFS about a situation or event determines how you feel about it.

Common Errors in Thinking

1. Anxious people will overestimate how likely it is that bad events will occur.
2. Anxious people usually assume that the outcomes or consequences of feared events will be catastrophic or unbearable.

What's the Worst that Could Happen?

...and could I cope if it did?

For example, doing homework.

- OVERESTIMATING THE CONSEQUENCES...

***“The end of the
world”***

Thinking Traps

- Walking with blinders

Only seeing the negative and overlooking the good in a situation.

- The Repetitor

- If it happened once it is always going to happen that way.

- The Catastrophiser (Pessimist)

- Always thinking the 'worst ever' is going to happen.

- The Avoider

- Staying away from situations you think are scary without trying first.

Thinking Traps

- **The Mind Reader or Fortune Teller**

- Jumping to conclusions about a person/thing/situation without the facts.

- **The Shoulds**

- The 'Shoulds' is like having a cold.
- I should always do everything right.
- I shouldn't make mistakes.

- **The Perfectionist**

- Setting expectations that are too high. Perfectionism is not a human option.

Realistic Thinking

“Detective Thinking”

- Be a detective and look for *Thinking Traps*
- By learning to think more realistically, you can learn to control your anxiety.
- Reality is that bad things will happen. At these times, it is appropriate to be anxious.
- Goal is to teach you how to manage anxiety most of the time, when it is excessive and out of proportion to the real situation.

Ambiguous Situations

- A situation that doesn't have a clear cause or outcome.
- Situation could have different causes...

POSITIVE

NEUTRAL

NEGATIVE

Ambiguous Situation Example

Activity:

Sam is walking down the street and sees a big dog sitting on the yard.

What thoughts would be helpful in this situation?
And unhelpful?



Being a Detective

- Anxious people tend to overestimate the probability that their negative thoughts about a situation are TRUE.
- Learn how to realistically evaluate the likelihood that their interpretation/belief is true.

Being a Detective

- Learn how to realistically evaluate the likelihood that their interpretation/belief is true.

“That dog is going to bite me”

100% TRUE

Being a Detective

“That dog is going to bite me” 100% TRUE

- Aim is to reduce the probability value from 100%.
- Helps to believe helpful thoughts.
- You will be less anxious.

Being a Detective

5 steps:

- 1. Identify what you are worried about (i.e., your worried thought).**
- 2. Gather evidence for worried thought.**
- 3. Gather alternative/positive thoughts.**
- 4. Evaluate the evidence and decide...how much do you believe it to be true now?**
- 5. *What can be my alternative thoughts?***

Just the facts!

Coping Comments

- I can do this, I will be OK.
- I am stronger than I think.
- I can handle this.
- I can cope with most things.
- I can feel anxious and still do it.
- I will not let anxiety stop me from having fun.
- It's just anxiety, it's not dangerous, and it's just temporarily uncomfortable.
- These are just my anxious thoughts. I don't have to believe them.
- Anxiety is bullying me! I don't have to listen.
- I don't need to assume the worst.
- It's okay.

Letting It Go....

- Sometimes we can let the thoughts float away like thought bubbles or imagine them floating away down a stream.
- We don't always have to challenge thoughts, sometimes we can just "LET THEM GO".

Mindfulness Meditation Practice.

How do YOU help your anxious child?

- ✓ Identify Negative Aspects of Being Anxious
- ✓ Identify How Your Body Responds to Anxiety & Fear
- ✓ Teach the Language of Feelings
- ✓ Teach Your Child to Identify Anxious Thoughts
- ✓ **Build New Coping Strategies**

Facing Fears

Identifying Goals

Creating a Fear Ladder

Exposure, Exposure, Exposure

Reward for Effort not Outcome

Beating Back Anxiety: Fear Ladder

- Start with an activity that ANXIETY STOPS. Choose one that he/she wants to do again (THIS IS YOUR GOAL).
- Make a list of all the steps involved in doing these activities again (THESE ARE YOUR STEPS).
- Rank order these situations according to level of fear (use fear thermometer) (THIS IS YOUR PLAN).
- Just do it!
- Check in: Record how it went at each step.

Let's Generate One Together...

What is my goal? To be able to give my public speaking speech in front of everyone in my English class.

Step	Anxiety Rating
Give public speaking speech to the class and answer questions.	10/10
Raise my hand to answer a question during class.	9/10
Ask a question after someone else's public speaking speech.	9/10
Practice public speaking speech in front of two friends, looking up every few seconds.	8/10
Volunteer to read part of a book passage during English class.	8/10
Imagine giving my public speaking speech to the class.	7/10
Read public speaking speech in front of two friends after school in the classroom.	6/10
Read public speaking speech in front of my best friend after school in the classroom.	4/10
Practice public speaking speech alone in front of the mirror.	3/10
Read public speaking speech alone in my room.	2/10

What is my goal?



Fear Rating

[illegible]

Exposure, exposure, exposure.

- It is normal to want to avoid distressing situations, however it is not helpful or healthy.
- Dangers of avoidance – over the long term, avoidance actually maintains anxiety.
- Alternative action plan:

Reinforce Brave Behaviour



Weekly Chart

Activity	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Weekend

If I earn _____ points for the week I can _____.

Model Brave Behaviour

You are always teaching...

- You model both 'desirable' and 'undesirable' behaviours.
- You teach skills to know how and when to manage anxious arousal.
- Treatment goal is NOT the total elimination of anxiety.

Emotional & Social Development

- **Self-efficacy** is...
the belief that one can succeed at tasks.

I can do this!

Nothing diminishes anxiety faster than action.

Walter Anderson

The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

*And the day came when the risk to remain
tight in the bud was more painful than the risk
it took to blossom.*

Anais Nin



How do YOU help your anxious child?

- ✓ Identify Negative Aspects of Being Anxious
- ✓ Identify How Your Body Responds to Anxiety & Fear
- ✓ Teach the Language of Feelings
- ✓ Teach Your Child to Identify Anxious Thoughts
- ✓ Build New Coping Strategies



ALWAYS CONSIDER.....

**“WHAT AM I TEACHING MY
CHILD RIGHT NOW?”**

Resources for Parents:

Website Resources:

Anxiety BC <http://www.anxietybc.com/>

Mindmasters CD

<http://www.child-youth-health.net/english/publications-and-resources/mindmasters-cd-track-list/>

Minds Up! <http://thehawnfoundation.org/mindup/>

Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO)

<http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/>

RBC & Children's Mental Health

<http://www.rbc.com/community-sustainability/community/childrens-mental-health/trusted-resources.html>

Books:

What to do when you worry too much? By Dawn Huebner

Think Good Feel Good by Paul Stallard