

Anxiety Workshop for Parents and Carers at Framfield and Blackboys Primary Schools

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Ground Rules



- This is a safe space: please respect everyone's contribution.
- No question is a silly question.
- Mobile phones to silent, please.
- Please don't identify others' children.
- Think before you share information about your own children.

Aims of the workshop

- To consider what anxiety is and why we experience it
- To think about what anxiety looks like in our children
- To develop confidence in talking about anxiety with children and to discuss positive strategies for anxiety management.
- Building a positive school partnership in order to support children's emotional regulation and manage anxiety.

Anxiety can be a protective function

These feelings evolved to help us feel safe



Fight, Flight, Freeze response



ANXIETY IN CHILDREN

HOW WE EXPECT ANXIETY TO PRESENT:



WORRISOME/
NERVOUSNESS



AVOIDANCE



SADNESS



FEAR

HOW ANXIETY ALSO PRESENTS:



DEFIANCE



SLEEP ISSUES



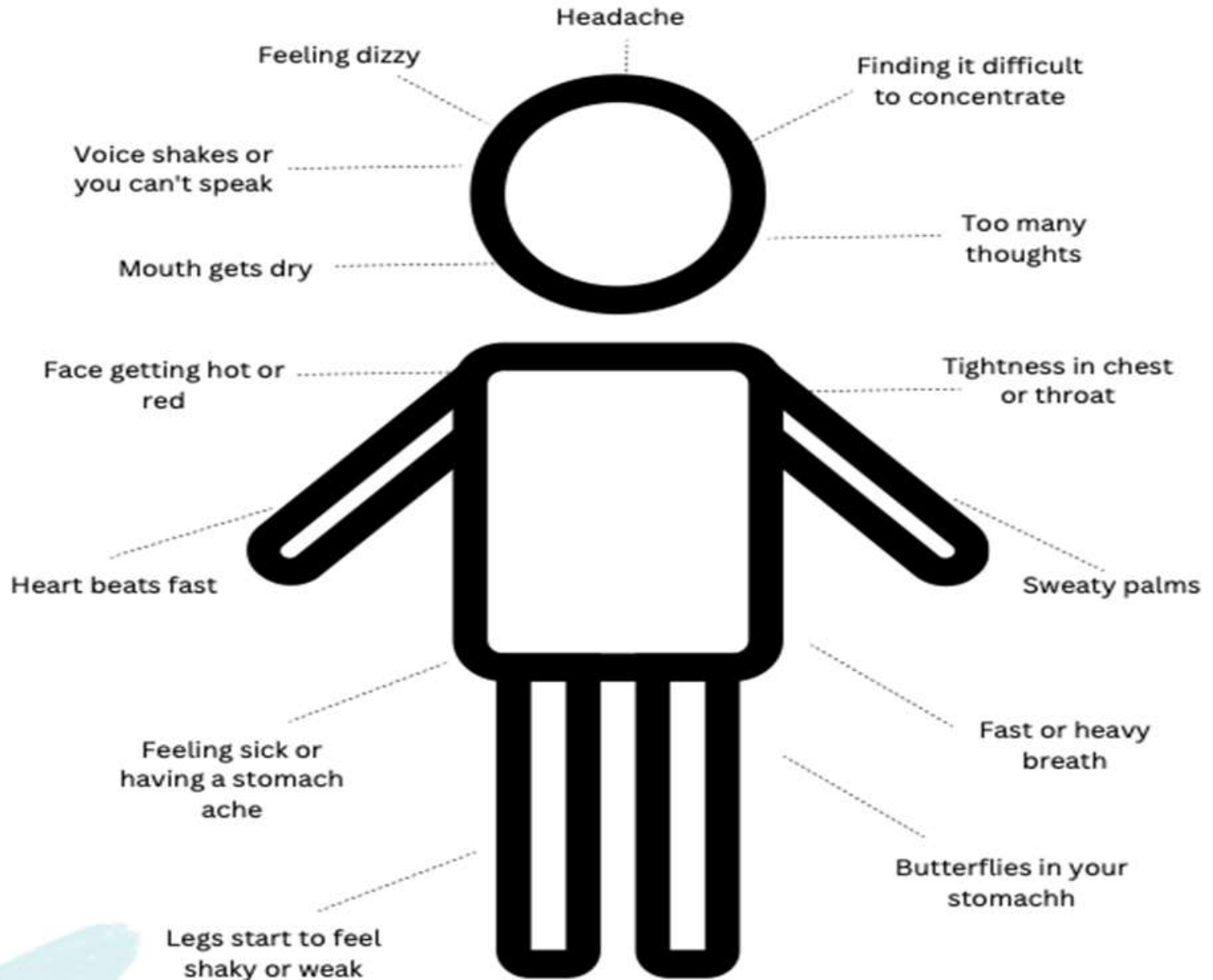
ANGER



IRRITABILITY

What does anxiety look like in our children?

What they might be feeling...



Talking about anxiety with children

- It's never too soon to introduce the language - you can use 'worried', 'nervous' etc, but also introduce the word 'anxious'.
- Name their feelings and possible reasons: "It looks to me like you're feeling anxious about something. I wonder if you're worried about going to school tomorrow?"
- Wonder aloud with your child:
 - I wonder if you're worried about...?
 - I think you might be scared of...?
 - I'm guessing you might be nervous about...
 - You look anxious. Might it be because...?

Talking about anxiety with children 2

- **Be Supportive**

- Tell them you understand how they are feeling
- Tell them that you care and will help them
- Tell them that it's normal - everyone worries and feels anxious at times

- **Be Positive**

- Tell them that there are things they can do to make themselves feel better
- Reassure them that together you will work to beat anxiety

What to avoid...



- Try not to get annoyed - although it might get frustrating, try to remain calm. Remember they are not doing this deliberately to annoy you.
- Try not to say “It will all be OK” - be honest with them and say they will feel anxious or worried but that these feelings don’t last forever.
- Don’t say “Don’t worry!” - They are not choosing to feel like this. Instead say, “What can I do to help?”

What makes children feel anxious about school?

- Fear of not making friends and fitting in.
- Conflict with other children.
- Finding schoolwork or lessons confusing.
- Difficult relationship with teacher.
- Going through difficult experiences outside of school, e.g. bereavement, illness.
- Additional needs such as autism or ADHD can make school more challenging and/or exhausting, leading to increased anxiety.

Getting ready for school...

- Always present school positively. Don't dwell on any negatives.
- Going to school is the one non-negotiable!
- If you're unsure if your child is unwell, give school a go - staff will always let you know if your child becomes too unwell to stay.
- Try to make sure your child eats breakfast.
- Have a fixed morning routine that your child knows.

Getting ready for school 2

- Think about your timings, not up too early, but not rushing either...
- Have something for your child to look forward to after school.
- Draw a heart on your palm and one on theirs - whenever they touch it, you will be thinking of them and sending them love.

If your child finds arriving at school difficult

- Children might find it helpful to arrive a few minutes early and have a job to do – this provides a calm start to the day with a clear sense of purpose. Ask your child's teacher what might be possible.
- Ask about a 'safe space' where your child can sit when they arrive, and return to if they need to.
- Can a friend meet them at the school gate?

If your child is finding things confusing/overwhelming

- Discuss with class teacher whether a visual timetable might help, or a 'now, next' card.
- Ask if visual support materials can be used. These are helpful at home too.
- Being given a warning before transitions can reduce anxiety.
- Can your child be assigned a 'buddy' to support in class?

Positive strategies for anxiety management

4-7-8 Breathing

1. Exhale completely
2. Inhale through your nose for the count of 4.
3. Hold your breath for the count of 7.
4. Exhale audibly through your mouth for the count of 8.
5. Repeat x 4.

www.DiverseHypnosis.co.uk



5 4 3 2 1 Grounding Technique

- Stop what you're doing...
- 5 things you can see
- 4 things you can feel
- 3 things you can hear
- 2 things you can smell
- 1 thing you can taste

Be supportive, positive and encouraging

- When anxious we often spend time thinking and talking about what we haven't done, what has gone wrong or how bad we feel.
- We need to shift focus and spend less time talking about failure and anxiety and more time talking about **being brave and coping**.
- Steer the conversation towards:
 - ✓ What they have achieved
 - ✓ How they coped
 - ✓ How they managed to beat their worries
- Keep a positive focus and praise them for being brave and trying to beat their worries.

Help your child to tolerate (not eliminate!) anxiety

- Anxiety is normal and will always be there at times – in most people.
- If you avoid the things that make you anxious, you may feel better for a while, but the anxiety will return...
- You can't take anxiety away or protect you child from experiencing it, but you can help them learn to **tolerate** it and act anyway.
- This will help your child learn that whilst anxiety is unpleasant, it is bearable, and not dangerous.
- Don't avoid – Plan to cope, e.g. Large busy shopping centres. Reduce the anxiety by taking them to smaller shops, shortening the time spent shopping or going at a time when the shops are less busy. Plan to buy a favourite toy or food.

“Worry Time”

- Older children can find ‘worry time’ a useful tool.
- Choose a time slot at the end of the day (20 mins max) that is allotted to joint problem solving any issues.
- When something comes up during the day, quickly jot it down and say ‘we will think about this during worry time’
- During worry time, review the list. Often, many of these worries will have gone away by this point anyway.
- For the worries that remain, do some useful problem solving with your child, *i.e.* thinking about effective solutions - NOT going over and over it!

Building a positive school partnership to support children's anxiety

- Arrange a time to talk to your child's teacher about their anxieties. Best not to do this at drop-off or pick-up time unless it's a quick information share.
- Acknowledge that children can be anxious about different things in school and at home. The anxiety is not your fault, or the school's.
- Share positive strategies that have worked at home and ask the school to share those that have worked there.
- Remember that the school is on your side!

- Communicate regularly and keep the dialogue open. Agree the best way to keep in touch.
- Model how we talk about and deal with own anxieties to our children - parents and teachers have anxieties too.
- If you feel comfortable to do so, share your own school-related anxieties with a trusted member of staff.
- If something has happened in school, reassure your child that it will be dealt with, but don't keep returning to it.
- Keep your child at the centre of the process.

- Ask your child what they think will help them. Share this information with staff.
- Work with the class teacher to identify and address particularly tricky lessons/situations.
- Some things are unhelpful, such as giving your child a mobile phone and asking them to call you if they become anxious. Criticising other children or adults is also unhelpful.

Thank you for listening!

- Any questions?

