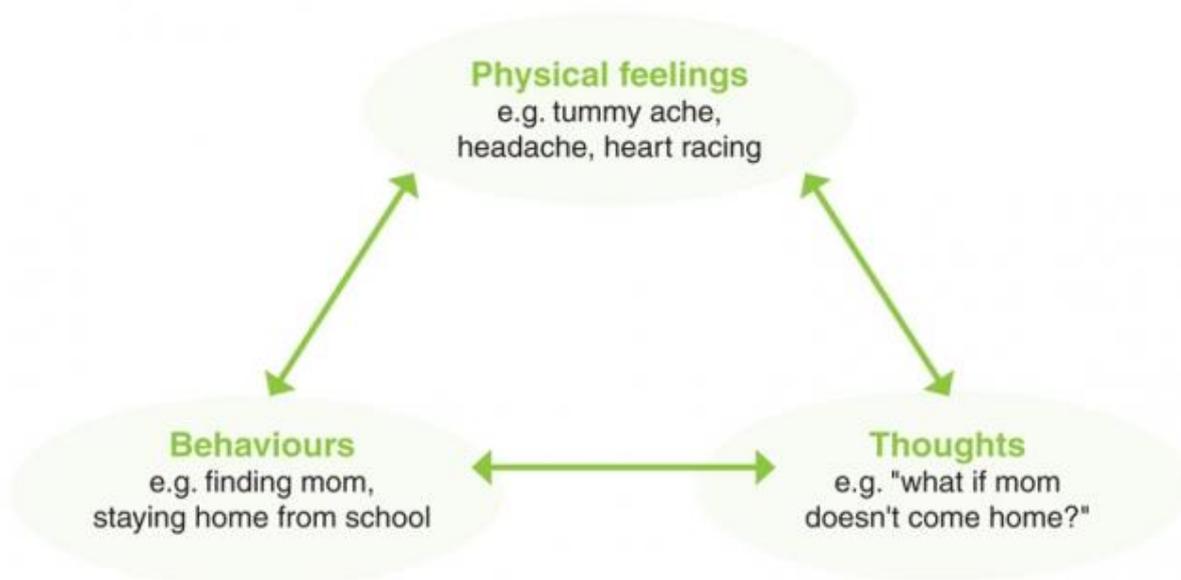


When Anxiety can become a problem

Anxiety can become a problem when our body reacts as if in danger in the absence of real danger. A good analogy is that it's like the body's smoke alarm.

How you can explain the "smoke alarm" response

An alarm can help protect us when there is an actual fire, but sometimes a smoke alarm is too sensitive and goes off when there isn't really a fire (e.g. burning toast in toaster). Like a smoke alarm, anxiety is helpful when it works right. But when it goes off when there is no real danger, then we may want to fix it. Often people will explain that it may feel like being trapped in a vicious cycle



How to break the cycle

Find the physical 'Early warning sign' and do what works

To help a child recognize physical symptoms, draw a sketch of a body and ask them to identify where he or she feels anxiety in the body. Prompt them, if necessary, with an example: "When I feel anxious, I get butterflies in my tummy, and I feel really hot. What happens when you feel anxious?". These physical sensations are early warning signs that act as clues that we need to act to break the cycle by using relaxation coping strategies such as mindfulness, breathing or progressive muscle relaxation.

Relaxation resources:

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/senseability/relaxation-techniques.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

<https://www.anxietybc.com/adults/calm-breathing>

<https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/>

The Do's and Do not's of talking to a young person with Anxiety

Don't: Forget about non-verbal cues.

When you're talking anyone about how they're feeling, remember words aren't the only important part of the conversation. We all pick up on non-verbal queues. Positive body language and appropriate eye contact can really help to soothe and comfort a person who is feeling anxious.

Do: Acknowledge exactly what they're feeling.

Always acknowledge what seems to be the predominant feeling and offer your support. Saying something like: 'I can see that you're anxious/angry/upset... Would it help to talk about it?'

Do: Normalise the anxiety.

This is an important one. Young people shouldn't be made to think that what they are feeling is not "normal".

Let them know that you have had that same feeling at the same age and that even now sometimes as an adult you feel worried (without giving detail). For example you could say: 'When I get anxious, I find it quite hard to know exactly what the anxiety is about. How about you?'

Don't: Minimise how they're feeling with phrases.

Avoid phrases including: "Don't be silly", "There is nothing to be afraid of", "Everything will be alright" or "calm down" as they can minimise the person's anxiety.

Do: Use words to demonstrate empathy.

Use comments such as 'I can see that this is difficult but let's do it together' (this demonstrates empathy and acknowledgement of distress), or 'That is really helpful that you have told me this' or 'When we discussed this before, we agreed that when you felt like this we would do ____'. This builds problem solving but also demonstrates that they have skills and resilience to manage this.

Don't: Make too many suggestions.

It can be natural to want to solve the young person's problems and tell them what they could do to feel better, but it's better to allow them to think. Support the young person to find their own solution, rather than making too many suggestions. Ask questions like 'What do you think would help?' or 'What worked last time you felt this way?'

If they're not ready to talk, let them know you are there if and when they need you.

Do: Encourage and praise them

It's so important to build confidence with praise. Focus on their effort rather than the result. If they are praised for getting the best marks, for example, they may develop a sense that anything less is a failure. Studies have shown that children praised for achievement or intelligence, rather than effort, were more likely to fear failure and feel anxious about setbacks.

Recognise and challenge anxious thoughts

Older children will likely be able to identify some/most of their anxious thoughts, and even challenge their unrealistic thoughts. For more information and to see how to challenge negative thoughts and to nurture more realistic thinking:

www.anxietybc.com

Recognise Avoidance

Is it helpful to avoid our fears or does it maintain our worries? Try exposing yourself to your feared stimuli.

<https://thiswayup.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Module-4-Graded-exposure-description.pdf>

Self Help Materials

Moodjuice is a website with access to self help materials that is designed to help you think about emotional problems and work towards solving them. Emotional problems are often the mind and body's way of saying that something needs to be changed in our life.

<http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/anxiety.asp>

BLAST - Be less anxious stressed and tense

http://www.dchs.nhs.uk/assets/public/dchs/services_we_provide/service-directory/our-services/health-psychology/Information-sheets/stress&anxiety/blast_booklet.pdf

Further information and support

Support for adults

The Samaritans

The Samaritans offer a safe place for anyone to talk any time they like, in any way – about whatever's going on.

Telephone 116 123

Email jo@samaritans.org

Website www.samaritans.org

Talking Therapy

Access to 1:1 CBT therapy within Oxfordshire with the option to self-refer

Telephone 01865 901222

Email Talkingspaceplus@nhs.net

Website <https://www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk/talkingspaceplus/>

Useful support for children

SHOUT - text 'Shout' to 85258 for 24/7 crisis text support

Childline - under 19s can call 0800 1111 for free, confidential support

<https://www.stopbreathethink.com/kids/>