

A large, stylized rainbow arching across the top half of the slide. The colors from top to bottom are magenta, purple, blue, green, and yellow. The brushstrokes are thick and expressive, with some overlapping and frayed edges.

Supporting a child with their worries (anxiety)

Mental Health Support Team
Adapted from Creswell & Willetts 2019

ANXIETY

Write down the words that come to mind when you think about anxiety.

What does anxiety mean to you and your family?

“Anxiety is defined by persistent, excessive worries that don’t go away even in the absence of a stressor. ”

Ref American Psychological Association ,2019



Anxiety vs Stress

Anxiety

- Experienced for long periods of time
- Uncontrollable worry
- Does not always feel rational
- May be anxious about many different things
- What if???????



Stress

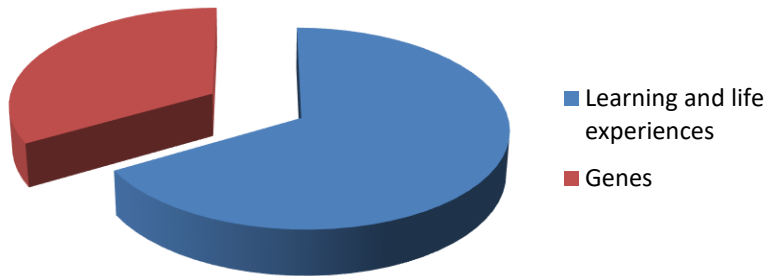
- Experienced for shorter more distinct periods
- Usually has a reason – can you think of any?
- Usually has a resolution

What causes anxiety?

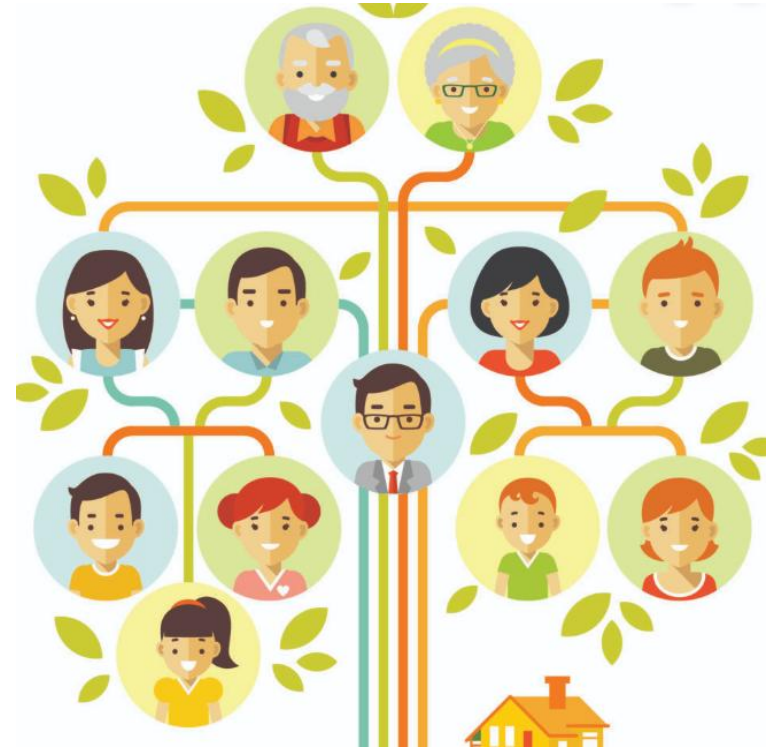


There is probably no one thing that caused your child's anxiety, usually there are lots of things.

Nature - Genetics



From Creswell & Willetts, 2010



It is thought that genetics account for one third of our tendency to suffer from anxiety!

Nurture

Family & Relationships

Learned behaviours

Are there worriers in the family?



Learned reactions

How do others react to anxious situations?



Environment /Life events

- Has your child experienced an event which has effected them?
- Finance
- Friendships
- Where they live school life

Learning to cope.....

Is it ok for your child to be anxious?



Yes!!

Children need to have the opportunity to experience situations which they find scary or uncomfortable.



This is how they build skills to cope with anxious situations

Is Anxiety useful?

Yes!!



KEY POINTS

- Anxiety - prolonged, without external stressor, what if?
- Stress- short term, external stressor, can be solved.
- Causes- genetics, learned behaviours and reactions, life events, physical environment.
- Anxiety is a normal and useful feeling that can keep us safe.



Common fears and worries experienced by children and young people.....

Social anxiety

- Embarrassment
- Judgement
- Fear of peoples reactions

Generalised anxiety

- Many worries
- What if?
- Cannot stop thinking about worries

Separation anxiety

- Problems
- Separating from parent or carer
- Fear of harm coming to parent/ carer or child

How do different types of anxiety effect children's day to day lives?

What does your child's anxiety stop them from doing?



Thoughts



Anxious thoughts and expectations

**Overestimate
threat**

**Underestimate
ability to cope**

Behaviours

Arguing,
irritable, lash
out, tantrum,
meltdown



Fight

Flight



Freeze

Mind go blank,
cant think
clearly, not
talking or
moving, refusal



Run away, hide,
defiance,
avoidance

Behaviours....

Avoidance Behaviours



Avoidance keeps fears going and there is never an opportunity to develop coping skills

Safety Behaviours



This makes the child feel safe, but they also prevent the child from facing their fears.

Reassurance Behaviours



This can prevent children from learning to cope independently

Body

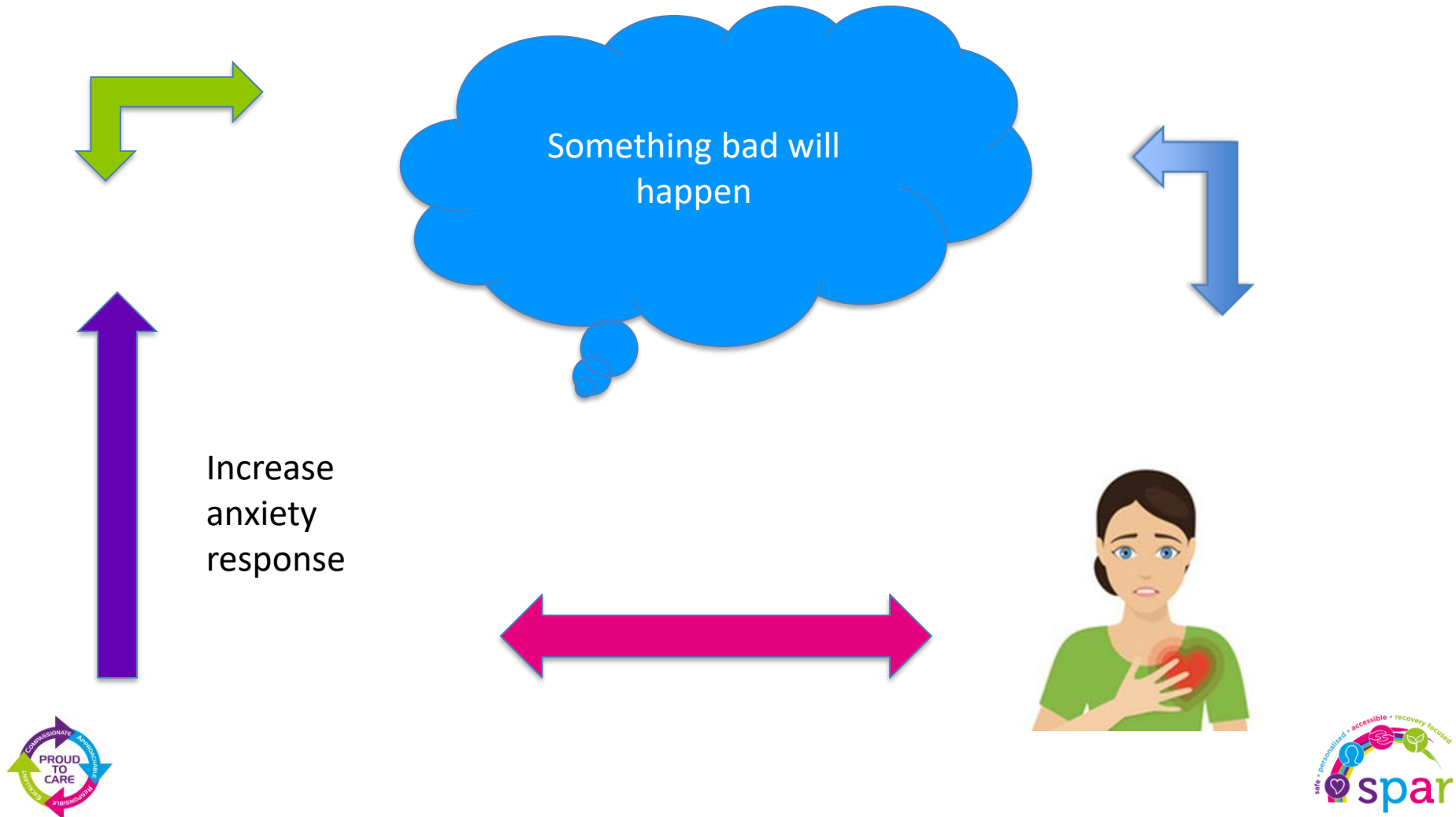


Can you think of any physical symptoms of anxiety?

Physical symptoms of anxiety



Physical feedback loop



KEY POINTS

- Anxious thinking- worst case scenario
- Behaviours- Fight/ Flight/ Freeze, can develop unhelpful safety behaviours, excessive reassurance seeking, avoidance
- Physical Symptoms- many and varied
- Physical feedback loop can be changed with support

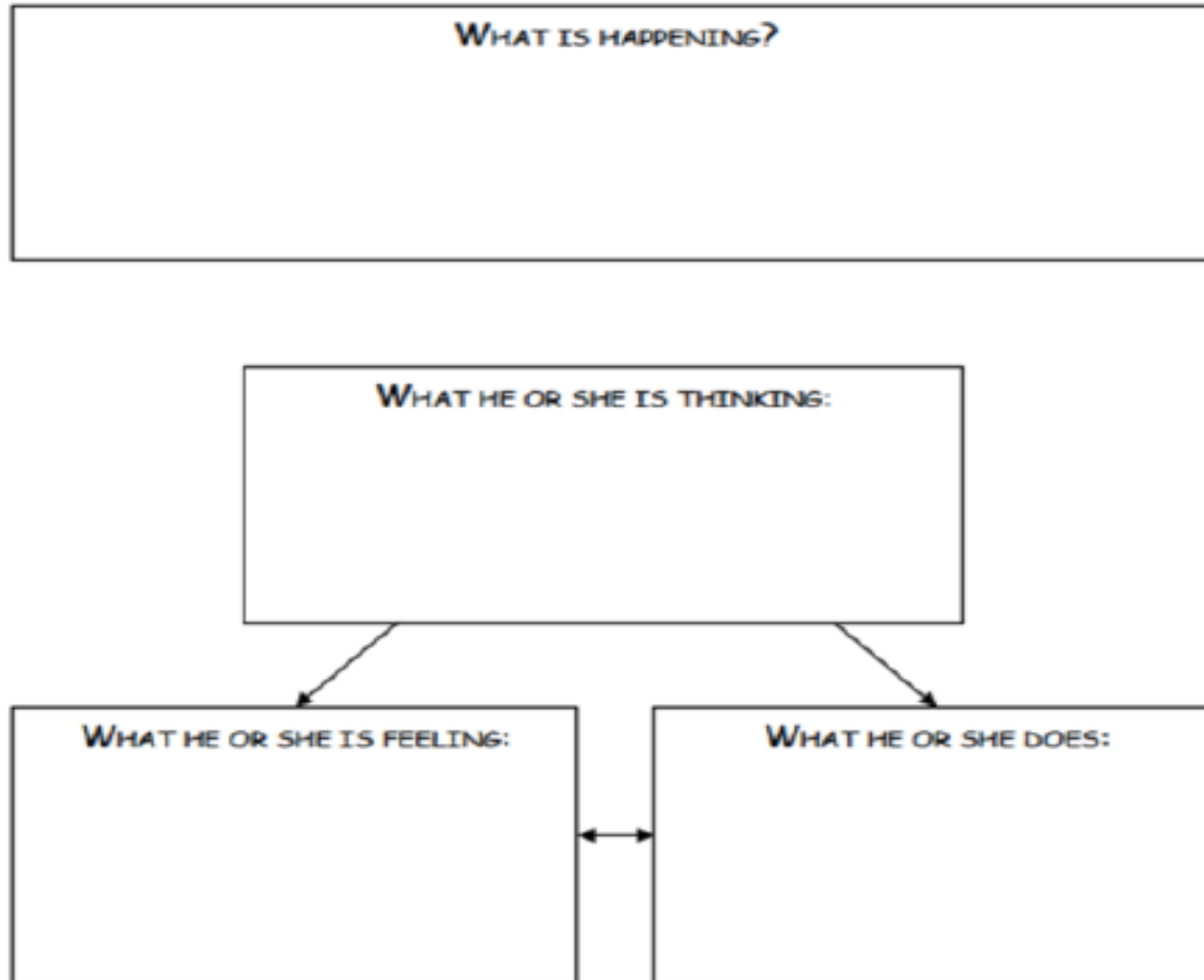


How to help

Do I need to know what caused my child's anxiety in order to help them?



Explore anxious thoughts



Exploring anxious thoughts with empathy

Mum - go upstairs and get your shoes

Ben - No don't want to (avoidance, strop, argumentative)

Mum - Why not?

Ben - because I don't want to I'm scared

Mum - don't be silly you are upstairs all the time

Ben - No.....(avoidance, argumentative, defiance)



Mum - what is it that worries you about going upstairs?

Ben - I don't want to go on my own

Mum - That must feel scary, what are you worried will happen? (*empathy and curiosity*)

Ben - nobody will be up there with me

Mum - and why does that worry you?

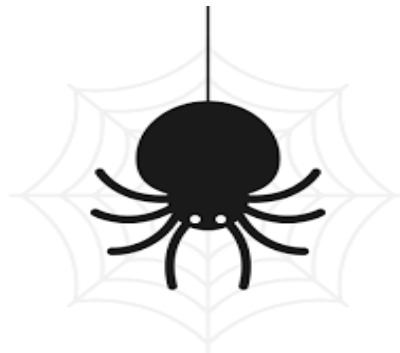
Ben - I'm worried that something will get me

Mum - is there anything in particular that you are worried will get you ? (*curious*)

Ben - a monster.....

Rational?

- Remember that your child's fear and behavioural response is rational TO THEM even if it is not rational to you.
- Can you think of any 'irrational' fears that you may have?



Reassurance

It is important to encourage your child to think for themselves and develop problem solving skills.

Eg. Anxious thought - I will forget my homework and get in trouble at school, my teacher will be disappointed with me and I will have to a detention.

Reassurance seeking to mum - what if I forget my homework?

Answer- go to Mrs Wood and explain to her that you forgot and I will bring it in to school at lunch for you

Answer- what do you think that you could do?



Every day independence

It is important that your child has opportunities to learn independence.



Jobs for the Kids

Ages 2-3

Pick up toys / wipe table/ dust/ help sort laundry

Ages 4-5

Lay the table, tidy room bedroom, help make beds, help with meal prep, dusting

Ages 6-7

Bring laundry down, fold clothes, Clear table, help with cooking, sweep floors

Ages 8-10

Mop floors, empty bins, weeding in the garden, meal preparation

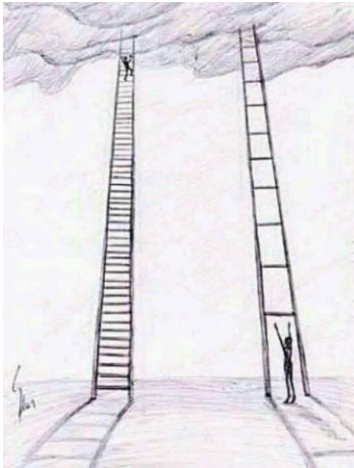
Ages 11+

Laundry, load and unload dishwasher, tidy bedroom and other family rooms, mow the lawn, hoovering, pack lunches

Having a go

Remember Ben?

Set a goal and use a ladder to support your child in reaching that goal.



Can you think of some steps to help Ben with his fear of being upstairs on his own?

SMART GOAL

 Specific		Be specific, keep this narrow. Don't think about achieving too many things.
 Measurable		Can you measure your progress? How will you know that you are moving towards your goal?
 Achievable		Is it possible for you to achieve this goal? Do you have the things you need to help you achieve your goal?
 Realistic		Is this goal realistic for you and relevant to your life?
 Time Limited	time limited 	Set a firm time limit on achieving your goal. You can have short term and long term goals but be clear about which goal you are talking about.

SMART Goals

NOT a SMART
goal:

For my child to be
less anxious
sleeping over at
other people's
houses.

A SMART goal:

For my child to be
able to go to a
sleepover at their
best friends house
in the holidays

Work with a partner to think of a SMART goal
for your child

Attention and Praise



Make praise specific not general



General- well done!

Specific- You did a great job getting dressed for school this morning. I know that this can be a struggle for you and I am really proud that you made that effort.

General- Your teacher told me you did great at school today.

Specific- your teacher said that you asked a question in class today. I know that you can feel shy in class so I'm really impressed that you were able to do that today. Well done.

KEY POINTS

- We do not need to know our child's anxious thoughts?
- Explore thoughts and feelings with curiosity and empathy.
- Fears will be rational **to the child**
- Use reassurance constructively when needed, encourage problem solving first.
- Encourage every day independence.
- Having a go- use goal setting and goal ladder.
- Pay attention to positive steps and behaviours more than to anxiety behaviours.
- Use specific praise and agreed rewards.

Useful Resources

Helping Your Child With Fears and Worries by Creswell and Willetts

<https://www.combined.nhs.uk/our-services/children-and-young-people/>

24 hr access team 0300 0328 728

<http://changeshere4u.org.uk/stay-well-children-and-young-people-online-support-mental-health-mental-wellbeing-wellness-stoke-newcastle-staffordshire-every-mind-matters-self-isolate-stay-home-save-nhs/>





References

American Psychological Association. (2019). Accessed via <https://www.apa.org/topics/stress/anxiety-difference>

Creswell. C & Willetts. L . (2019). *Helping Your Child With Fears and Worries*. London: Robinson.

