

# HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH FEARS AND WORRIES

All young people feeling anxious from time to time. Anxiety can become a problem for children when it gets in the way of everyday life or negatively impacts family life.

## What can keep anxiety going?

- Anxious thinking
- Not understanding their physical symptoms
- Anxious behaviours such as avoidance, safety behaviours, seeking reassurance.
- Anxious responses from others.

## Finding out more

- Ask open questions e.g. 'What are you feeling worried about?' 'What do you think might happen?' to help identify unhelpful thinking styles.
- Phrases such as 'that sounds difficult' or 'lots of children worry about that' help normalise their experience and show you understand.
- Ask helpful questions like "has that ever happened before?" and "how do you think you could cope if that happened?" can help your child rationalize the worry, rather than providing reassurance.
- Think together about solutions - be collaborative!

## Changing behaviours

- Facing avoided situations can help reduce anxiety over time.
- Do an experiment to test out their worries, or if testing a fear feels too much, try breaking it down into manageable steps.
- Praise and reward brave behaviour.
- Ensure a balance of activities that provide a sense of Achievement, Closeness and Enjoyment,

## Managing physical symptoms

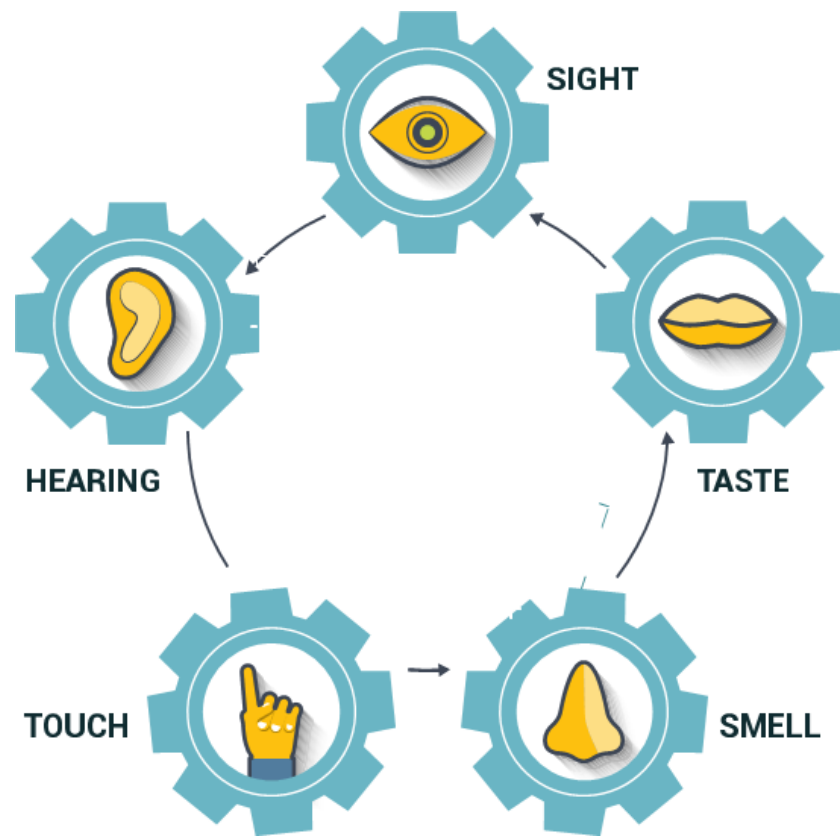
- Bodily symptoms of anxiety evolved to keep us safe as part of our bodies' 'fight or flight' response.
- They are uncomfortable but normal and not harmful.
- Encourage your child to focus shift their focus away from physical symptoms.
- Breathing and grounding exercises can also be helpful.

## Managing Uncertainty

The uncertainty caused by the pandemic can increase worry and anxiety for some children. The following tips may be helpful for responding to children's worries about uncertainty.

- Model acceptance of uncertainty and normalise how difficult it can feel when things are this way.
- Stick to the facts and current advice. Be honest when you are unsure about things.
- Be aware of triggers and be mindful of how much news, radio and media you and your child are receiving or having conversations about.
- Young people can be sensitive to the emotions of those around them so it's helpful to think about how you manage your anxiety when responding to their worries. This could be as simple as taking a breath before responding.

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## 5 senses grounding:

Notice **5** things you can see,  
**4** things you can hear,  
**3** things you can touch,  
**2** things you can smell and  
**1** bodily sensation.

## BALLOON BREATHING



## Try breathing exercises:

<https://copingskillsforkids.com/deep-breathing-exercises-for-kids>



## Distraction techniques:

Spot as many red things as you can in the room.

Spelling/counting backwards

Taking some time out

## Additional Sources of Support

- **Bromley Y**: Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Service for Children and Young People
- **Bromley Children's Project**: Family/parenting support on relationships, communication, etc. Updated webinars on their Facebook page.
- **Candle Project**: Children's bereavement service
- **Bromley Mencap**: Includes the Family Autism Support Service.

- **Talk Together Bromley**: NHS Talking Therapy service for adults
- **Young Minds Website and Parent's Helpline**: Information and advice
- **Kidscape**: Information and webinars around supporting children who are being bullied
- **Kooth**: Online wellbeing community for young people inc web based counsellor chat

Click on any underlined phrases to be taken to the relevant website

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **I've tried lots of this already but it hasn't worked. What can I do?**

Try to take a step back and think about what didn't work and why. Was it too difficult? Was it only implemented for a short amount of time? Was the child or you ready to make changes? What were the barriers and how can you overcome these? Persistence and consistency are both important when implementing strategies to support children with anxiety. It's also important to consider when more support might be helpful.

## **Should I involve the school?**

Some parents like to keep school informed about their child's difficulties, particularly if it is affecting them during the school day or getting in the way of their learning. If difficulties are present at school, it can be useful for school staff to know about strategies you are implementing at home so that they can support these in the classroom.

## **Should I seek professional support?**

This workshop includes self-help techniques which research suggests, when used effectively, can be helpful at reducing children's anxiety. However, if things continue to worsen or you feel that there is a significant impact of the difficulties on your child's life, it may be helpful to think with school or your GP about what support might be useful.

## **My child doesn't talk to me about how they are feeling and won't open up - how can I find out what they are worried about?**

Many children struggle to articulate what they are thinking or feeling. Making tentative suggestions when children answer questions with 'I don't know' can help explore. Trying other mediums like play, drawing or stories might be helpful. Some children find it easier to talk while doing activities where it feels there is less focus on them, like washing up or on a walk.

## **My child won't even give the first step towards facing their fears a go. What can I do?**

Consider breaking it down further to make it an easier step. Think about how to build up their motivation for change by talking about what things might be like if they were able to overcome their fears, and what would it be like if things stayed the same. Rewards are a helpful way to encourage children to face fears (rewards should be given after the child does the step, not as a bribe before they try it).

## **How should I respond to aggressive behaviour when my child is anxious?**

It is important to be clear about boundaries of what behaviour is acceptable. Although aggression can be related to anxiety, this doesn't excuse unacceptable behaviour. Try to work with your child to understand what is behind the aggression and how else they may be able to express this in a healthier way. If you would like advice regarding managing behaviour call the Bromley Children's Project Parenting Hotline: 02084617259.

## **My child has Autism. Does this approach work?**

Lots of the techniques we have discussed are applicable to children with ASC and can be utilised effectively with some adaptations. Consider being more visual in your approach, i.e. setting out a visual plan of what strategies they can use when they are feeling a certain way. For ASC specific information [Bromley Mencap](#) run virtual drop-ins and workshops (/) and Tony Attwood's book, 10 Steps to Reducing Your Child's Anxiety on The Autism Spectrum, may be of interest.

## **Me and my partner respond a bit differently to our child's anxiety. What approach should we take?**

We understand that parents have different ways of doing things, and often each way has its own strengths and weaknesses. Compromising and coming together to work through strategies consistently over time is likely to have the best effect on managing your child's anxiety.





# THE SIGNPOST

Text support for 11-18 year olds

Stressed?

Worried?

Feeling low?

Problems with friends or family?

When you are struggling with something, it can be difficult to know which way to turn for help.

**The Signpost** offers emotional health support and will help you think about what options are available.

## Text: 07480 635 025

Texts are monitored Monday-Friday, 9-5 (excl Bank Holidays).

The Signpost is run by Wellbeing Practitioners from Bromley Y to offer young people residing or attending school in Bromley borough easy access to emotional wellbeing advice. For more info about Bromley Y, visit [bromley-y.org](https://bromley-y.org)

## For helpful resources and updates follow our social media:



[bromley-y.org](https://bromley-y.org)



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