

FEAR-A MYSTERIOUS PAIN

OBJECTIVE: To get the child to understand fear and anxiety symptoms so they can identify whether it falls within the range of normalcy.

SKILL: Learning to identify anxiety symptoms and utilizing effective coping mechanisms



- Video
- Exercise Sheets
- Counsellor Interaction

CORE LEARNING

Anxiety can be normal within a certain range despite physical symptoms.

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is an unpleasant feeling that we all experience at times. It is a word often used to describe when we feel 'uptight', 'irritable', and 'nervous', 'tense', or 'wound up'. When we are anxious we normally experience a variety of uncomfortable physical sensations. These include: increased heart rate, muscular tension, sweating, trembling, feelings of breathlessness. Anxiety affects us mentally as well. For example, when anxious, we often worry for large periods of time, so much so that our worry can feel out of control. These worries are often about a variety of issues and commonly our mind jumps quickly from one worry to another.

Anxiety also influences how we behave. For instance, when we feel anxious, we often avoid doing things that we want to because we are worried about how they will turn out.

Although short experiences of anxiety are part and parcel of daily life, it becomes challenging when anxiety begins to follow people around and is a regular feature in their lives.

Anxiety is caused by a number of reasons including;

- Major Life events- Extremely painful or multiple stresses happening at one time
- Thinking Styles- Some people have tendency to naturally worry or fixate on issues
- Evolution- Fight or flight instinct- driving force in causing panic to get us to act for survival
- Genetics- Some people inherit anxiety from familial ties or are genetically predisposed.

What keeps our anxiety alive?

Mental habit-We hold on to strong beliefs that bad things are going to happen

Worry will protect me”- We think worry gives us an opportunity to be prepared in case danger does happen.

Symptoms of anxiety—Feeling the symptoms of anxiety makes us worry even more. We start thinking there is something wrong with us and the worry cycle continues.

Avoid scary situations — We avoid situations which keeps the belief that “the thing” is scary. We never walk through the fear to discover the truth. Instead, avoidance keeps the fear alive.



The symptoms we experience when anxious are often referred to as the 'fight or flight' response. This comes from the idea that people primarily experience anxiety to help them either fight or run away from danger as discussed in other chapters. The anxiety symptoms themselves are not dangerous and it is the right response but at the wrong time.

Remembering this can help you to be less fearful of the symptoms of anxiety which will allow them to pass sooner. Our fight or flight response would kick in to help us at this point. For example: If there was something to fear....

- Our hearts would begin beating more quickly (supplying blood to our muscles).
- We would sweat (to cool us down).
- Our muscles would become tense (ready for action).
- We would take deeper breaths (to supply oxygen to our muscles).

Thoughts are a big deal when it comes to anxiety

The way that we think about things has an impact on our anxiety levels. Many of these thoughts occur outside of our control, and can be negative or unhelpful. It is therefore important to remember that they are just thoughts, without any real basis, and are not necessarily facts. Even though we may believe a lot of our unhelpful thoughts when we are anxious, it is good to remember that they should be questioned as they are often based on wrong assumptions. Consider the following

- We have thousands of thoughts everyday- some derive from within and some from without
- Thoughts affects how we feel, and how we feel affects what we do
- When we guard our minds by monitoring and questioning our thoughts, we have more control over how we feel
- Not every thought is true... in fact many have no real basis
- We can think about what we are thinking



Remember the last time your felt afraid or anxious. Which of these did you experience?

Feelings

- on edge
- Panicky
- Stressed
- Irritable/low patience threshold
- uptight
- Nervous

Physical Symptoms

- Dizzy
- Chest tight or painful
- Stomach Churning
- trembling or tingling sensations
- Breathing faster or slower
- Concentration difficulties
- Tense body/muscular pain

Thinking styles

- You often worry 'what if' something bad happens
- Your mind jumps from worry to worry
- You often imagine the worst case scenarios
- You are always on the look out for danger.
- Talk very quickly

Behavior Patterns

- Avoid doing things
- Pace around/Find it hard to relax
- Snap at people easily
- Get easily flustered

Three areas we tend to have anxiety about?

What people are going to think about us- Does it matter? We often get caught up in what people think about us. Yes, we should care enough not to offend others with what we do or say or behave. However, if we are being our authentic self, and people don't accept us, that is not our problem. The truth is that if we don't accept our selves, no one else will. We teach other people how to treat us.... by doing it first to ourselves.

Something terrible in going to happen - How do you know? This is what makes anxiety a problem. We spend so much time thinking about an issue or situation in only one way, when there is a million other ways it can turn out. It is critical that you learn to identify thinking patterns that are not helpful and challenge them. If we just accept the thoughts that come to us without at least questioning them, then we become trapped. Do you want to be trapped?

I won't be able to do it - How do you know. If we don't try new things or take risks, how will you know what you are capable of or not. The only way to grow is to take on new challenges and see what comes out of it. Some people use FEAR as an acronym for "FALSE EVIDENCE APPEARING REAL". You have to go in to find out the truth for yourself!!

DEALING WITH FEARFUL OR ANXIOUS THOUGHTS

Once you have recognised an unhelpful thought the next stage is to challenge it. To do this, you can ask yourself a series of questions. See the example below:

Situation 1: The end of year exams is approaching.

Situation 2: I have to speak in front of the class

How you feel: Nervous, stressed and apprehensive.

Unhelpful thought 1: I'll definitely fail my exams miserably!

Unhelpful thought 2: Everyone is going to laugh at me

Now you can challenge your unhelpful thoughts by asking these questions.

A

Is there any evidence that contradicts this thought?

- 1) I've always done well in my previous exams.
I've been scoring well in my coursework.
- 2) I've never laughed at anyone.
I've practiced at home and it seemed fine

B

What would you say to a friend who had this thought in a similar situation?

- 1) I'd say don't be silly, you've always done well. As long as you've studied hard, You should be fine. Besides, you can only try your best.
- 2) I'd say, just try our best, everyone gets scared. Just do it and get it over with

C

What are the pro and cons of thinking in this way? ?

- Cons: It's making me feel sick with worry. ?
- Pros: I can't really think of any.

D

How will you feel about this in 6 months' time?

I'll probably look back and laugh about how silly I was being.

E

Is there another way of looking at this situation?

- 1) I've always done well in the past so I should be ok. I can only do my best anyway; after all I've studied hard. At worst, I'll just have to re-sit next year.
- 2) I've practiced and it could go really well. People might enjoy my speech. Worse case scenario, even if they laugh, I was brave and did it anyway.

Once you have asked yourself these questions, you should read through your answers. Try to come up with a more balanced or rational view. For example: Worrying about failing or being laughed at is doing me no good. I've always done well before so I should be fine, especially since I've prepared properly.

INSIDE STORY

Zoey was a 10-year-old girl from a close, supportive family who was described as 'anxious from birth'. She had been a shy, reserved young girl at pre-school, but she integrated well in grade 1 and began making friends and succeeding academically. She complained several times of severe abdominal pain that was worst in the morning and never present at night. She had missed about 20 days of school during the previous year because of the pain. She also avoided school excursions, fearing the bus would crash. She had difficulty falling asleep and frequently asked her parents for their reassurance.

Hannah was worried that she and her parents might die. She was unable to sleep at all before a test. She could not tolerate having her parents on a different floor of the house from herself, and she insisted on securing the house to an unnecessary extent in the evenings, fearing intruders. Her insecurity, need for constant reassurance, and school absenteeism were frustrating and upsetting for her parents

Discuss the following (remember there are no right or wrong answers):

- 1) Do Zoey's symptoms seem normal or abnormal?
- 2) Is it rational to think that intruders would invade her house every night?
- 3) What are some helpful thoughts that could help Zoey manage her unhelpful thinking?
- 4) Should Zoey take a chance and try some of the things she has been avoiding?

Some other ideas to help you reduce my anxiety?

- ❖ Use deep breathing and learn to relax.
- ❖ "Worry Time"- Pick a set time each day to worry on purpose. E.g. 7pm for 30 minutes. Give yourself permission to worry at this time only. If you find yourself worrying outside of this time, write a note to yourself to bring it up again during your "Worry Time"

- ❖ Distract yourself with games like rubiks cube, solitaire and any others that require your attention.
- ❖ Stop avoiding the things that make you anxious.

CHILD ACTIVITY (You can do this with child or they can do alone)

List the things that you avoid:

Come up with a list of the situations that you often try to escape from or avoid.

For example

Things I Avoid	Predicted anxiety
<i>Going on a work night out</i> <i>Speaking in front of small groups</i> <i>Going to a house party with friends</i> <i>Speaking in front of a large group of friends</i> <i>Going out for a meal with friends</i> <i>Submitting new ideas to my boss</i> <i>Joining a yoga class</i> <i>Delivering formal presentations at work</i>	

Ranking these situations

Rank your list of situations in order of difficulty. From the least anxiety provoking to the most anxiety provoking on a scale of 0 -100. 0 = no anxiety and 100 = extreme anxiety.

For example:

Things I Avoid	Predicted anxiety
<i>Going on a work night out</i>	60
<i>Speaking in front of small groups</i>	50
<i>Going to a house party with friends</i>	55
<i>Speaking in front of a large group of friends</i>	70
<i>Going out for a meal with friends</i>	50
<i>Submitting new ideas to my boss</i>	65
<i>Joining a yoga class</i>	70
<i>Delivering formal presentations at work</i>	90

Confronting the lowest ranked situation

Try to confront the lowest ranked item on your list. This will be the item that causes you least anxiety. You will likely find that although your anxiety might initially rise, it will drop if you remain in the situation for long enough. Try to stay with the situation until your anxiety has reduced by at least half.

Repeating this task

Repeat the task as often as possible (every day if you can). Try not to leave too long between times when you confront this item. This is because the more you confront something, the more your fear will reduce. You should notice your anxiety getting less and less each time you do so. You may find eventually that it will cause you little or no anxiety at all.

Moving on to the next lowest item

When you feel comfortable with an item, try to move on to the next item on your list. Working through your list you will begin to feel anxious in fewer and fewer situations. You should find that your confidence grows as you move on from each item. You should find that tasks ranked as more difficult seem more manageable as you progress.

Things to consider:

- Don't fear the symptoms of anxiety. Anxiety is a natural and healthy reaction that is not dangerous
- Try not to escape situations you fear half-way through. Stay and your anxiety will eventually decrease.
- Your anxiety will reduce each time you confront a feared situation. Try to confront your fears as often as possible.
- You may also find it helpful to challenge any unhelpful thoughts as you face a fear.
- Look out for other situations that you avoid due to anxiety. Try to gradually reduce your avoidance more and more.
- You may confront an item on your list which doesn't go as well as you had hoped. Try not to give up. Persevere, and it should eventually get easier.
- If an item on your list seems too hard, see if you can put in an extra step or two before it. This will allow your confidence to rise further before you face

Suggested Video Sources

www.everydayspeech.com

www.You tube.com