Supporting Your Child to Overcome Fears & Worries

Delivered by Oxon CAMHS SPA School In Reach workers

Based on: Psychological Perspectives in Education & Primary Care Module

Written by Dr Monica Parkinson & Dr Kerstin Thirlwall, Clinical Psychologists, University of Reading
Remember:

- **All** children and young people (and adults) have changes in mood, and ups and downs
- Being fearful is very common during childhood
- We need to consider whether it is developmentally appropriate
Opening round

In pairs……..

• Name

• What are you hoping to get from today's session?
Activity: What might give you an indication that worry is a problem?

- Physical Symptoms?
- Behaviours?
- Emotions?
Physical symptoms

• Tummy pain
• Feeling sick
• Hear racing
• Shaking
• Dizzy
• ‘Just not feeling right’
Behaviours

• Asking lots of questions
• Being clingy with adults lots of the time
• Coming downstairs lots at bedtime
• Not wanting to go to school or clubs
• ‘Silly’ behaviour
Emotions

• Fear
• Sadness
• Anger
• Frustration
• Overly excited
What keeps fears & worries going?

- **Thoughts**
- **Feelings**
- **Physical feelings**
- **Behaviour**
Stop...
before you do anything –

Mind 8 relaxation tips –
Breathing 29 secs – 1 min 15
http://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/relaxation/relaxation-tips/?o=6833#.WJeeYcvfWhB
Our brains...

The Thinking Brain and the 999 Brain

www.cwmt.org.uk

myresilience.org
Poul Lundgaard Bak, MD

Caring, safe and excellent
The Meerkat: our Amygdala

Internal alarm system
On the look out for danger
On high alert

blocks information from the Owl
Reacts automatically

If it thinks or feels under threat - triggers Fight Flight Freeze
Feeling worried about talking in front of the rest of the class.....
Feeling worried about talking in front of the rest of the class.....

**Thought:**
- People will laugh at me
- Scared and embarrassed

**Feelings:**
- Scared and embarrassed
- Sick in the stomach

**Behaviour:**
- Avoid answering questions in class – keeping head down

**Physical feelings:**

Caring, safe and excellent
Activity: Case study

What is happening?
What anxious behaviour is s/he displaying?
What bodily sensations is s/he having?
What is s/he thinking?
Evidence for and against their worry?
Identifying possible alternatives
Ben, aged 12

‘Ben’ becomes tearful each morning before school and complains of feeling sick. Although his teachers report that he is fine when he has settled in, he is most comfortable when he can meet a teaching assistant each morning when he arrives. He finds it difficult to sleep alone, frequently comes down to his parents throughout the evening and often goes to sleep in their bed during the night. If his parents go out without him he texts them frequently to check that they are OK and to find out when they will be home. He is reluctant to go out with friends or join activities after school.
• Ask questions
• Challenging unhelpful thoughts
• Problem solving approach
• Step by step plan
• Then…. let go, distract or do nothing?
Some useful questions....

• What is it about [this situation] that is making you worried?
• What do you think will happen?
• What makes you think that [this situation] will happen?
• Has that ever happened to you before?
• Have you ever seen that happen to someone else?
• How likely is it that [this situation] will happen?
• If [this situation] did happen, could there be any other reasons for it?
• What would you think was happening if someone else was in the same boat?

• What might [another child] think if they were in this situation?

• What would you say to [another child] if they were worried about this situation?

• What might be another way of thinking about this situation?
How to respond to worry

• Cutting out reassurance (gradually)
• Encouraging independence and having a go:
  – Attention and praise
  – On the lookout for ‘have a go’ behaviour
  – Rewards
  – Observing others’ behaviours and feelings
  – Allowing independence
Problem Solving

• What is the problem?
• List all the possible solutions
  - no matter how weird or wonderful
• What would happen if I chose this solution?
  - In the short term? In the long term?
    To my worry in the future?
• Is this plan doable? Yes/No
• How good is this plan? Rate 0-10
• What happened?
Provide opportunities for facing fears

- Explain to your child why it’s important to work towards facing their fears
- Devise a step by step plan:
  - Learning to face fears
  - A step by step approach
  - Breaking it down into steps
  - Helpful thoughts
  - Putting it into practice
## Example of graded exposure plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Go into town on bus with mum and I pay for ticket</td>
<td>2/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Go on bus with mum but sit on my own</td>
<td>3/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Go on bus on my own – mum meets me in town</td>
<td>4/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Go and pay for item in shop in town</td>
<td>5/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Walk to corner shop with friend</td>
<td>5/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Ask sales assistant in town a question</td>
<td>7/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Go into town with mum and spend 30 minutes walking round shops on own</td>
<td>8/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Go into town on bus with friends</td>
<td>10/10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Step by step plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GOAL</th>
<th>HELPFUL THOUGHT</th>
<th>REWARD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10. (Ultimate goal)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. (EASIEST STEP)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CALLING YOUR TEACHER 'MUM' IS EMBARRASSING.
TALKING TO CHILDLINE ISN'T.

FARTING IN ASSEMBLY IS RISKY.
TALKING TO CHILDLINE ISN'T.
Closing round

What will you do differently following today’s session?