

POSITIVE PARENTING

# Children and Anxiety



# Aims



- The importance of co-regulation
- What is anxiety?
- How can I help my child(ren)?
- Where can I get further help if I need to?
- Parents and anxiety
- Can anxiety ever be positive?

# Regulation



We are not born to self-regulate.

Emotional regulation is gained by co-regulation.



Well-regulated adults are needed when children experience dysregulation.

# What is anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe.

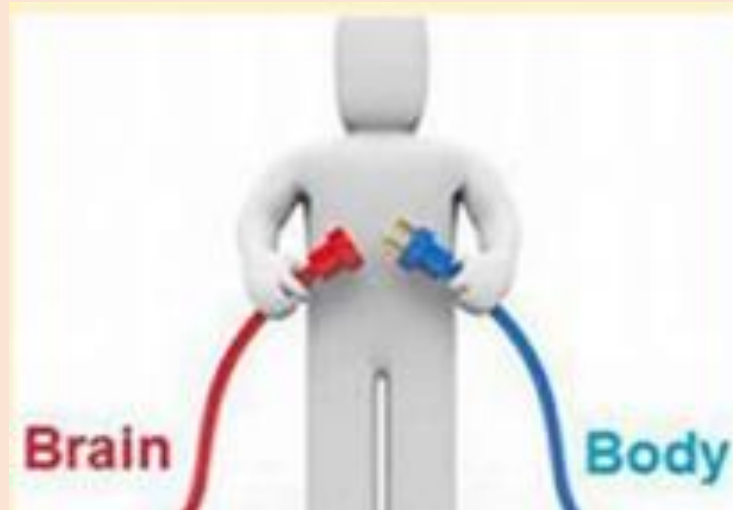


Everyone experiences feelings of anxiety at some point in their life.

Feeling anxious is a normal part of development and helps 'survival skills' to grow in order to face challenges.

# Head to toe

The brain and the body are connected.



In order to understand and cope with emotions, their physical impact needs to be recognised.

# Feeling anxious?



Anxiety affects people in different ways. Some people may feel lethargic, others hyperactive others feel like they have butterflies in their tummy.

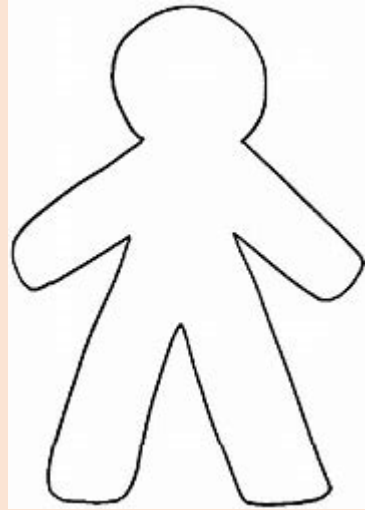


Think of a time when YOU have felt anxious. What did you FEEL physically? What part of your body felt different, your hands, feet, tummy?

# Strategy

## 1

### ACTIVITY

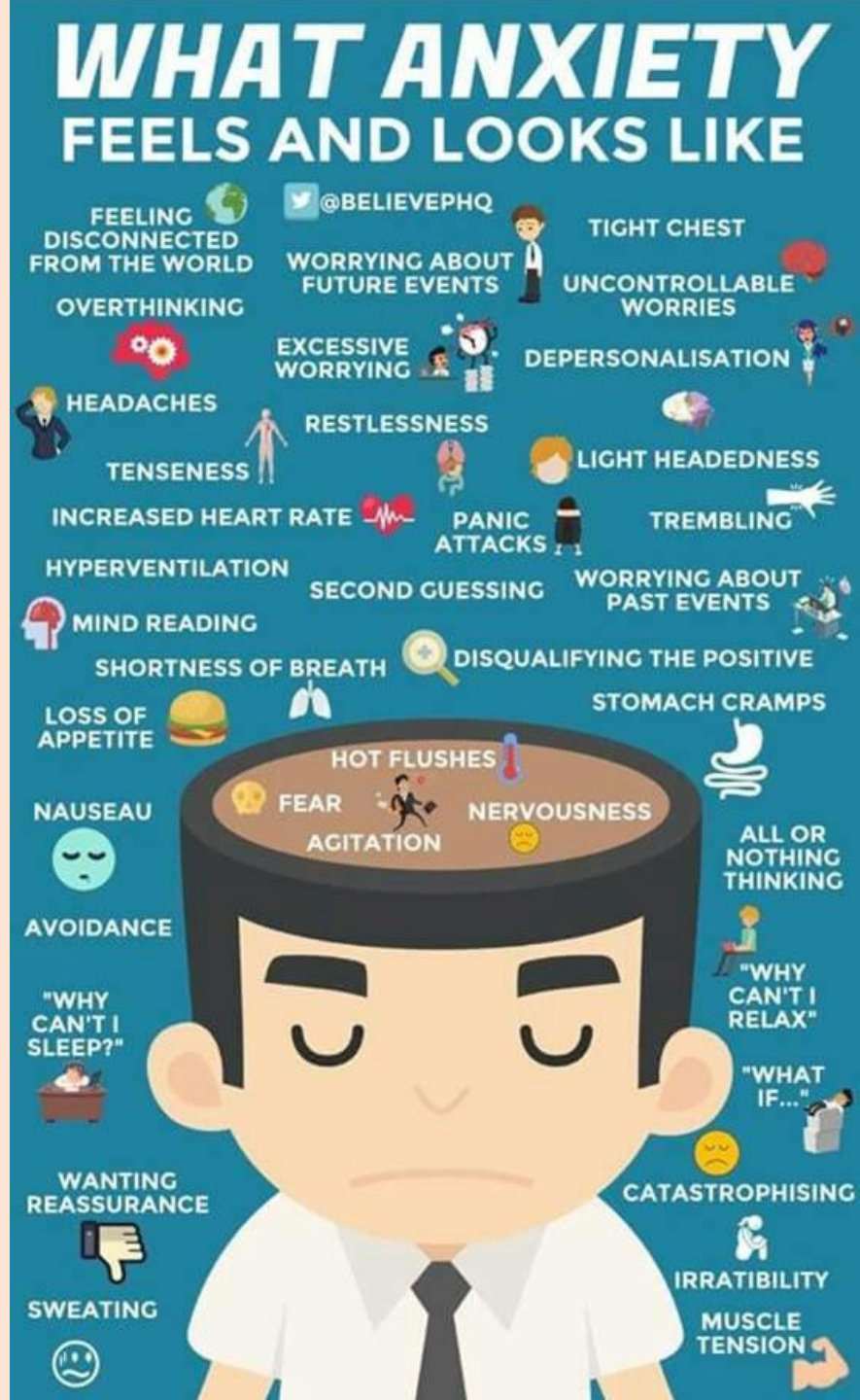


On the outline, write how your body feels when you get anxious. Try and focus on the physiological experience of anxiety.

This is a good activity for your child(ren) to do.  
It is a good activity to do together.  
You can draw your own figure and label it.  
This will show your child that adults feel anxious too and that it is perfectly normal.



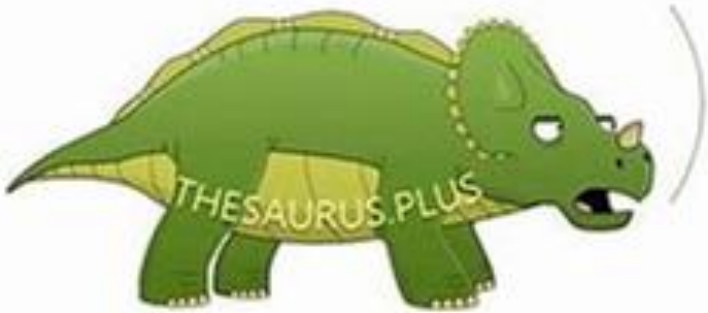
What sort of things did you come up with?





synonyms for anxious:

uneasy, nervous, troubled, eager, keen, impatient,  
unquiet, concerned, worried, solicitous



It is important to name and describe the emotion - what is happening in their body and why it is happening.

Many children and young people don't know what they are feeling when they are anxious, and it can be very frightening and overwhelming. Children need someone to help them to co-regulate.



# Strategy

2

Tell your child it will be okay, and the anxiety will pass.



Use a calm, soft and low tone. Keep words to a minimum, often repeating the same thing slowly.

It can be helpful to describe the anxiety as a wave to ride or surf that gets smaller after it peaks.



You may like to write down a script of what you will say to your child to reassure them.

What would you say to your child right now?

## ACTIVITY

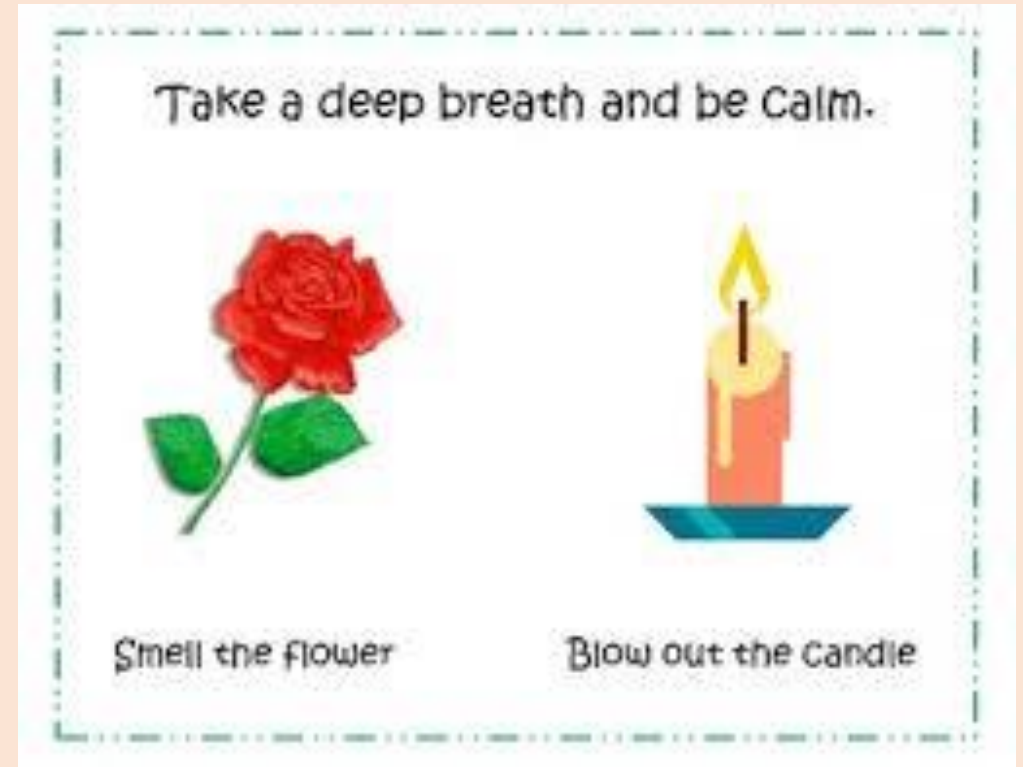
Write down a simple phrase that you know would help your child - and you!



# Strategy

## 3

Get your child to breathe deeply and slowly, in through their nose (smell the flower) and out through their mouth (gently blow out the candle).



## ACTIVITY

Have a go at this yourself now. Really be mindful of your breathing. Keep going until you feel calmer.

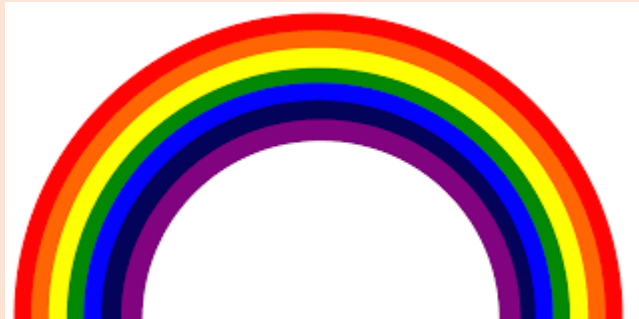


# Strategy

4

Distract them by focusing on something else.

## ACTIVITY



Look for:

5 red things

4 blue things

3 yellow things

2 green things

1 pink thing.



# Strategy

No other form of communication is as universally understood as touch. The compassionate touch of a hand or a reassuring hug can take away our fears, soothe our anxieties, and fill the emptiness of being lonely. *-Randi G. Fine-*



Give them a cuddle or hold their hand if they will let you - touch can be soothing.

# Strategy

It can help to talk to your child about finding a safe place in their mind - somewhere that they feel relaxed and happy. You can use bubbles to help the child visualise a happy place, and then focus on their bubble floating to the safe place.



It may be a grandparent's or friend's house or a holiday beside the sea which they can picture when 'wrong thoughts' come into their head or they are feeling anxious. It may even be an imaginary place. Use bubbles so your child can blow their worries away, watch and celebrate as their bubbles and worries float away.

Sometimes holding a memento, like a seashell or pebble, can help. Music such as listening to waves is also effective.





## ACTIVITY

Where is your safe place? Picture it now. Complete the breathing exercise from earlier to help you. Close your eyes if you would like to.



# Strategy

Make a 'worry box'.

Your child can write each worry down and post it in the box out of sight. They can leave the worries in there for a short time to see if they were worth worrying about (if not they can be torn up).

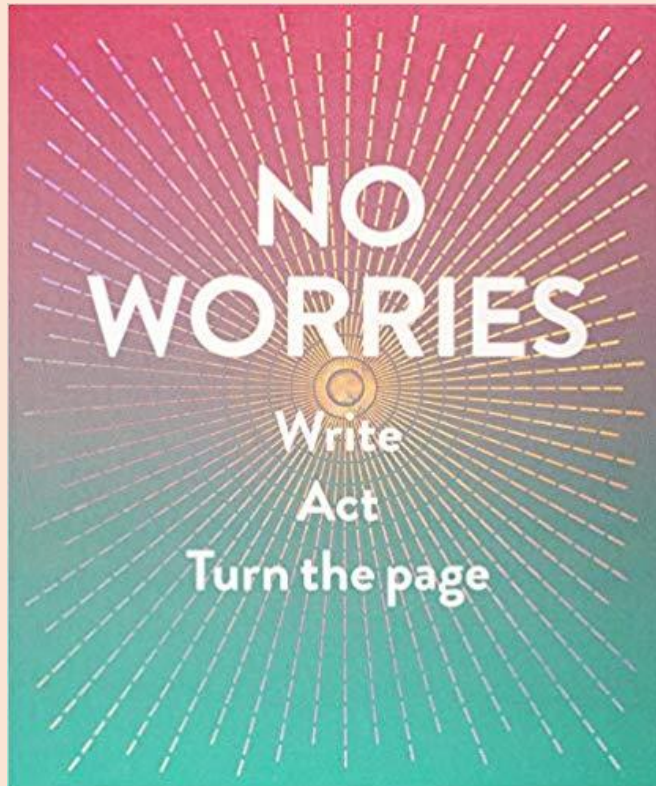


Alternatively, you could designate a specific 'worry time' for around 10 or 20 minutes (but not too close to bedtime, or when the child is in bed) so worries can be saved up for that time. This gives the message that we are in control of our worries and not vice versa.



# Strategy

Encourage your child to notice what makes them anxious. Talking it through can help but your child could also try keeping a diary or a 'worry book'.



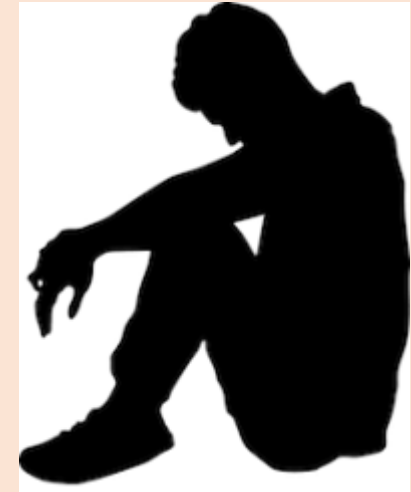
Work on positive-thinking.

Name their worst case scenarios and think through together how to sort out the situation if it happens, e.g. 'I'm worried that we'll miss the bus.' 'What do you think we could do if that happens?' 'We could get the next bus'.

# ACTIVITY

Think of a worry that you have had.

Complete the grid.



| What am I worried about? | Has it ever come true?<br>How often? | What will I do if it does happen? | What shall I tell myself? |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
|                          |                                      |                                   |                           |



# Strategy

9



Maintain a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise to reduce the levels of stress hormones, good sleeping habits, calm bedtime routines, limited screen or computer time in the evening and a healthy diet.

# Parental anxiety



Most people will suffer from anxiety at some point in their lives.



The importance of ensuring your anxiety is managed cannot be over-exaggerated.





While you don't want your child to witness every anxious moment you experience, you do not have to constantly suppress your emotions.

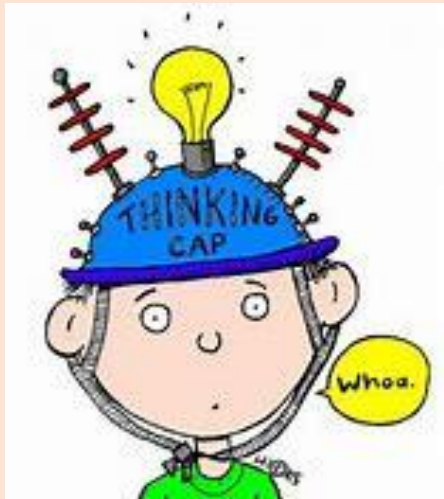
It's okay—and even healthy—for children to see their parents cope with stress every now and then, but you want to explain why you reacted in the way that you did.



By helping your child to feel less anxious about situations, you in turn should begin to feel less anxious too.

# Can anxiety ever be positive?

YES!



A study by Bonnie Hayden Cheng and Julie M. McCarthy (2018) found that a level of anxiety can actually enhance performance and focus and leads people to developing self-regulating behaviour.

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# Thank you!

If you have any further questions or thoughts, please write them down or ask me.

