

Practical Tips for an Anxious Child



By: Dr. Schoen
School Guidance Counselor

Background Information

Factors Contributing to Anxiety

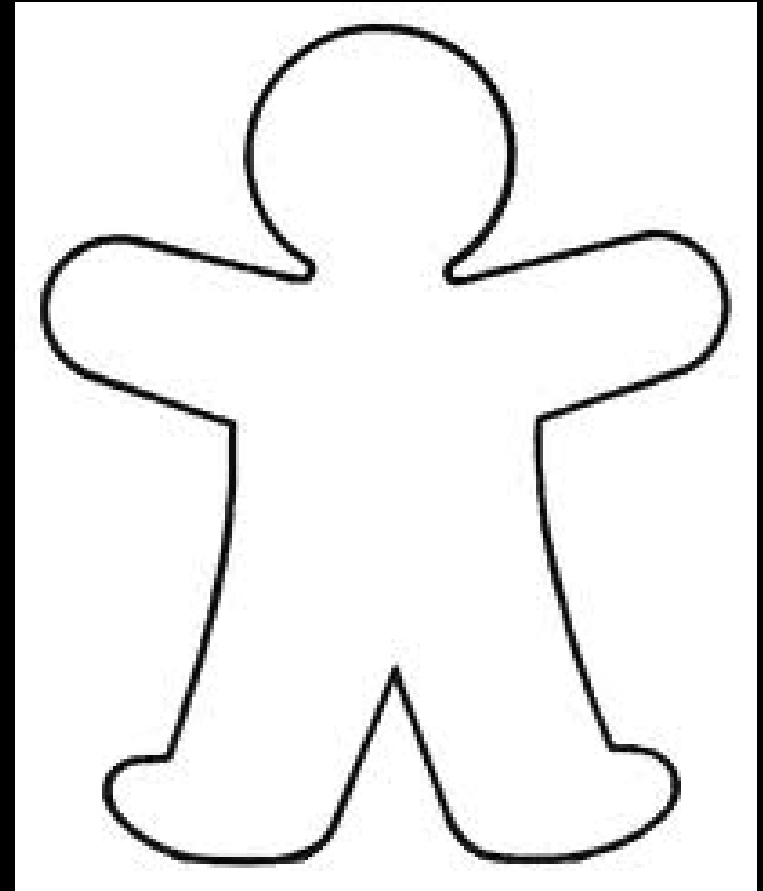
- **Genes:** General emotional sensitivity
- **Negative Thought Patterns**
- **Avoiding:** Keeps anxiety alive and the belief never changes
- **Adult Reactions:** Being overly protective causes children to believe that they cannot handle life themselves
- **Adult Modeling:** Copy ways of coping
- **Stressful Events**

Anxious children believe that there is a level of danger in the situation that they avoid. When children avoid, they maintain the same believe. The strategies that we will discuss will help children to think more realistically about the world through your interactions and the way you handle their emotional reactions. Changing fears requires a gradual and consistent process.

Activities

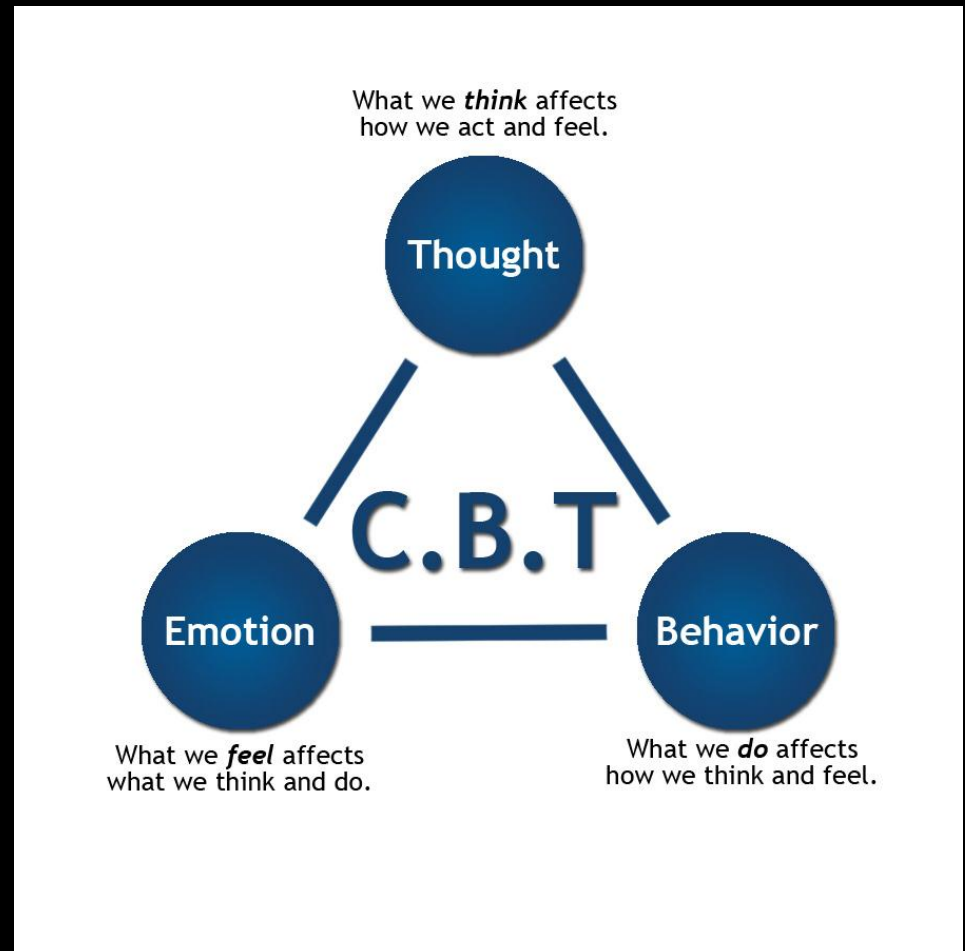
Activity: Anxiety and My Body

Have your child color parts of their body where they can feel anxious signals.



Activity: Anxiety and Thoughts

- Look at a magazine and ask your child what various people might be feeling.
- Show your child that feeling impact our thoughts by drawing the bubbles in the chart.



Activity: Learning about Thoughts and Feelings

- Have your child keep a record of his or her anxiety for a week or two.
- Have them color in graph paper, use tally marks, or put objects into a container to track the number.
- Set goals to reduce worries

Activity: Role Play

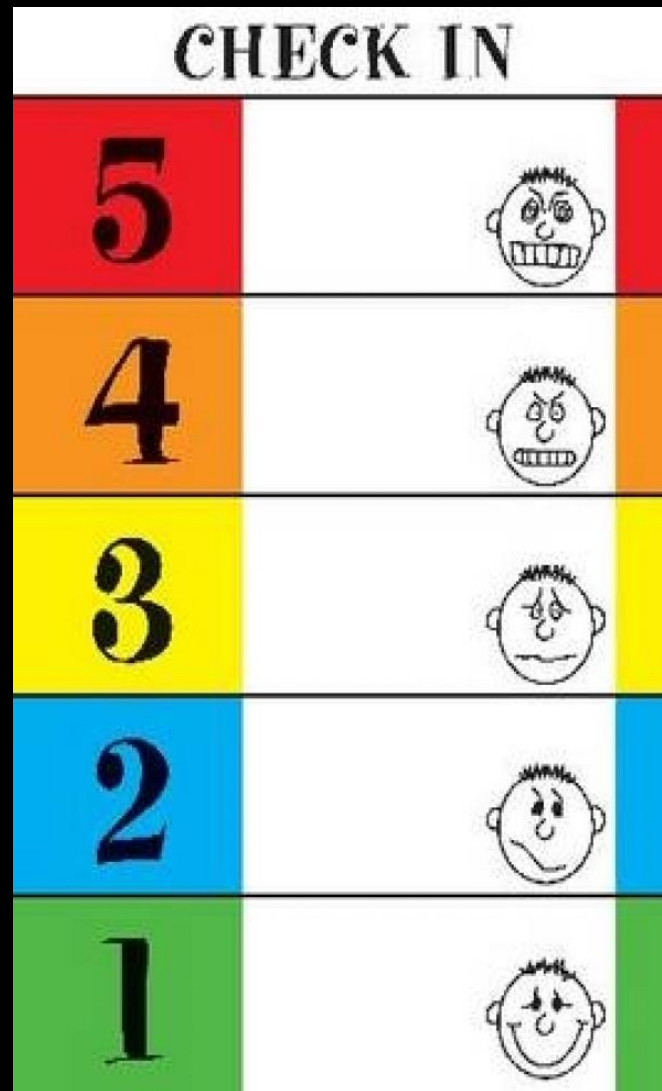
- Act out a real or imaginary situation
- This helps your child practice social skills and make things realistic
- Use Puppets or stuffed animals for younger children

Activity: Detective Thinking

Questions to Guide:

- Have you been in a situation like this before?
- Did something bad happen every time you were in the situation?
- Have any of your friends had anything like this happen to them?
- What other reasons could there be for this happening?

Activity: The Worry Scale



Younger Worry Scale



NOT
WORRIED



TEENSY
WORRIED



MODERATELY
WORRIED



OK, NOW I'M
WORRIED



VERY
WORRIED

Activity: Relaxation

- Find a small amount of time each day to practice relaxation exercises
- Options: Breathing, yoga, progressive muscle relaxation, and visualization

Adult Reactions and Support

Too Much Reassurance

- Anxious children are often unable to rely on themselves and will ask for more reassurance.
- Balance!!
- In the long run, too much reassurance will only cause a child to demand more. The glass is never full.
- Reassurance sends the message that this is an awful situation.

What CAN you do?

- Help children come up with solutions.
Lead them to answers, don't tell them!
- Encourage children to be a detective and help talk things out
- Gradually give less reassurance

What CAN you do?

- Discuss with your child what you are looking for
- Be consistent
- Reward brave, non-anxious behavior
 - Stickers
 - Marbles in a jar to lead to a reward
 - Praise
 - Attention
 - Special time together

Model Brave, Non-anxious Behavior

Coping Model:

- Show that we all experience fears, but work through detective thinking out loud
- Openly problem solve

Anxious or Naughty?

- Having an anxious feeling does not make verbal or physical aggression acceptable
- Look for consistency. Does your child avoid going to his room for homework, but can be there for hours on the computer?

Problem Solving Approach

- Summarize what your child says
- Ask your child what he or she can change – situation, reaction, or both
- Brainstorm how to reduce anxious feelings
- Do through each option and think about what would happen if that option was picked
- Evaluate success

Creating Social Opportunities

- Allow the chance for children to practice social skills
- Join clubs or have play dates
- There may be resistance, but start slowly and don't make avoidance an option

Check Out Some Other Resources...

