

The Worry Workshop

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- Masters Degree in Education
- 20+ years' experience as a School Leader and Development Consultant
- Mum to Will and Rose



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- 20+ years' experience advising in schools
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Anxiety is still on the rise...

Sources: YoungMinds
Guardian investigation, Aug 2024

- “Anxiety is the number one concern raised by callers to the YoungMinds parents helpline”
- In 2023-24, there were 204,526 referrals of children made to mental health services with a primary cause of anxiety - the highest level since records began

Anxiety presents itself in many different ways...

The desire to control people and events



Difficulty getting to sleep



Feeling agitated or angry



Defiance and other challenging behaviors



Having high expectations for self, including school work & sports



Avoiding activities or events (including school)

Pain like stomachaches and headaches



Struggling to pay attention and focus



Intolerance of uncertainty



Crying and difficulty managing emotions



Over-planning for situations and events



Feeling worried about situations or events

Specific

worried about a particular situation or event

- friendships - in person/online
- how I look/sound
- school work
- homework
- being poor at sports
- going to a new school
- world events

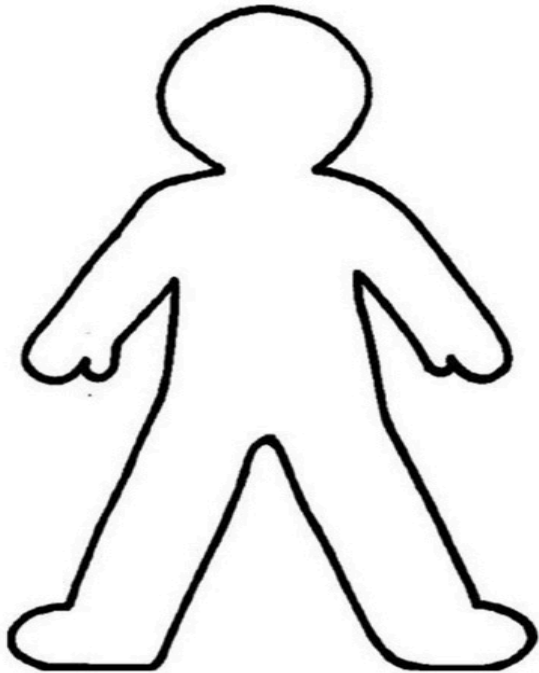
Generalised

- feelings of unease not attributable to anything specific



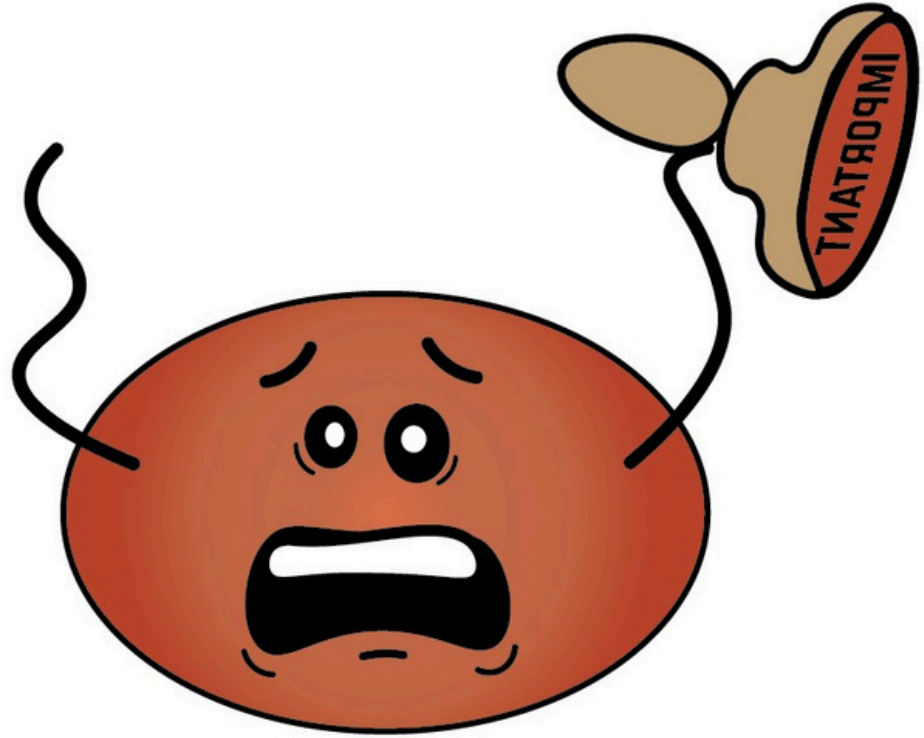


What's happening to me?



Psychoeducation: teaching children about the nature of anxiety, the 'fight or flight' response, bodily sensations etc.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rpolpKTWrp4>



amygdala

Help Miggy
feel safe!





'In the moment'

Strategies for managing anxiety



- Distraction (the brain can't do two things at once, so replace worrying thoughts with something else e.g. singing, reading, counting)

- Deep breathing:
 - 5 fingers
 - blow out the candles
 - tummy surfing teddy bear



Where is your brain?



Thinking Brain
Upstairs Brain
Ready to Learn



Yellow Zone
Caution area



Feeling Brain
Downstairs Brain
Flipping your lid

How can we help?



- Support calming breathing and self-regulation
- Listen, stay calm, be realistic but optimistic
- Normalise worry/uncertainty whilst recognising and validating emotions – anxiety is a normal reaction to not knowing

NB: Lots of children's worries are about aspects of life within the range of typical child development



Stages of Typical Child Development



Social / Emotional

Birth to 2 years old

- o Increasingly alert, responsive and interactive with people they regularly see
- o Strong bond usually develops with main caregivers – there can be jealousy if this caregiver interacts with another child
- o Cry to get their needs met
- o Enjoy simple interaction games (e.g. peek-a-boo)
- o Can be defiant and emotionally dysregulated ('tantrums') in their desire to communicate and be independent

Social / Emotional

2-7 years old

Reception &
Key Stage 1

- Increased motor and language skills lead to more exploration and the development of their own personality
- Show and verbalise an increasing range of emotions
- Are spontaneously kind and caring
- Move from playing alone and alongside other children (parallel) to playing more cooperatively
- Increasingly conversational and independent



	Social / Emotional
7-11 years old Key Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less egocentric, more empathic - more aware of others' perceptions• Increasingly independent and sociable• May complain about friendships• Developing own identity (may withdraw from some family activities/conversations)• Try to express feelings with words but not always successful

Social / Emotional

11-15 years old and into adulthood

*Puberty may start as early as 9 in boys, 8 in girls

- ∅ Puberty* leads to changes in mood, sensitivity and self-consciousness
- ∅ Strive to be independent – may start emotionally distancing from caregivers (peer group becomes increasingly influential)
- ∅ May test out new ideas, clothing styles and mannerisms while figuring out where/how to fit in
- ∅ Increasingly able to regulate their own emotions and deal with upsets BUT can also still be moody, egocentric and impulsive
- ∅ Need privacy



Social skills and friendships



- Support children to establish connections and relationships:
 - Friends outside school, playdates, sports clubs, hobbies
 - Balance use of social media alongside offline activities
- Create space where your child can raise any questions/worries
 - listen, empathise,
 - avoid rushing to judgment/taking sides/trying to fix it
 - guide your child towards their own solution (with adult support if needed)



Planning ahead: Strategies to help with social anxiety

- Reminders of school (or other settings) routines, classroom rules, social expectations
 - Playground games
 - Names of friends, teachers etc
 - Reminders/practice of key skills e.g. ‘good listening’, taking turns, sharing, empathy, etc
- Helping children with social problem solving
 - Rehearse tricky scenarios/conversations via role play with people or toys
 - Create and practise useful scripts
 - “Please can I play with you?”
 - “I’m not comfortable with that”
 - “Excuse me Miss X, can I have some help please?”



Strategies for managing separation anxiety



- Hand-over to school staff,
- transition object,
- heart symbol on your hands,
- verbal reassurance “I’ll be thinking about you doing your maths and playing with your friends whilst I’m in my meeting...I’ll be here with your snack at 3.15pm and I can’t wait to hear about...”
- manage expectations about when you’ll leave and follow through to *CAR* - stay **calm**, **assert** that you’re leaving, **reassure** that you’ll see them later





THOMAS'S DAILY SCHEDULE		
8:00 am	Morning routine	Brush teeth - Get dressed Make bed - Breakfast
9:00 am	Academics	Math - Writing Science
10:00 am	Snack time	Snack - Yoga
10:30 am	Creative time	Art - Music - Lego
12:00 pm	Lunch time	Eat - Daily Chores Free Play Outside
1:00 pm	Quiet time	Reading - Journal
2:30 pm	Academics	Educational Games Puzzles
4:00 pm	Free play	Free
5:00 pm	Evening routine	Dinner - Shower Brush teeth - Bedtime

Routines, predictability



Choices within limits

Learning from Mistakes



FAIL
[F] **FIRST**
[A] **ATTEMPT**
[I] **IN**
[L] **LEARNING**

Learning to Lose!



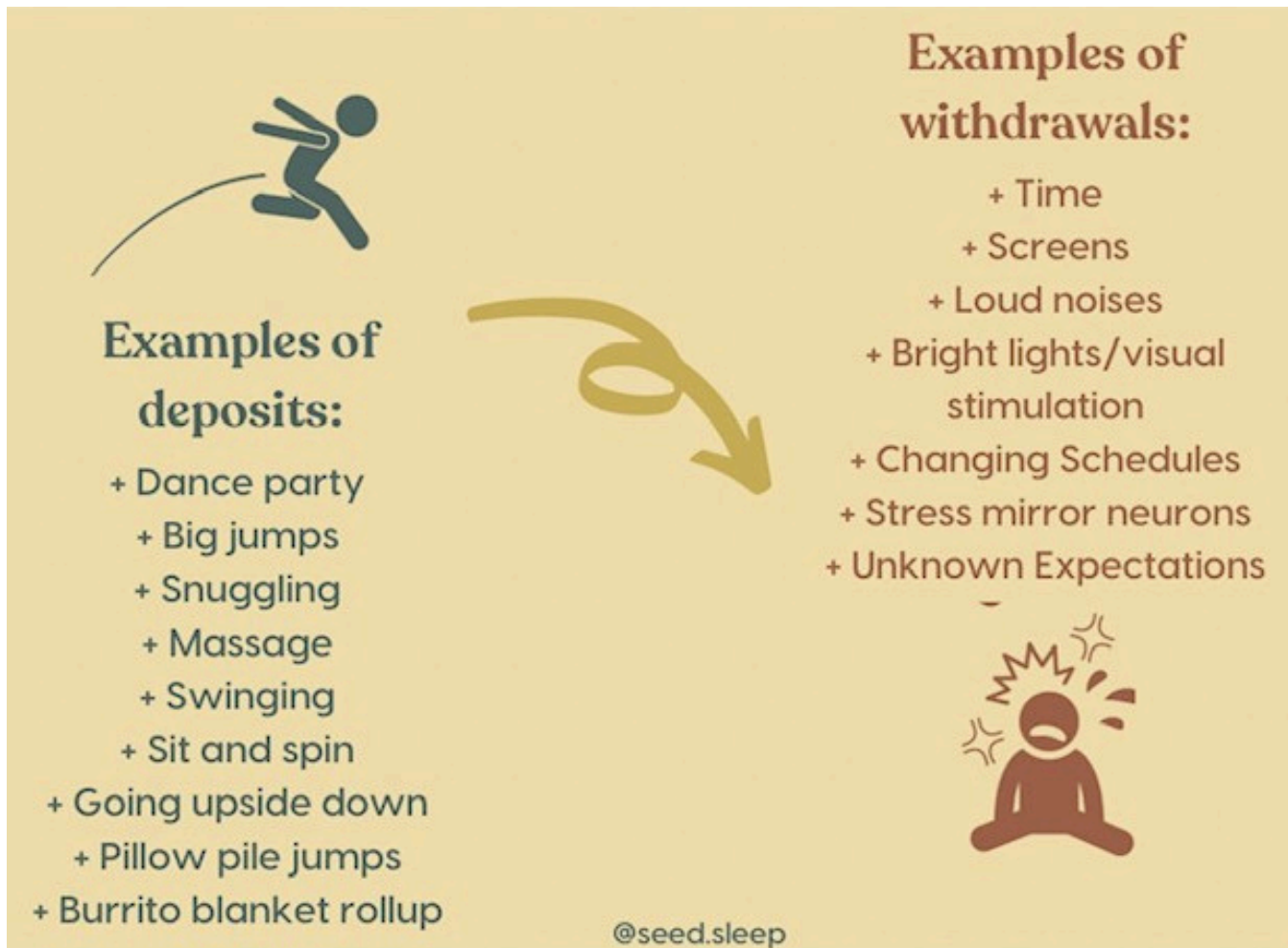


Consider experience of the 'News'

Manage use of electronic devices



Try watching *Newsround* as a starting point with your child – balanced, age-appropriate coverage.



Imagine that every child has a 'bank' for regulating the central nervous system.

Withdrawals are inevitable, so we need to make regular deposits either side of the school day.

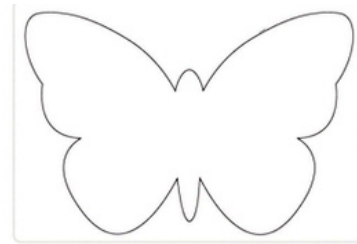
When are we more likely to make thinking errors?



When we are tired	When we feel confident	When we have had a previous upsetting experience	When we feel lonely
When we are hungry	When we feel safe	When we are getting plenty of exercise	When we are already stressed about other things

Helping with anxiety about something beyond the child's control

- Connect
- Contain
- Keep the basics going – nutrition, hydration, sleep, friends, fun
- Keep school staff in the loop to help support your child



NB: Child or parent can write down the worry. Parent could be custodian of the worry bag to relieve child of the responsibility.



What helps us to feel better?

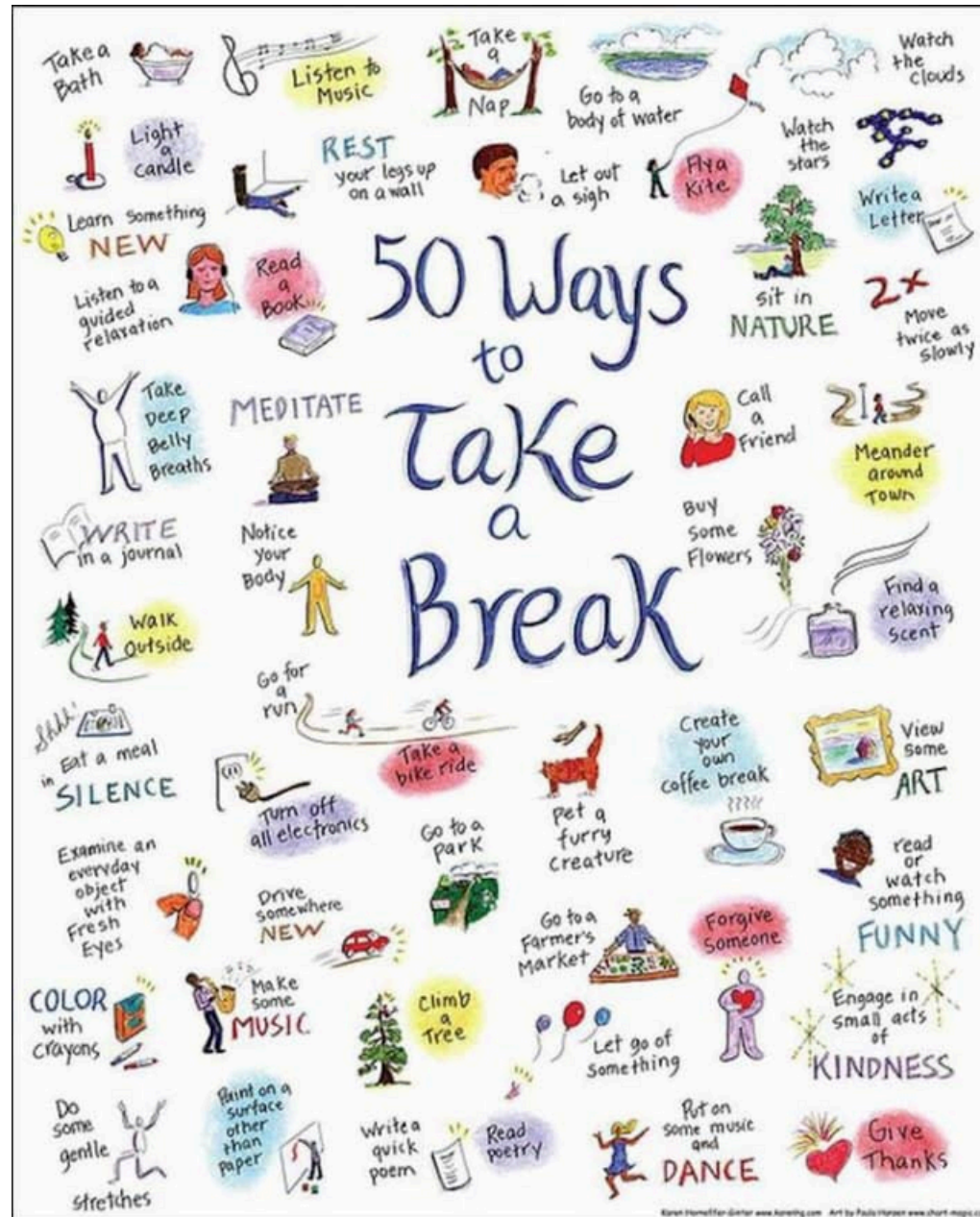


Source: My Health My School, Bramhope Primary Pupil survey, July 2022

Model Self-Care



....and healthy coping strategies



Pastoral Support at Bramhope

- **Class teachers** ongoing support in class and for parents
- **School Website** signposts range of online support and information services
- Discussion with parents and referral agreed
- Teacher or parents can complete a short form
(what are the concerns? what has been tried so far? and what are the targets?)
- **Pastoral coordinator** receives referral and arranges initial conversation with the child and phone call to parents
(Mrs Judd is pastoral coordinator)
- Children added to school pastoral register
- Aim is to offer the child appropriate support within the same half term
- Approx. 6 sessions for most children, more if required
- Discussion with parents if issues not resolving
- Working closely with Cluster Parent Support Advisor – Lisa Matheson (details available from school)
- **Referral on to TAMHs** where appropriate for individual counselling or parent support
(Targeted services which are offered through the school cluster we are part of)

Parenting Scenarios



Kayla	Millie
Sammy	Aidan
Henry	Sally



Parenting Scenarios

<p>Kayla tells you she is the only girl in her class who doesn't have a best friend. She's worried she never will.</p>	<p>Millie is in Year 5. She is already worrying about the move up to secondary school as she thinks the work will be really hard.</p>
<p>Sammy is refusing to come to school on PE days. He feels he is the worst at sports.</p>	<p>Aidan has upset Jack through a comment which he meant as 'banter'. Jack will not speak to, or play with, Aidan now.</p>
<p>Henry has just been diagnosed with dyslexia. He's worried his classmates will tease him for being different.</p>	<p>Sally is worried she won't like her lunch today and that she will be hungry all day.</p>

To learn more...

- o *Captain Snout and the Superpower Questions* by Daniel Amen
- o *Raising Resilient Children* by Sam Goldstein
- o *The Whole Brain Child* by Dr Daniel Siegel & Dr Tina Payne Bryson
- o *Think Good-Feel Good* by Paul Stallard
- o *Swiped: The School that Banned Smartphones* (Channel 4 documentary)
- o www.annafreud.org
- o <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2024>
- o www.familylives.org.uk (parenting advice on a wide range of issues)
- o www.headspace.com (Mindfulness App)
- o <https://www.relaxkids.com/calm-pack>
- o www.sleepfoundation.org
- o www.youalright.co.uk/whats-stressing-you-out/puberty-and-growing-up
- o www.youngminds.org.uk (useful website with a wealth of resources promoting emotional well being of young people)