

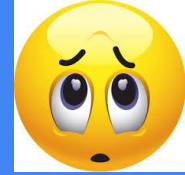
Worry Workshop

The Wellbeing Team
Croydon Hills Primary School
September 2020





Introduction



This presentation has been put together in response to parents and guardians being interested in learning more about anxiety and how to support their children who experience it.

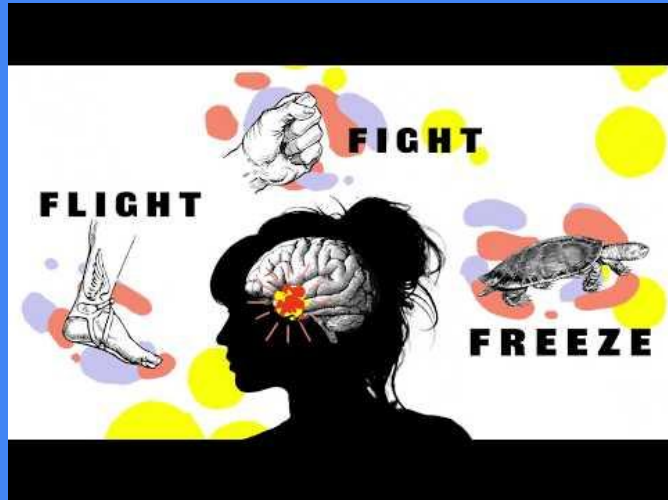
The information presented in this presentation is of a generalised nature and although from reputable sources, is not tailored to individual children.

If you deem the level of anxiety being experienced by your child as 'high' - significantly interfering with their everyday activities, please make an appointment with your GP to discuss your concerns.



Anxiety and the brain

Anxiety is a word used commonly in our everyday language. One of the most important things to remember is that a certain level of anxiety is normal, and actually helpful. Please click on the links below to learn about what happens in the brain when people feel anxious. After watching these links, and in a time of calm, you might want to watch the video on the right with your child/children.



What happens when you feel anxious?

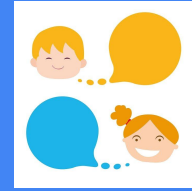
Now that you know that certain levels of anxiety are normal, take a moment to think about what anxiety feels like for you.

- What situations/thoughts make you feel anxious?
- What happens to your body when you feel anxious?
- What do people see you doing when you feel anxious?



Being able to identify anxiety is the first step in being able to do something about it. As a parent/guardian, knowing the answers to the above questions can help you to have age appropriate 'modeling' conversations with your child/children. See the next slide for what this might look like.

Talking about it



Talking about anxiety with your child in a calm and non judgemental way is so important. Just as with adults, children don't need to be told not to think something, or to 'snap out of it', they need to be listened to and understood. Below is an example of what a conversation about anxiety could look like. Note: You need to pick your timing. Trying to have a big chat about anxiety when a child is feeling highly anxious is unlikely to be effective as their prefrontal cortex ('thinking' part of the brain) is not activated.

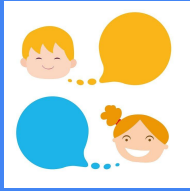
Adult - "The other day when we were leaving for school, you seemed really sad about something. What was happening for you then?"

Child - "I was sad because I didn't want to leave you."

Adult: "Why didn't you want to leave me?"

Child - "I was worried that you might have a car accident and wouldn't be able to pick me up after school."

Adult - "That is a worrying thought. Do you know why you started worrying about this?"



Talking about it cont...

Child: "I heard something on the radio about a car crash."

Adult: "I understand that hearing about someone being hurt has made you feel worried about me. When I feel worried, I find it helpful to talk about it, but I also try to come up with ideas to help me to feel less worried. Would you like to come up with some ideas together about what you can do and what I can do when you feel worried?"

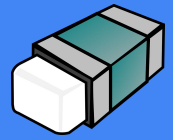
As you will note, this example involves:

- Listening to your child without judging or giving your opinion
- Validating what the child is saying by acknowledging that it must feel 'hard'
- Normalising 'worry' by acknowledging that you sometimes feel worried
- Sending a message to your child that they can do something about it
- Assuring the child that you will support them

It is important to be age appropriate when explaining such things as car accidents etc. It is also ok not to have all of the answers and to say 'I don't know'



'Thinking mistakes'



A few years ago, 'Behind the News' filmed a 'Worry Workshop'. This highlighted the four main ways that our brain makes 'thinking mistakes'. Sometimes having an external focus with your child can help create conversations. Click [here](#) to watch.

After watching this yourself, please watch this with your child.

Afterwards you could do a number of things including:

- Asking your child if they have any of the same worries that they saw other children talking about
- Asking your child if they have different worries
- Asking your child what their worries sound like, feel like and look like
- Identifying any similar feelings that you have when you are worried and sharing them with your child. Make sure to be age appropriate
- Making a 'Worry machine'
- Talking with your child about the four thinking mistakes and helping them to identify which one their brain sometimes makes.
- Coming up with a plan together of what you can both do next time 'thinking mistakes' happen.

General ideas on how to address worries - These are just a few!

Worry time - This can be done a number of ways, but generally involves:

- Talking with your child and coming up with a time of day that will be allocated to 'worrying'.
- Setting a timer (5mins to ½ hr depending on age)
- Giving your child space to write down/draw their worries on single sheets of paper and putting them in a jar/box. Some children may want to use a 'Worry journal' instead. There are also Worry time apps - See Resource list
- Asking your child if they want to talk about any of their worries with you.
- Keeping the worries or ceremonially doing something with them like ripping them up and throwing them into the bin.



General ideas on how to address worries - These are just a few!

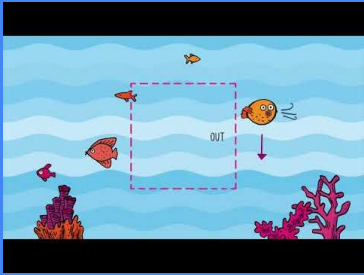
Deep breathing is a key strategy in lowering anxiety levels. It not only requires us to focus on what we are doing, hence distracts us from what we are worried about, but it also significantly lowers cortisol levels (the stress hormone in our body). Click [here](#) to read more about the benefits of deep breathing.

There are many different deep breathing techniques. Some children try one technique and decide that it doesn't work. Deep breathing is an 'art'. It takes time and practise. Doing this with your child in fun, 'low stress' times will help them to feel more confident to do it when they are anxious. See the next slide for some breathing videos.

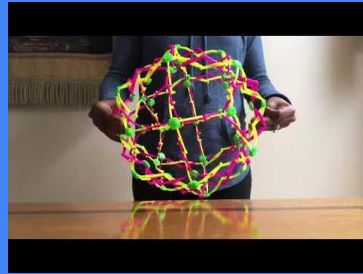


Deep Breathing

Square Breathing



Hoverban sphere breathing
The Reject Shop sells them



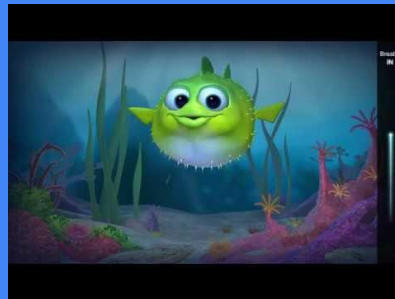
Rainbow breathing



4, 7, 8 Breathing



Belly breathing



Green Sea turtle guided meditation



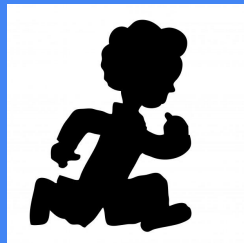
Exercise and Healthy Eating

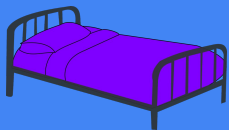
“Exercise relieves tension and stress, boosts physical and mental energy and enhances well being by releasing endorphins”

(Robinson.L, Segal. J, Smith.M (2019), ‘The Mental Health Benefits of Exercise’, Helpguide, <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/healthy-living/the-mental-health-benefits-of-exercise.htm#:~:text=Exercise%20is%20a%20natural%20and,attention%20instead%20of%20zoning%20out>. Accessed 11/9/2020)

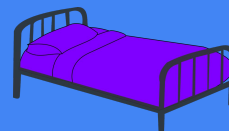
Click this [link](#) for more information related to children and exercise.

Healthy eating is also helpful for anyone in relation to their physical and mental health. Click on this [link](#) that will take you to the Australian Dietary Guidelines brochure.



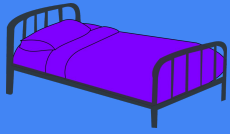


Sleep

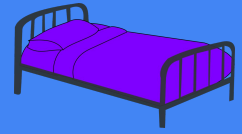


Most people know that sleep is important in helping everyone, not just children, have energy and generally cope better with life. The challenge is that a lot of children experiencing worries or anxiety, also struggle to sleep. Here are some things that you and your child can do to support them to fall asleep.

1. If you don't have one already, set up a bedtime routine. Creating a visual chart with your child will help them to focus and give you something to refer them to when they ask you for the 10th time, what they need to do next! Aside from the obvious tasks of getting into pajamas, brushing teeth etc, the chart can also include things like having a glass of milk or water, listening to calming music for 5 minutes, reading a story etc.
2. Allow time to support your child to go to sleep. This is sometimes hard when you have had a long day, but putting the time in at their bedtime, will eventually result in them sleeping, allowing you some more 'downtime' at night.
3. If your child expresses worries about going to sleep, set a timer and tell them that they can talk about their worries with you until the timer goes off. Talking about them may also involve you encouraging them to say their worries in a funny voice (helping them to disconnect the negative emotion from the thought) and assuring them that they are safe and that you are looking after them. It is important not to dismiss their worries as for them they are very real.
4. Ensure that your child is off a screen at least one hour before bed. To learn more about screen time and sleep, click [here](#).



Sleep cont...



5. Help your child to relax. This can involve deep breathing, muscle relaxation, listening to calming sounds, positive imagery (Where they imagine a 'happy place'). It may also involve you holding their hand for 5 minutes and maybe even drawing small circles on their hand with your finger. This can distract them, but also help them to focus on the pattern.

6. Other ideas:

- A weighted blanket for their bed. These are available online. The weight is dependent on the weight of your child so make sure that you purchase the correct one.
- A nightlight or lava lamp
- Commit to 'coming back' every 5-10 mins to check on them
- A soft toy to cuddle (you can explain to your child that they can transfer their worries to their soft toy)
- Reading a fun story for 10 minutes before they go to sleep
- A 'Worry journal' to write or draw their worries before going to sleep

Some of the above ideas were adapted from 'Bedtime problems - children' (2018) Royal Children's Hospital, https://www.rch.org.au/kidsinfo/fact_sheets/Bedtime_problems/#talk-about-it Accessed 16/9/2020

COVID-19 Anxiety

There are a number of resources available aimed at helping you support your children if they are feeling anxious about COVID-19. Here are just a few:

Black Dog Institute - [Click here](#)

Kids Helpline Resources - These are excellent! [Click here](#)

Dr Jodi Richardson - [Click here](#)

'My Hero is You' - Storybook

[Click here](#) to hear it read. You could even watch it with your child if you would like to.

A basic Coronavirus Social Story - [Click here](#)

Information on other types of anxiety

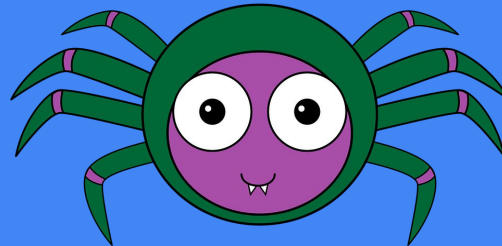
Performance anxiety - [Click here](#)

Back to School/First day of school anxiety - [Click here](#)

Separation anxiety - [Click here](#) and [here](#)

Social anxiety - [Click here](#) and [here](#)

Phobias - [Click here](#)





Resource List



Apps for managing anxiety

<https://www.sourcekids.com.au/apps-to-help-children-manage-their-anxiety-d1/>

Belly breathing song - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c646TZ_E18A

Beyond Blue - Anxiety management strategies

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/anxiety/treatments-for-anxiety/anxiety-management-strategies>

Brain Hack video re how the brain works

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=8&v=LB0NLJjVYJo&feature=emb_logo

Government Mental Health website - <https://headtohealth.gov.au/>

Kids Helpline- <https://kidshelpline.com.au/kids> - Excellent Website to help children aged 5-12

Ten Apps for anxiety - Kidspot

<https://www.kidspot.com.au/health/family-health/mums-health/the-10-best-apps-for-anxiety/news-story/ac3823961cc5a8f4d69f2323dcf5c351>

Worrytime App - <https://au.reachout.com/tools-and-apps/reachout-worrytime>

Thank you

We hope that you have learnt more about anxiety and feel confident to try some of the strategies referred to throughout the presentation. As mentioned at the beginning, if you have significant concerns for the mental health of your children. please consult medical professionals.

Please feel free to contact us julie.reid2@education.vic.gov.au if you would like more resources, or feel that your children need extra support to manage their anxiety.

