

# **ADHD and Anxiety**

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# Agenda

- Reasons why CYP with ADHD experience anxiety
- Ways in which anxiety can be communicated
- Methods of addressing anxiety in CYP with ADHD

# Recap – ADHD Criteria

## DSM – 5 (2013)

- A persistent pattern of inattention **and/or** hyperactivity-impulsivity that interferes with functioning or development, as characterised by at least 6 out of 9 inattention symptoms and /or at least 6 out of 9 hyperactivity and impulsivity symptoms (CYP)
- Several inattentive **or** hyperactive-impulsive symptoms were present prior to age 12 years.
- Several inattentive **or** hyperactive-impulsive symptoms are present in two or more settings (e.g. home and school).
- There is clear evidence that the symptoms interfere with, or reduce, the quality of social, academic, or every day functioning. (Also, in NICE guidelines 2018)
- The symptoms.... are not better explained by another mental disorder (e.g. mood disorder, anxiety disorder).

# Recognising ADHD in Learning Environments

Attention	Disorganized / Forgetful	Restless	Impulsive	Work Habits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Easily distracted</li><li>• Tunes out of lessons</li><li>• Daydreams</li><li>• Trouble staying in seat</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Forgets to take books home</li><li>• Forgets assignments or forgets to turn them in</li><li>• Loses homework, pencils, etc.</li><li>• Messy desk, backpack, papers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Fidgets</li><li>• Fiddles with nearby objects</li><li>• Trouble waiting, taking turns</li><li>• Trouble staying in seat</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Talks excessively, blurts out or interrupts</li><li>• May disrupt class</li><li>• Trouble following rules</li><li>• Careless errors</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trouble starting/finishing work</li><li>• Incomplete, late, or missing assignments</li><li>• Trouble following rules</li><li>• Doesn't follow instructions</li><li>• Easily frustrated</li></ul>

# DSM-V Symptoms of Inattention

- Has decreased attention to detail, makes careless mistakes
  - Has difficulty sustaining attention in tasks
  - Does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
  - Does not follow through on instructions
  - Has difficulty organising tasks and activities
  - Avoids tasks that require sustained mental effort
  - Loses things
  - Is easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
  - Forgetful in daily activities
- \*Nine inattentive symptoms



# DSM-V Symptoms of Impulsive/Hyperactivity

- Fidgets with hands/feet, squirms in seat
- Leaves seat when remaining seated is expected
- Runs about or climbs excessively; restlessness
- Unable to engage in leisure activities quietly
- On the go, as if driven by a motor
- Talks excessively
- Blurts out answers before question has been completed
- Difficulty awaiting turn
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others

\*Nine hyperactive/impulsive symptoms





# What is Anxiety?

- Anxiety is a normal emotion. It's the brain's way of reacting to stress and alerting individuals to potential danger ahead.
- It's normal to feel anxious, worried or fearful in certain situations.
- These feelings are our bodies natural 'fight or flight response' to a perceived dangerous or risky situation.
- However if continuous feelings of anxiety impact ability to carry out life as normal, excessive anxiety can make individuals avoid school, family get-togethers, and other social situations that might trigger or worsen their symptoms.





# ADHD and the Brain

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rfcdx3qm77M>

## How ADHD affects the brain

### 1 Prefrontal Cortex

Functions as an intersection for attention, behavior and emotional responses. For people with ADHD, attention is switched easily.

### 3 Basal Ganglia

Neural circuit system that regulates communication within the brain. In the ADHD brain, a "short-circuit" can cause inattention or impulsivity.

### 2 Limbic System

Regulates emotions. Deficiency of dopamine in the ADHD limbic system may result in restlessness, inattention or emotional volatility.

### 4 Reticular Activating System

The major relay system between the brain's pathways. A dopamine deficiency may cause impulsivity and hyperactivity.



# Traumatic Stress and the Brain

- Toxic levels of stress hormones rewire brain connections and over time can cause neuronal cell death, especially in the prefrontal cortex and limbic systems

## BRAIN LEARNING CENTERS

### PREFRONTAL CORTEX

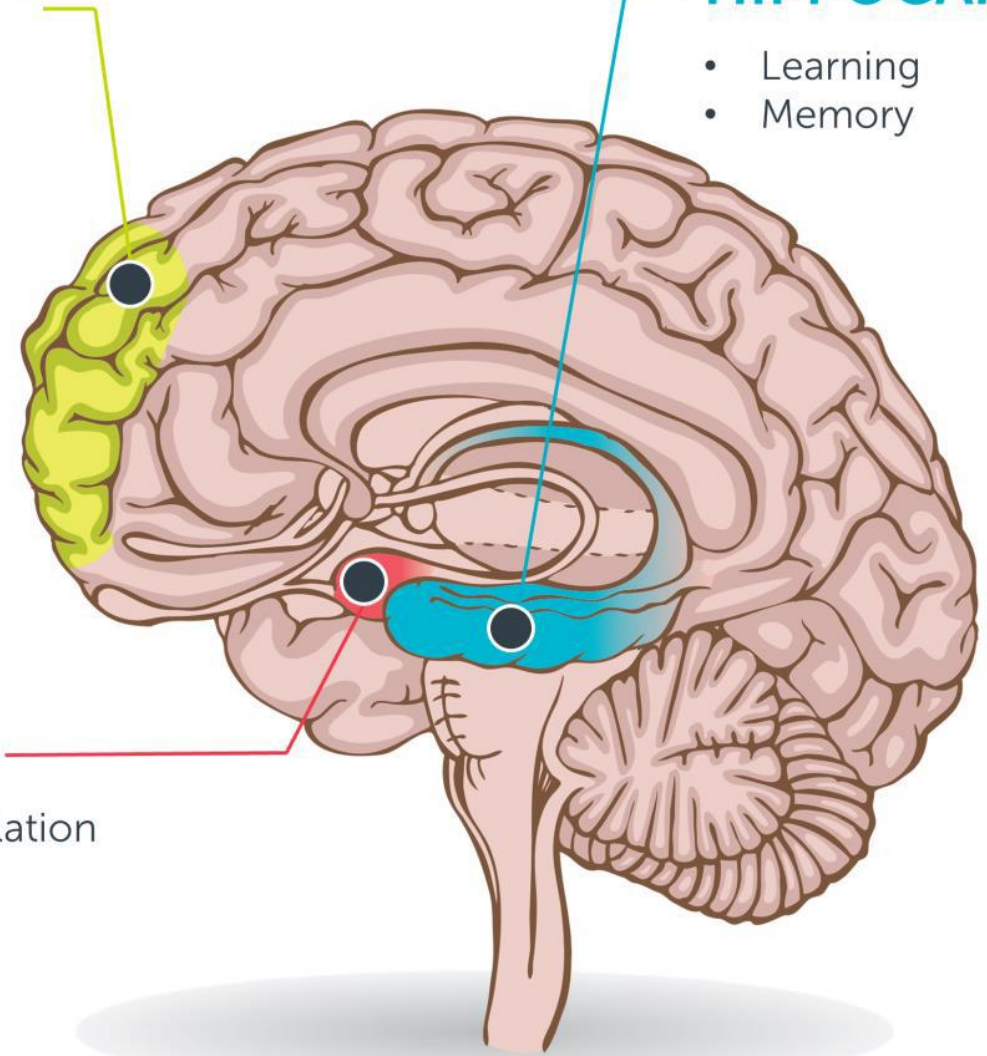
- Executive Function
- Self-Regulation
- Attention

### HIPPOCAMPUS

- Learning
- Memory

### AMYGDALA

- Emotional Regulation
- Reactivity



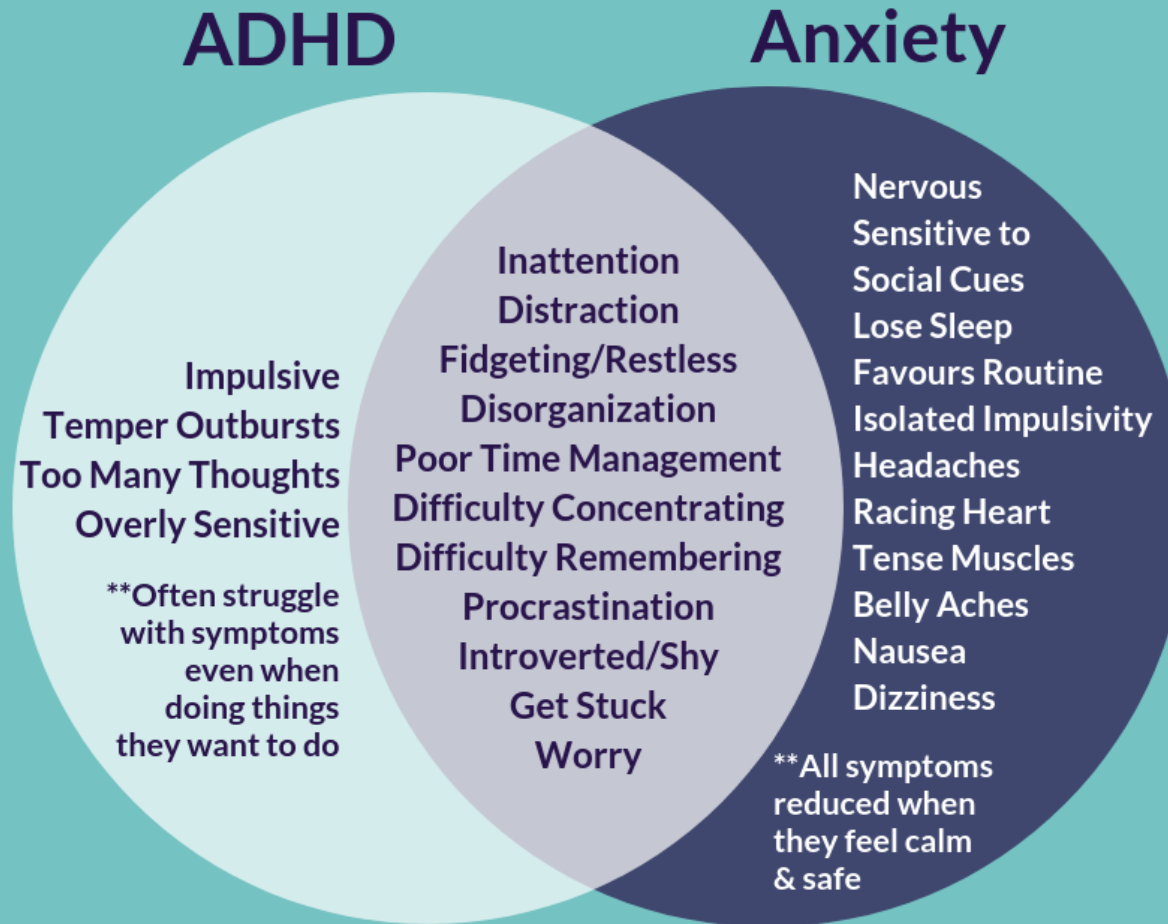
# Reasons why CYP with ADHD struggle with anxiety

- Higher stress levels
- Low self-esteem
- Difficulty following daily routines
- Difficulty completing tasks
- Emotional dysregulation



Task: Think about what a worry feels like

# ADHD versus Anxiety in Kids



www.sarahhardywalsh.com

# Signs of Anxiety

## 3-10 Years of Age



**Not Sleeping Through the Night or Having Nightmares**



**Not Eating Properly**



**Difficult Separating from Caregiver**



**Physical Symptoms:  
Headache and  
Abdominal Pain**



**Nicklaus  
Children's  
Hospital**



**Irritability**



**Crying Frequently**



**Hyperactivity**

## 8 WAYS A CHILD'S ANXIETY SHOWS UP AS SOMETHING ELSE

### 1. Anger

The perception of danger, stress or opposition is enough to trigger the fight or flight response leaving your child angry and without a way to communicate why.



Chandeliering is when a seemingly calm person suddenly flies off the handle for no reason. They have pushed hurt and anxiety so deep for so long that a seemingly innocent comment or event suddenly sends them straight through the chandelier.

### 4. Chandeliering



### 2. Difficulty Sleeping

In children, having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep is one of the hallmark characteristics of anxiety.



### 5. Lack of Focus

Children with anxiety are often so caught up in their own thoughts that they do not pay attention to what is going on around them.



### 6. Avoidance

Children who are trying to avoid a particular person, place or task often end up experiencing more of whatever it is they are avoiding.

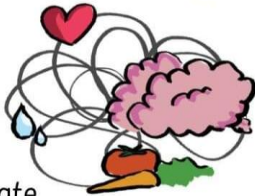


### 7. Negativity

People with anxiety tend to experience negative thoughts at a much greater intensity than positive ones.

### 3. Defiance

Unable to communicate what is really going on, it is easy to interpret the child's defiance as a lack of discipline instead of an attempt to control a situation where they feel anxious and helpless.



### 8. Overplanning

Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.



Further symptoms of anxiety in children with ADHD:

- Withdrawing from peers
- School refusal
- Being disruptive or clowning around in school
- Hair twirling, skin picking, or other anxious behaviours

# Anxiety

## FULL SPECTRUM OF ANXIETY



# Adversity and Adult Support

When confronted with adversity:

- Adrenaline releases fight or flight response
- When stress response systems are activated in children in the context of supportive adult relationships, these physiological effects are buffered.





## DIFFERENT WAYS MY BODY REACTS TO MY FEELINGS



# Environmental Modifications

- Operate on your child's time: Twice as much time, half as much done.
- Avoid rushing
- Monitor demands
- Establish routine
- Prepare for change to routine
- Break tasks down into smaller steps
- Provide ongoing feedback
- Check in on a regular basis

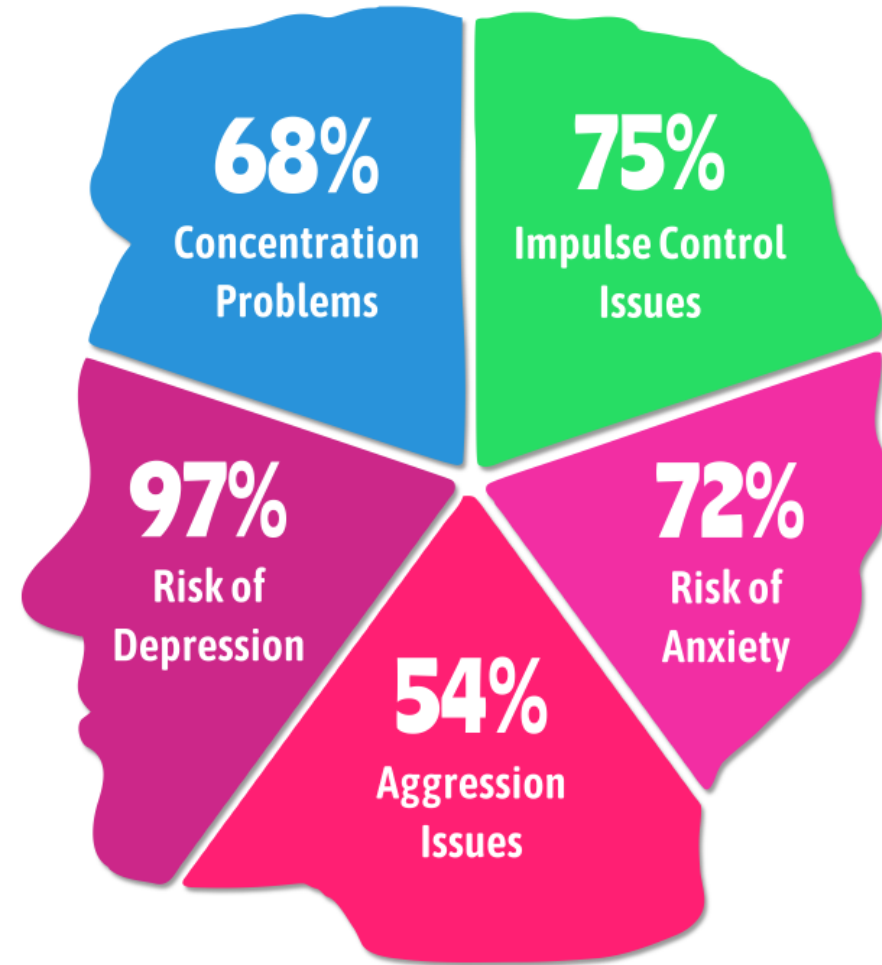
Instead of saying...	Say or do this instead...
Do your homework.	Pick up 10 items of clothing from the floor.
Tidy up your bedroom.	Answer questions 1 and 2 from your maths book.

**Anxiety and  
sleeplessness  
usually go  
together!**

**One feeds the  
other.**

**Its Official - 58% Of Children  
Are Not Getting Enough Sleep**

These children are at a greater risk of experiencing mental health issues.  
Even mild sleep deprivation can result in the following increases:



# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU SLEEP



- Often a poor sleep cycle – too little, too much, startled reaction during sleep.
- Less sleep a night than their peers.
- Good sleep is **essential** for emotional stability.

# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T SLEEP



# Visualisation

**Think** of a happy time or place when you were having fun. Try to remember all the very small things of that special memory:

- What were you wearing?
- How did the air smell?
- What could you hear?
- What did you see?

***“Thinking of good memories makes us feel really good inside and if you practice, soon just thinking of happy times will make you actually feel that way.”***

# Positive Thoughts

Identify  
negative  
thoughts  
and change  
them into  
positive  
thoughts

This is hard for me, but I have learned strategies to help me.

I can't do it yet. I'll keep trying!

I will find someone to talk to.

I will try my best! If I don't win, it's ok!

I will finish. It might take a while. I will take a break and ask for help.

This is hard, but I have done hard things in the past. I did well!

This isn't my best subject, but I'm smart at many things!

I read books that are right for me.  
I read at a pace that is right for me.

# Calm Thinking

- What am I worried about?
- Why does it worry me?
- What are the chances it will happen?
- What proof do I have that it will happen?
- What else could happen?
- So what if it happens?
- Can I be absolutely sure it won't happen?
- How could I handle it if it happened?



# Calming words



- Breathe in while you say to yourself "I feel calm"
- Breathe out while you say to yourself "I let go of stress"
- Breathe in while you say to yourself "Feel calm"
- Breathe out and say to yourself "Let go of stress"

# Naming Anxiety

- Labelling anxiety (or other feelings). Practice identifying feelings and facial expressions.
- Take turns with your child, pointing to faces that look “Mad,” “Excited,” “Sad,” or “Worried,” and describing a time when each of you experienced such a feeling. This exercise reminds children that adults have different types of feelings, too, and that they learn to manage them.
- Ask your child to draw a picture of what his/her bad feelings look like, and give a form to his/her anxiety. Having an image of the “monster” makes it easier to fight it off.
- Resources - [childtherapytoys.com](http://childtherapytoys.com)

# Chase away bad feelings

*Relaxation, breathing techniques, and visual imagery can help kids fight off depression and anxiety. Practice these in the evenings (they'll also help your child unwind before bedtime). Once he's mastered a calming technique, he can use it to stop a bad feeling in its tracks.*

- **Relax:** Have your child lie down and focus on and relax one body part at a time - hands, arms, chest-until their entire body is calm and anxious feelings have been crowded out.
- **Visualise:** Ask your child to think about happy times or a good feeling; e.g. “being licked by a his/her pet puppy.” If your child is fearful of a particular situation, such as a test, s/he should picture him/herself successfully completing the test.

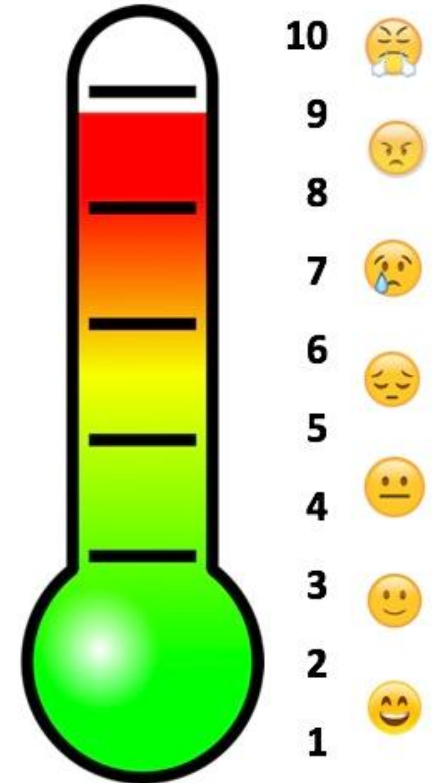
# Monitoring

- Sports watches - really good to monitor heart rate; a good concrete way of detecting signs of agitation e.g. through a fit bit.
- Looking at peaks on a graph. Good evidence to show (the school) that the child is more agitated throughout the day than their face, body language or speech indicates.
- Anxiety and agitation could be suppressed so much at school, it is violently released at home.

# Feelings Thermometer

- Identifies early cues and triggers.
- Touch the point that represents the depth of yourr feelin the thermometer)
- A thermometer helps with rating difficulties. If can't say word, ask them to tell you the number.
- Appropriate voice e.g. count to 10 using a happy./sad/an voice. Way to teach how to pick up emotion in self or others.

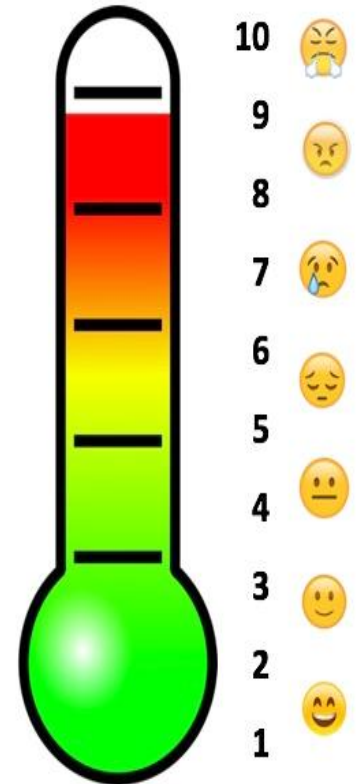
FEELINGS THERMOMETER



## Structure, emotions and cues

- Ask how happy/sad/angry were you at different times of the day. The YP chooses the appropriate face to indicate on the timeline, and explain why.
- The YP chooses which face to put at the specific time on the timeline and explains why: e.g. Which face do you choose at 10 am? etc

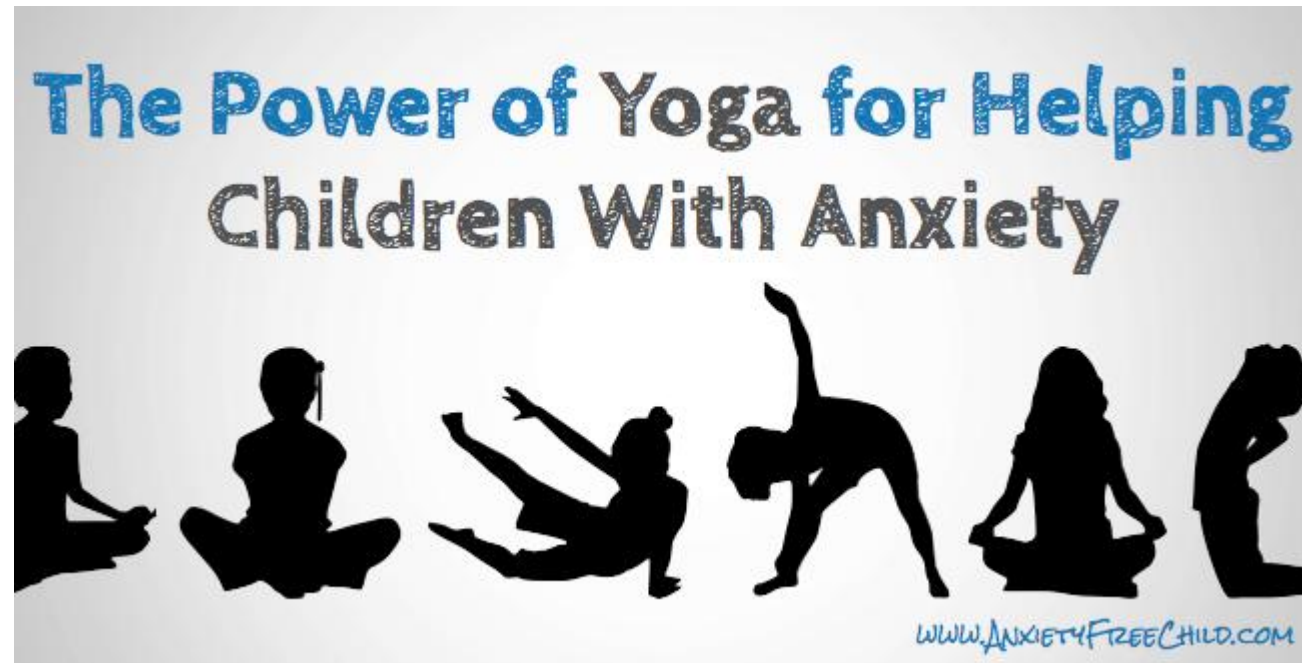
FEELINGS THERMOMETER



# Awareness Tools - Yoga

- Mindfulness, meditation, yoga, etc.
- Yoga encourages individuals to be aware of their body.
- Sometimes only 20 mins a day can help behaviour and concentration.

*Anxietyfreechild.com*



## **Physical Activity Tools for the Quick Release of Emotional Energy**

- Physical exercise as a regular part of their day. E.g. dancing in the bedroom to release tension; “running keeps anxiety away”. Leads to regular release of emotional energy.

## **Relaxation Tools**

- Drawing relaxes.
- An effective tool is walking in nature – thoughts slow down



## Vocalise how to manage emotions

- Talk aloud what you're thinking, to model what is desirable.
- ... Stay calm..., seek help, be flexible in thinking ('Let's try it another way').

## Thinking Tools

- Create thought cards; e.g. I can be brave. etc
- Place on their phone /noticeboard/ bedroom Wall.



# Turning Over a New Leaf

- Write a word on each of three leaf pictures of something that makes you feel anxious; you can draw it if you prefer.
- Turn the leaves over and write on the other sides, a way that you would like each one to change.
- Choose one of the 3 as the most important
- Draw a new leaf picture of how you can achieve it.
- Create a leaf Mandala.





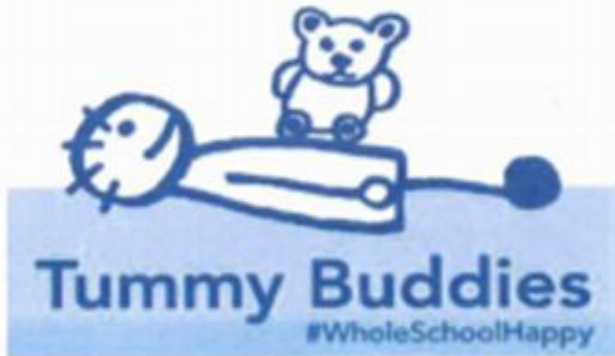
# Relaxation and Deep Breathing

When our children's minds are tense, their bodies are tense, too. Relaxing their bodies will help them relax their mind.

## ***Relaxation:***

- Is a skill
- Pick the right time
- Make the time
- Create a habit
- Create a relaxing environment
- Make it fun
- Keep it simple and short.

# Tummy Buddies breathing exercise



1. Choose a soft toy that you can balance on your tummy and ask your teacher to put on some gentle music
2. Take your shoes off and lie down so you are comfortable
3. Put the toy on your belly

4. Breathe in: While your teacher counts to three, breathe in through your nose so your tummy gets big and your toy goes up in the air.

5. Breathe out: While your teacher counts to 4 breath out through your mouth so your tummy sinks and your toy sinks down.

6. Repeat this 10 times, can you rock your tummy buddy to sleep so they feel completely safe, calm and relaxed?



# Balloon Breathing Exercise







Have the child/children sit in comfortable chairs or lie down on the floor. Instruct them to take a deep breath in and hold it for 3 seconds, then exhale slowly. Breathe in counting to three and then out, counting to three.

Repeat several times. When deep breathing, it's important to breathe with the diaphragm so you may like to tell children to place their hand on their tummy. When breathing in, their tummy should expand and then contract when breathing out. You can get them to pretend they have a balloon in their stomach which they are trying to fill with air and then try to push all the air out, so the balloon goes limp.



# 3 comforting thoughts & Calming down visual support



	Sit on chair
	Feet on floor
	Fold hands
	Take 3 deep breaths
	Count to 10
	Good work

# Problem Solving Skills - Adolescents

What is the problem? : \_\_\_\_\_

What are all the things I can do to handle it?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What will happen if I do each of those things?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

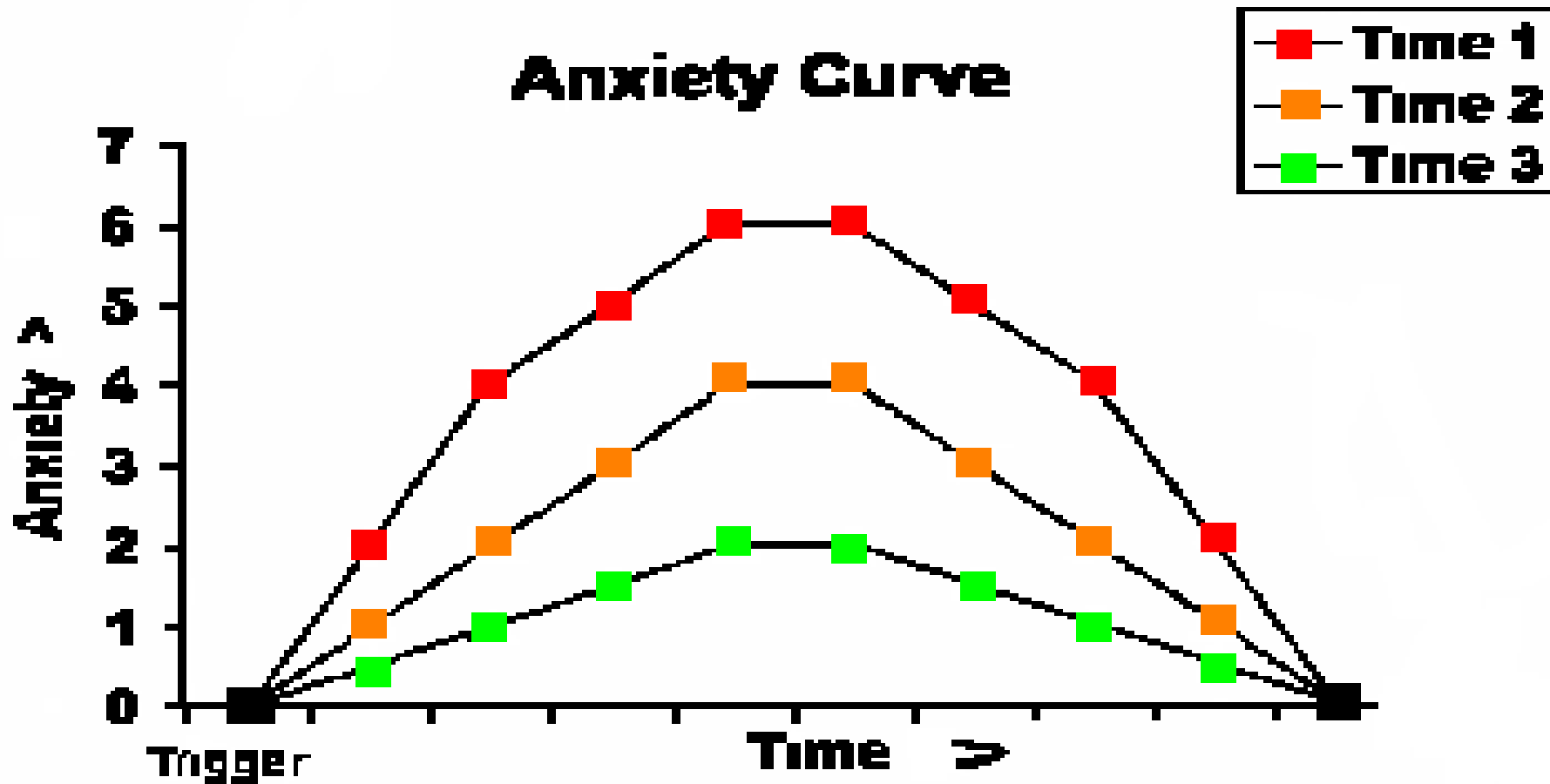
Which way of handling it is the best?

Now that I have tried it, how did I do?

Can I do anything differently next time?



# Exposure



# Exposure

## Create an Exposure Ladder

- Role play, rehearse, strategy, rewards. When achieved, start on the next rung of the ladder.
- Once a specific behaviour has been managed with the use of a reward, continue to reward its successful completion for at least 2-3 weeks thereafter.

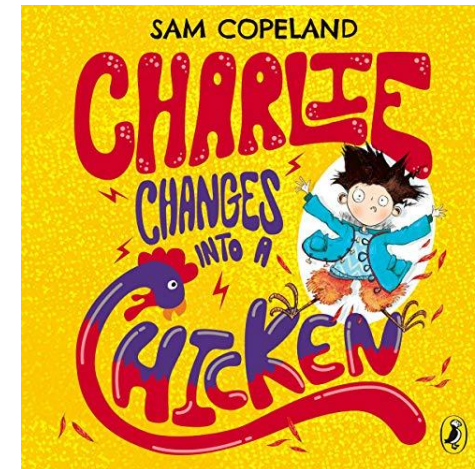


- Graded exposure to little things first.
- Start with a situation that causes the least anxiety
- Then gradually increase exposure to situations that cause more anxiety.
- Practice
- Praise
- Rewards



# Children's Books on Anxiety

- <https://e2epublishing.info/blog/10-best-books-anxiety>  
Ten fantastic books to help children understand, manage and overcome anxiety, worry and stress, providing lessons and coping strategies through story that will stay with them as they grow
- Charlie Changes into a Chicken by Sam Copeland
- All Birds Have Anxiety - Kathy Hoopmann;
- Huge Bag of Worries – Virginia Ironside.
- How Are You Peeling – Saxton Freymann (2004)



**Stress Reduction Strategies**

**Recognising Anxiety**

**ADHD FOUNDATION**  
Mental Health, Education and Training Services

The infographic is divided into two main sections. The left section, titled 'Recognising Anxiety', features a blue silhouette of a head with a brain made of tangled orange lines. Surrounding it are 18 circular icons representing various symptoms: a lightning bolt for panic attacks, a fish with a question mark for memory issues, a bomb for constant worrying, a blue circle with a slash for insomnia, a blue circle with two water drops for sweating, a thumbs up for needing reassurance, a head with a lightning bolt for headaches, a flame for overthinking, a heart with a pulse line for rapid heartbeat, a pair of lungs for trouble breathing, a person running away from a door for avoidance, a stomach for stomach issues, a target for trouble concentrating, a foot for lack of patience, and a dove for procrastination. The right section, titled 'Stress Reduction Strategies', features an orange silhouette of a head with a brain made of blue crosses. Surrounding it are 12 circular icons representing various strategies: a person with a ball for hobbies, a person in a meditative pose for meditation, a person with a hand on their forehead for mindfulness, a person stretching for progressive muscle, a person climbing stairs for life coaching, a person sitting on a massage table for massage, a person breathing into a cupped hand for deep breathing, a person running for physical exercise, a person sitting at a desk for cognitive behavioural therapy, two people talking for counselling, and a person writing in a notebook for journal writing.

## To summarise:

- Anxiety is associated with ADHD – 40% CYP with ADHD;
- Neurodevelopmental condition and consequences;
- Some overlap between symptoms ADHD and anxiety, but each has distinct features;
- Anxiety is communicated in a variety of ways;
- Methods of managing anxiety.