OVERCOMING YOUR CHILD’S FEARS AND WORRIES – GUIDANCE FOR PARENTS

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What is the Overcoming approach?

- Parent led CBT
- Gold-standard treatment
- Method of delivery: individual (8 sessions), group treatment (6 sessions) or signposted as self-help.

Where can I get it?
- AnDY clinic
- Local CAMHS

Treatment of child anxiety disorders via guided parent-delivered cognitive–behavioural therapy: randomised controlled trial

Kerstin Thirlwall, Peter J. Cooper, Jessica Karalus, Merryn Voysey, Lucy Willetts and Cathy Creswell
Key strategies

- Understanding anxiety
- Goal setting
- Challenging thoughts
- Problem solving
- Facing fears gradually
- Modifying how you respond
UNDERSTANDING CHILDHOOD ANXIETY PROBLEMS
WHAT IS ANXIETY – WHEN DOES IT BECOME A PROBLEM?

• Anxiety is a normal emotion - It can be helpful and enhance performance

• Anxiety becomes a problem when it’s excessive and interferes with a child’s everyday life – around 1 in 20 children have significant anxiety problems.
WHAT ARE COMMON ANXieties EXPERIENCED BY CHILDREN?

- **Specific phobias:** Fear of particular place, object or situation
- **Social anxiety:** Fear of doing something embarrassing in front of others
- **Generalized anxiety:** Excessive worrying and difficulty controlling worrying
- **Separation anxiety:** Extreme difficulty to be away from a parent / carer
- **Panic Disorder:** Intense feelings of anxiety and unpleasant physical symptoms
- **PTSD and OCD**
WHAT KEEPS CHILDREN’S ANXIETY GOING?
WHAT KEEPS CHILDREN’S ANXIETY GOING?

• Although it can be helpful to understand the causes (e.g. genes, critical life events) of your child’s anxiety it is much more important to understand what is keeping their anxiety going.

If a car gets stuck in mud, part of the problem was the route it took, but what is needed now is to sort out what is stopping the car moving on.
WHAT KEEPS CHILDREN’S ANXIETY GOING?

Anxious thinking  Bodily symptoms  Anxious behaviour
ANXIOUS THINKING

I won’t be able to speak…everyone will just laugh at me and think I am stupid
BODILY SYMPTOMS

• If child interprets bodily symptoms as a sign that something bad is happening and/or too uncomfortable to bear – they will feel more anxious and less confident that they will/can deal with the threat.
ANXIOUS BEHAVIOUR

• **Avoidance**
  - By not facing their fears a child does (i) not discover whether it is really as bad as they think or (ii) learn to cope with it

• **Safety behaviours**
  - Prevent the child from testing out their fears and learning something new
PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Situation
John is due to give a presentation in school

Anxious thoughts

Anxious Behaviour

Bodily symptoms

LIMITLESS POTENTIAL | LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITIES | LIMITLESS IMPACT
FACING FEARS - STEP PLAN
WHY SET GOALS?

- Goals help create a focus for you and your child.
- It is important to develop realistic and achievable goals.

**Not a SMART goal:**
“For my child to be less anxious sleeping over at other people’s houses”

**A SMART goal:**
“For my child to be able to go to a sleepover at their best friend’s house in the Easter holidays.”
HOW TO DO A STEP PLAN?

• All steps should relate to the ultimate goal
• Rate each step in terms of how anxious you think it will make your child feel
• Order the steps from least anxiety-provoking to most anxiety-provoking – finishing with the ultimate goal

AGREE A REWARD FOR EACH STEP
PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

• Confirm with your child which step they will first try (and their reward)

  Note: the first step must be achievable – something they have already done and relate to the ultimate goal

• Praise any attempts at conquering the step
• Repeat each step until your child feels comfortable
• If necessary, break a step down into smaller steps
• Look out for safety behaviours (e.g. avoidance)
PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

1. Praise and rewards

THINGS TO SAY TO MY CHILD:

2. How anxious does my child feel doing each step

THINGS TO DO WITH MY CHILD:

3. Step-plan

OTHER THINGS MY CHILD WOULD ENJOY:

GOAL | HELPFUL THOUGHT | REWARD
---|---|---
10 (ULTIMATE GOAL) | | |
9 | | |
8 | | |
7 | | |
6 | | |
5 | | |
4 | | |
3 | | |
2 | | |
1 (EASIEST STEP) | | |
## STEP-PLAN: TROUBLESHOOTING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Possible solution</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child was too anxious</td>
<td>- Acknowledge how hard it is for your child to face fears</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Help child challenge anxious thoughts about step</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Break down into smaller steps</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child refuses to do the step</td>
<td>- Change reward to increase motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Make sure it is not too anxiety provoking</td>
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<td>- Break down into smaller steps</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Give child choice of which step to try first</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child gets distressed whilst doing a step</td>
<td>- Acknowledge their distress and encourage them to keep going</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Say: “I know you can do this, remember how you did x, you can do this”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Get them to think how they will feel afterwards</td>
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<td>Child refused to do step more than once</td>
<td>- Give additional reward for repeated attempts</td>
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<tr>
<td>You/your child forgot to do step</td>
<td>- Agree day/time for child to try step this week</td>
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That’s all Folks!

Do you have any questions?