

UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY

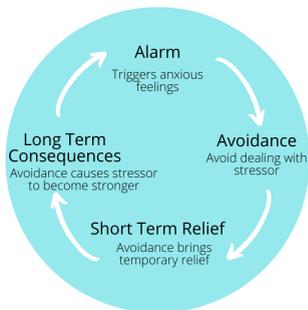
WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Anxiety is a normal evolutionary response that all humans have. It is caused by a part of the brain which is responsible for detecting and alerting us to threats and danger. Without anxiety, humans and many other species can't protect themselves from dangers, and are more likely to become extinct. Anxiety is helpful when we are faced with real dangers such as speeding cars, angry people, or getting seriously ill, however it quite often alerts us to danger when there isn't a real danger, such as, meeting new people, talking in front of a class, getting on a bus, or going to school. When we feel anxious, we tend to experience negative thoughts, and these thoughts cause us to change our behaviour, emotions, and also causes physical symptoms. These changes are the body's way of preparing us to fight, run away, or hide from the perceived danger, and are typical symptoms of anxiety.



WHAT KEEPS ANXIETY GOING?

When feelings of anxiety are triggered, our normal response is to run away or hide from the thing that is causing it - this is what we call avoidance. When we avoid things, we feel relieved from anxiety, but our anxiety will get worse in the long-term. This is because we do not learn to cope with the situation when we avoid it, and so our anxious thoughts and feelings persist. Exposing ourselves to the trigger of anxiety helps us to learn to manage and overcome the anxiety, while also improving confidence, resilience, and self-esteem.



WHEN DOES IT BECOME A PROBLEM?

Everyone experiences anxiety from time to time, and how we manage anxiety is key to preventing it from affecting us. Anxiety becomes a problem when the symptoms of anxiety (thoughts, emotions, behaviours and physical symptoms) interfere with normal daily life. Some examples include: avoiding certain places, things or people, becoming quiet and socialising less, struggling with sleep, disengaging with interests and hobbies, feeling unable to concentrate, looking for reassurance from others, experiencing regular physical symptoms, and struggling to cope with changes or unexpected challenges.

TOP TIPS TO MANAGE ANXIETY

- 1 Notice what your triggers are** and notice if you avoid them. If you do, then try and expose yourself to the trigger that you are avoiding. Notice how you learn to cope, while you challenge your anxious thoughts and worries, and reduce your anxiety. You will also feel accomplished and feel more confident in yourself.
- 2 Trying new things and challenging yourself** helps you to learn about different things, and improves your brain function, which helps you to become more confident and resilient to anxiety. This also helps to improve your coping skills, and you never know, you might find a new hobby or interest!
- 3 Practicing mindfulness** helps you to focus on the present moment, which improves concentration skills, and reduces the impact that anxious thoughts have. You can find guided mindfulness videos on YouTube.
- 4 Controlled breathing exercises** help to reset your nervous system which reduces the amount of the stress hormone 'Cortisol', and sends signals to the brain to be calm. Completing a breathing exercise once a day can help to reduce your overall levels of anxiety. Search for "Square" or "Box" breathing on YouTube.
- 5 Talking to someone** can help you to process and understand your feelings better. It is also helpful to share ideas about how you can help yourself with another person - "A problem shared, is a problem halved".
- 6 Remember that anxiety is normal**, and it is there to protect us. When anxiety is really bad, it is hard to imagine it ever feeling better, but it will get better over time with management strategies.



WHERE CAN I FIND MORE SUPPORT?

USEFUL WEBSITES:

www.YoungMinds.co.uk
www.TheMix.org.uk
www.Kooth.com



Chill Panda



What's Up



Kooth (website)



Think Ninja

IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE UNABLE TO MANAGE YOUR ANXIETY ON YOUR OWN, SPEAK TO A TRUSTED ADULT AT SCHOOL ABOUT BEING SUPPORTED BY THE MENTAL HEALTH IN SCHOOLS TEAM.

