

Supporting children and young people with their worries



Sophie Wilson

Interim Service Manager, Healthy Minds
Lincolnshire and Mental Health Support Teams

Agenda

- What is anxiety?
- How do I respond to my child's worries and fears?
- What can I do to support my child?
- How good am I at self-care?
- What else is available to support me?

What is anxiety?

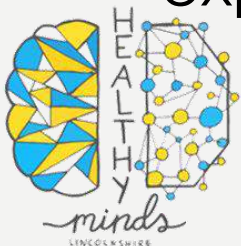


“Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe.”

NHS Choices, 2016

Anxiety itself cannot be inherited, however genes which make us more likely to worry can.

This, as well as environmental factors such as Adverse Life Events, learning by example and social and communication difficulties (i.e. Autistic Spectrum Disorder) can influence the likelihood of a child experiencing anxiety.



Worrying

- Worrying is a normal and expected emotion that many of us feel on a day-to-day basis.
- Positives of worry could include increased motivation and concentration.
- However, when worry becomes disproportionate and excessive i.e. it begins to affect everyday functioning and mood, it can become detrimental to our wellbeing
- Everyone's capacity to deal with stress and worry is different.

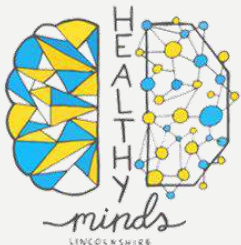


Stress

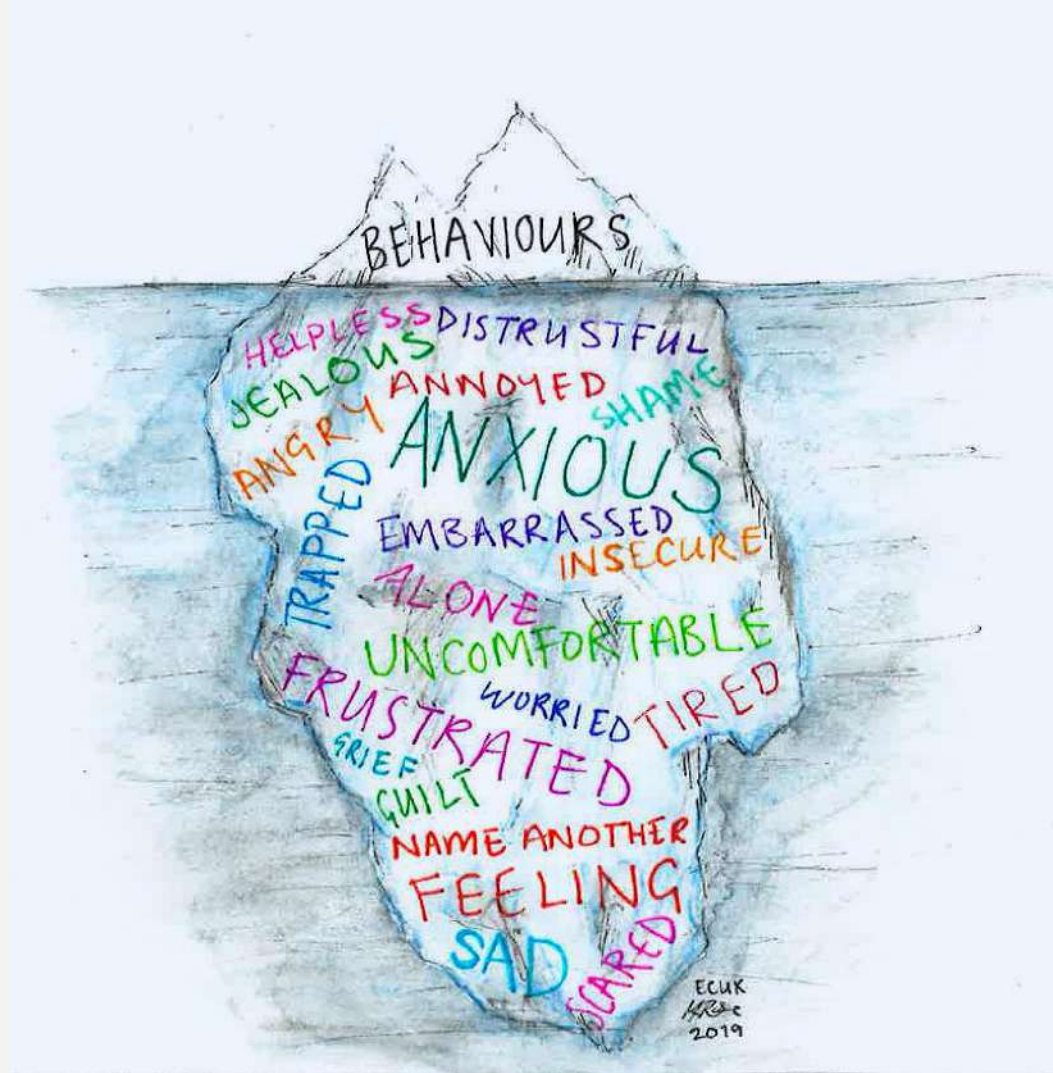


- In English, 'stress' can mean two different things:
 - the things that make us anxious - "my work is stressful"
 - our anxious reaction to them - "I feel really stressed out".
- (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2019)

Therefore it is important to clarify what these terms mean to the individual.



Behaviour as a communicator of emotion



Milestone Development

Child development theories explain the growth and development of a child at different ages.



Exploring the milestone development stages for your child can be really useful in helping you to understand whether their behaviours are 'normal' for their age.

A circular word cloud featuring various negative emotions and physical symptoms. The words are arranged in a circular pattern, with some words being significantly larger than others. The colors of the words include shades of blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. The words include: Anxiety, Stress, Fear, Worry, Dread, Emotion, Nervous, Tension, Worried, Restless, Avoidance, Breathing, Scared, Panic, Burnout, Fatigue, Sweating, Trembling, Pounding Heart, Feeling Sick, Withdrawing, Withdrawn, Scary, and many others. The words are arranged in a circular pattern, with some words being significantly larger than others. The colors of the words include shades of blue, green, yellow, orange, and red.



Lincolnshire Partnership
NHS Foundation Trust

- Blushing
- Shaking
- Sweating
- Tense muscles
- Decreased bladder control

BIOLOGICAL RESPONSE



Fight, Flight & Freeze (3 F's)

FFF is a natural stress response to a perceived danger. When it is activated our body experiences physiological and hormonal changes, which allow us to protect ourselves to the best of our ability. We react in 1 of 3 ways, we attempt to fight the danger, run from it (flight) or freeze as an act of camouflage.

For Example:

If you were hiking in the woods and you came across a bear, there are three main things that your body would do:



Fight

Try to make yourself, look big or scary and shout

Flight

Run away from the bear as fast as you can

Freeze

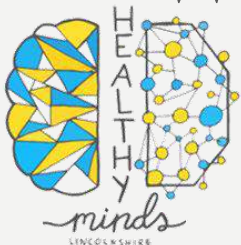
Stay as still as possible so the bear doesn't notice you

BEHAVIOURS

- Avoidance
- Leaving the situation
- Fidgeting
- Lack of eye contact
- Arguing back/refusal to take part
- School/Group refusal



- I can't/ won't do it
- I'm not good at it
- I'll make a fool of myself/embarrass myself
- Something awful will happen
- Everyone will laugh at me
- I won't be able to cope
- What if...



THOUGHTS AND WORDS



Discussion Point

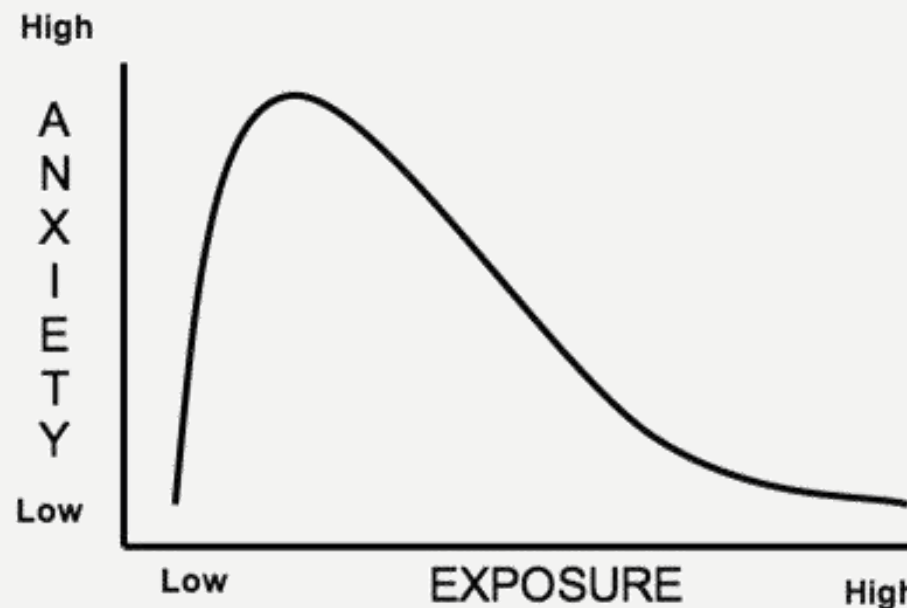
How do you respond to your child's anxiety?



What's keeping my child's fears and worries going?

Automatic response

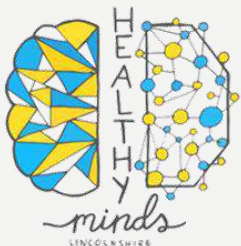
As a parent we automatically want to make the child feel happy and not worried. Our automatic response is to reassure the child that nothing bad is going to happen.



Responding to distress

Attune

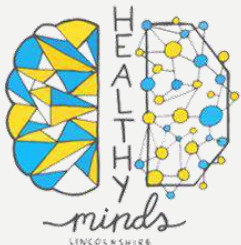
- **Be alert** to how they are feeling.
- **Demonstrate** attuning to their emotional state showing you can catch how they feel through facial expression, body language, gesture, noises: ah, oo, oh, mm, eek etc.
- **Understand** the intensity, pitch, pace, volume, expansiveness or spatial experience of the child's emotional state by matching this.



Validation – how to do it

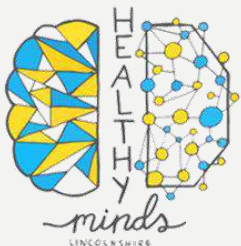
Validation is the recognition and acceptance of another person's thoughts, feelings, sensations and behaviours as understandable.

- **Summarise** what your child is saying. E.g. “it sounds like you're disappointed in yourself because you didn't get what you had hoped for”
- **Read** or guess your child's emotions and name them. E.g. “I'm guessing you're feeling very hurt and disappointed that your friend let you down”
- **Normalise** emotional reactions that anyone would have. E.g. “of course you're angry. Anyone would feel angry if they had been accused of something and felt wronged”



Contain

- **Catch and match** the feeling through attunement. This demonstrates that you can bare the feeling, which communicates that the feeling is survivable.
- **In practice:** go in at the *same* pitch and tone. With anger gradually bring this down and they will follow.
- **Give words** to what they are feeling – lend your emotional literacy to them, and allow them to use language they feel comfortable with back.



Soothe/regulate

- **Support** your child to self-soothe/ self-regulate



Self-Soothe Box



A self-soothe box is a useful tool for you to use when they are feeling a variety of emotions including sadness, anxiety and worry. It is personal to each individual and can be kept throughout their life and continuously updated. Here some ideas of what to include in this box.

Its not all about the parents and carers response...

How do other people respond to your
child's fears and worries?



Types Of Worries...

PRACTICAL

These are worries that are often affecting you in the here and now and we can usually find a practical solution!



I've forgotten my homework

HYPOTHETICAL

This type of worry is often about things that may be well in the future and may not have a solution no matter how hard you try to find one!



My phone is broken



I promised my mum I would walk the dog but I don't have time



If I go to the party on Friday everyone might laugh at me



What if people will make fun of my new haircut?

START



What should you
do with your
worries?

Problem Solving

Step 1: Identify the problem you want to focus on

Step 2: Identify solutions

Step 3: Analyse the strengths and weaknesses of each solution

Step 4: Select a solution

Step 5: Develop a plan

Step 6: Put your plan into action

Step 7: Review your plan



Your Time To Worry

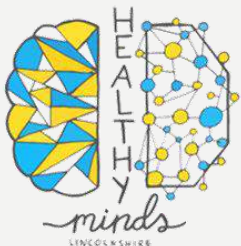


- This is your time to worry, only worry at this time
- 15-20 minutes a day
- Early evening is best, not just before bed

Write it down

Let the worry go

Take your mind off
it!



Capturing Worries

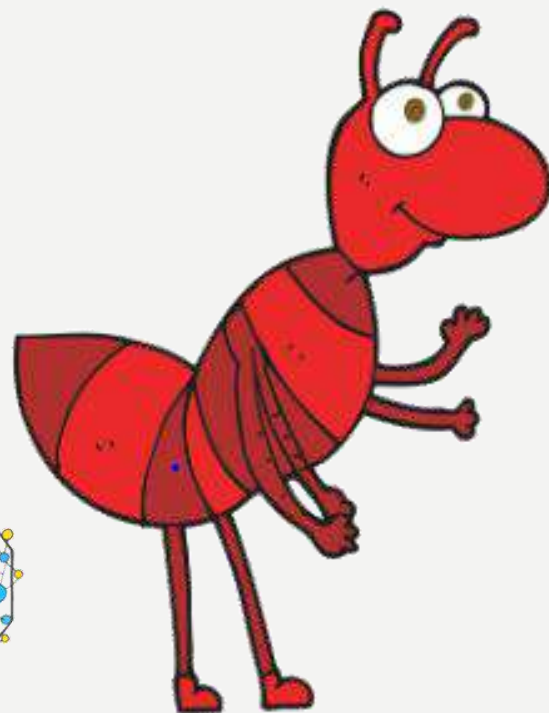
Top Tips:

- Remember to validate and listen to the child when they share their worries.
- Worrying is completely normal, everyone worries.
- Try not to say 'you don't need to worry about that'
- Ask your child to write the worries down.



Splattting the ANTs

You can use the idea of ANTs (automatic negative thoughts) to help young people with the process of challenging unhelpful thoughts to create a more balanced perspective.



I am different
from the other
people in my
class. I don't like it.



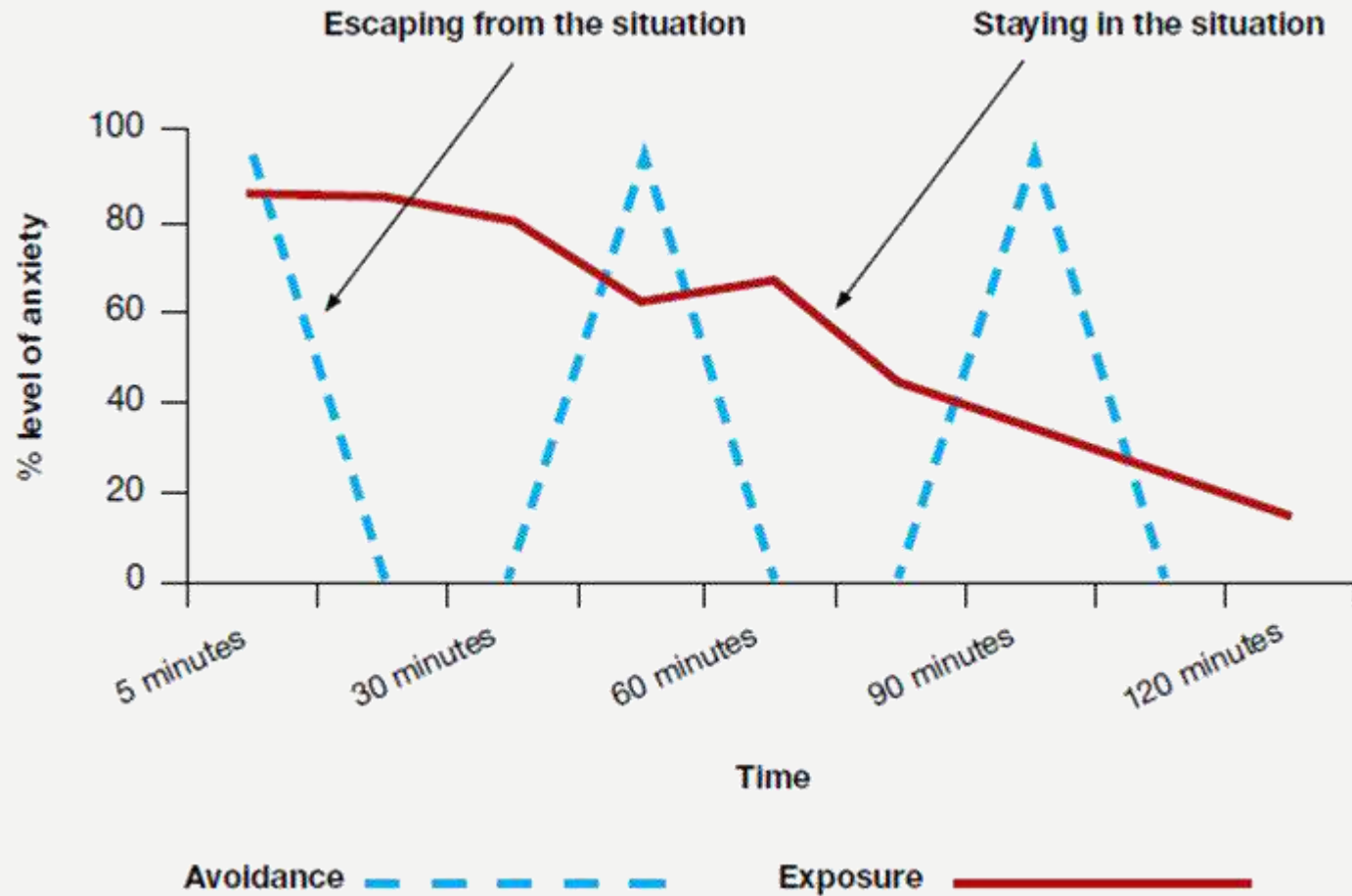
I am unique in
my own
individual way

Being on the look out for opportunities to 'have a go'



DO THE
BEST
YOU CAN

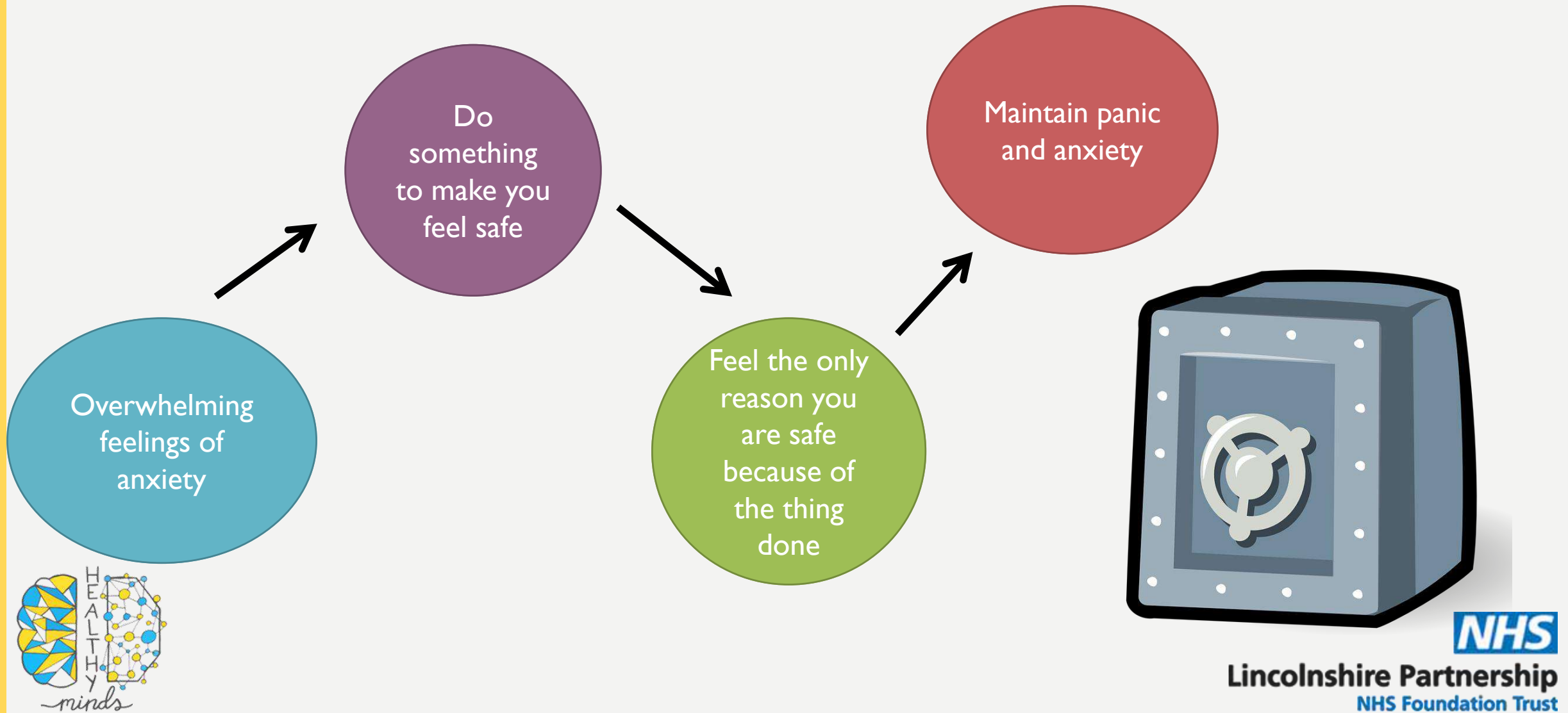
Habituation



This graph shows how our anxiety levels change by staying in a situation versus avoiding the situation.

This may be unpleasant but the symptoms do reduce.

Safety Behaviours

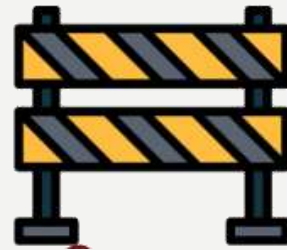


Change

As parents you have an instinct to protect your child, this includes when they are in distress.

To challenge anxiety and worry involves allowing your child to feel high levels of distress and this can be difficult to witness and can make you feel apprehensive about making a change.

What are some of the barriers to change?



What worries might be experienced when you are considering change?



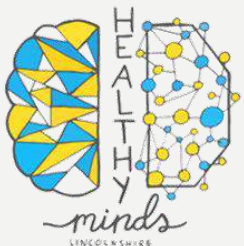
Worrying About Your Child

It is normal to worry about your child

When these worries begin to get in the way of parenting, that's when they need tackling.

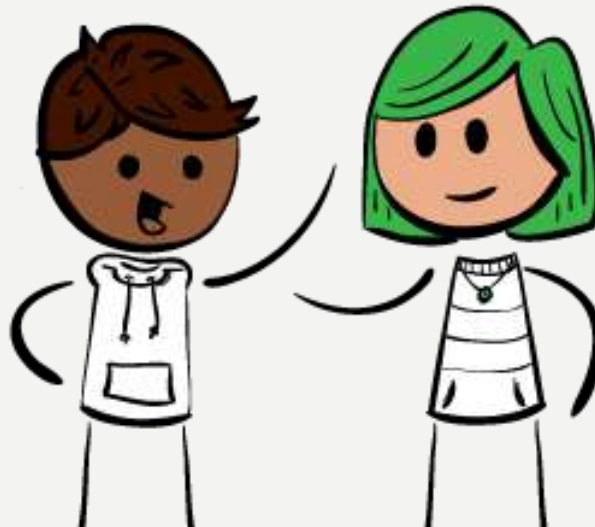
The first step in this is encouraging your child to talk about their worries, quite often when children worry they feel they are “weird, silly, or stupid”, so it's important to be mindful of your verbal and non-verbal reactions during this time.

What are some verbal and non verbal reactions you know?



Worrying About Your Child

It is ok to react to the worries, show concern and understanding by relating to them, just be aware that your child will be watching your reaction.



Tackling Your Own Anxiety

It can be helpful to challenge your own anxieties whilst working with your child, as it can encourage them to learn new ways of thinking and behaving by watching you.

What are some of the benefits and potential barriers to having a personal understanding of anxiety?



You Can't Pour From An Empty Glass

Although these strategies are an essential part of tackling your child's anxiety, it is equally important to spend time looking after your own emotional wellbeing.

How do you spend 'me time'?



Support for Parents/Carers

- Talk Plus - <https://www.talkplus.org.uk/>
- Family Line (by Family Action) 9am-9pm - 0808 802 6666
- Lincolnshire CYP Services - <https://www.lpft.nhs.uk/young-people/lincolnshire/parents-and-carers>
- Here4You Advice Line – 0800 234 6342 (Mon-Fri, 09:00-16:45)
- NSPCC Support for Parents - <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/>
- Steps2Change - <https://www.lpft.nhs.uk/steps2change/home>
- Action for Children - Parent Talk - <https://parents.actionforchildren.org.uk/>

