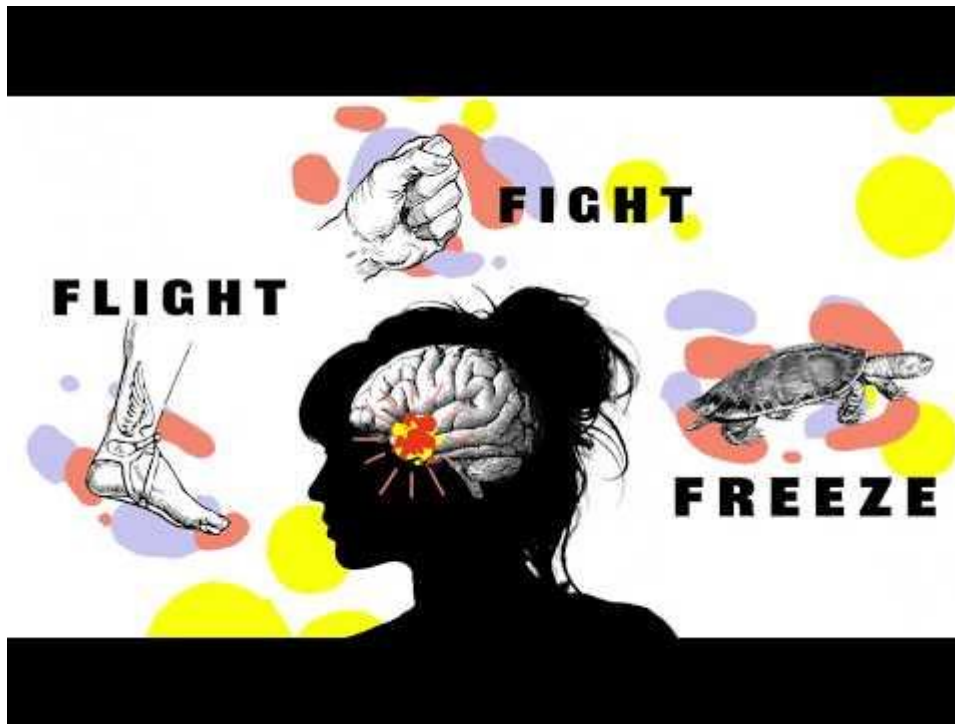


Mental Health Support at Hartford Infant and Preschool and Hartford Junior School

Anxiety: Helping your child with fears and worries

What is anxiety: video



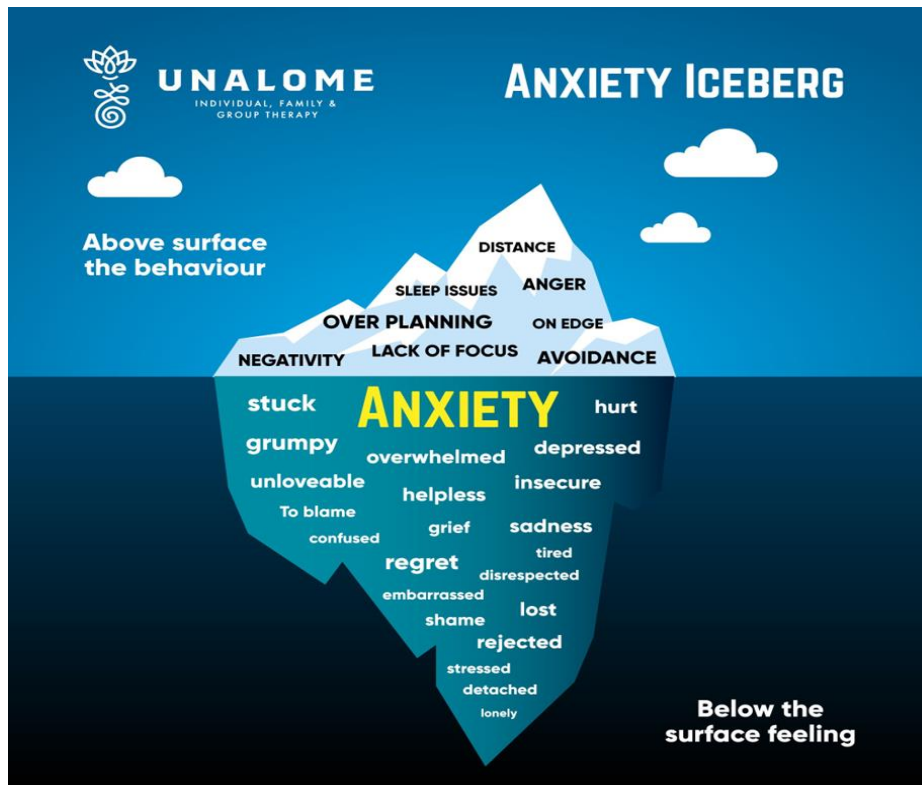
Anxiety = An overestimation of a threat + An underestimation of ability to cope

Common physical symptoms:

- Blushing
- Mind going blank
- Muscle tension
- Sweating
- Racing heart
- Upset stomach/feeling sick
- Trembling
- Light-headedness
- Shortness of breath
- Dizziness
- Nausea

What might we notice about an anxious child?

When a child is presenting with such behaviours, it is important to be curious!! What might they be feeling under the surface?



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.



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.

FOCUS

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

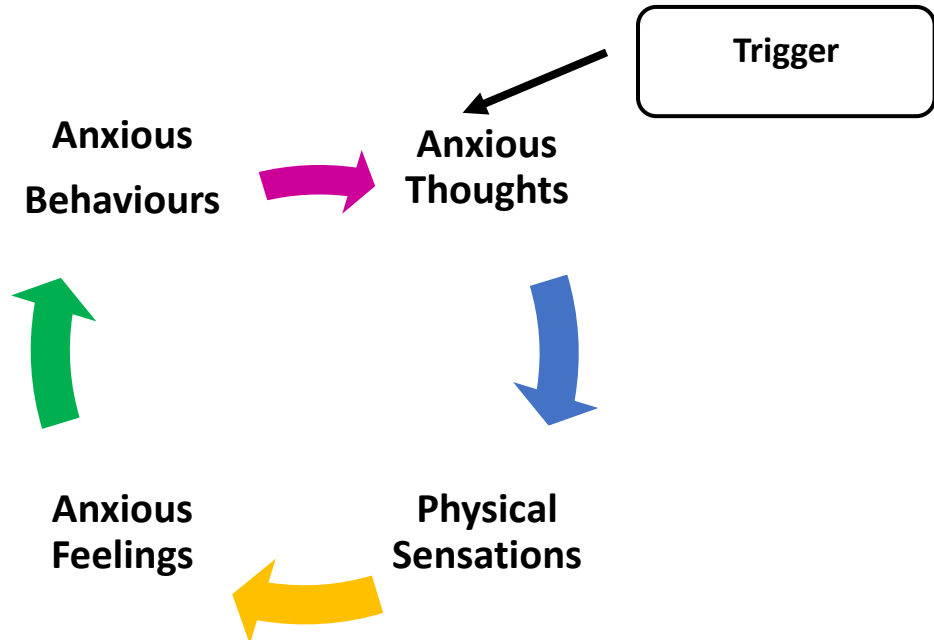
Overplanning and defiance go hand in hand in their root cause. Where anxiety can cause some children to try to take back control through defiant behavior, it can cause others to overplan for situations where planning is minimal or unnecessary.



How is anxiety maintained?

The way that we think about a situation will directly impact how we feel in that situation, which will then influence how we behave!

If our behaviour is to avoid the situation that makes us feel anxious, we do not learn that we can cope! This avoidance maintains our anxiety!



What can parents do to help?

- Helpful reassurance (avoid blanket reassurance, e.g., “everything will be okay” – “let’s be brave and give it a go” or “you’ve done this before and nothing bad happened”).
- Understanding your child’s worries (curious questions).
- Normalising, accepting, validating, empathising with your child’s feelings.
- Encouraging independence (building confidence).
- Behaviour experiments to test out anxious expectations.
- Step-by-step plan

Helpful techniques to manage anxiety in the moment

Grounding techniques



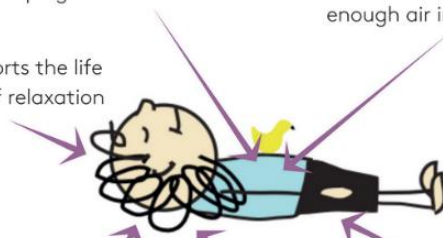
Breathing techniques

Belly breathing

Automatically slows the heart rate, helping to relax & calm

The most efficient and relaxed way of getting enough air into your lungs.

Supports the life skill of relaxation



Can boost energy levels with a few minutes of relaxation throughout the day

Emulates breathing during the regenerating processes (sleep, digesting food or resting)

Increased awareness of the breath & its effect on the body

Distraction



Further Resources

Helping your child with fears and worries – Cathy Creswell



This manual by Cathy Creswell is what the MHST (Mental Health Support Team) base their parent-led anxiety intervention on!

It is full of useful information around understanding your child's fears and worries and what you can do to support them!

It also has lots of helpful example questions and tips and tricks so we would really recommend it!