



DEALING  
WITH  
*Anxiety*  
IN  
CHILDREN





# Hello!

Headed up by owner and founder Julie Glynn, the team at Acorn Psychology and Support Services Ltd provide a wide range of educational psychology, specialist teacher support and therapeutic services to schools throughout Lancashire, Cumbria and the North West of England. We also offer parental support through our specialist teaching team.

Our philosophy is based on the belief that every child and young person can achieve given the appropriate support, guidance, intervention and learning opportunity. Our approach is based on developing an understanding of a child or young person's strengths and difficulties in order to provide support or training for positive outcomes.

We are a multi-disciplinary team consisting of Educational Psychologists, Assistant Educational Psychologists, Specialist Teachers, Counsellors and Psychotherapists. Our expertise includes all areas of Educational Psychology, Child Development, Teaching and Learning including Specific Learning Difficulties as well as Trauma and Attachment.

We hope you find this document helpful

*Team Acorn*

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# Anxiety



## WHAT IS ANXIETY?

Basically put anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling of fear or an impending disaster. It reflects the thoughts and bodily reactions a person has when they are presented with an event or situation that they feel they can't manage or undertake successfully.

It's a psychological (in our thoughts) and physiological (physical) state. Everybody experiences feelings of anxiety. It is a normal and natural reaction to something which is seen as threatening.

## ANXIETY FOR SURVIVAL

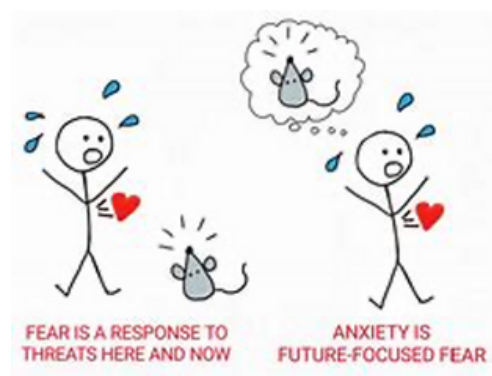
It is a stress response that dates back to prehistoric times that is all about survival. Anxiety helps to prepare and mobilise the body for fight, flight or freeze.



When a person is experiencing anxiety, their thoughts are actively assessing the situation, sometimes even automatically and outside of conscious attention, and developing predictions of how well they will cope based on past experiences.

## A glitch in our coping strategy?

Our body can't differentiate between a perceived threat and a real threat and therefore we experience anxiety without a 'real' threat and respond psychologically or physically.



# Anxiety and Children



Children can feel anxious about different things at different ages. Many of these worries are a normal part of growing up. From around 6 months to 3 years it's very common for children to have separation anxiety. They may become clingy and cry when separated from their parents/carers. This is a normal stage in a child's development and usually stops at around age 2 to 3.

It's also common for preschool children to develop specific fears or phobias. Common fears in early childhood include animals, insects, storms, heights, water, blood and the dark. These fears usually go away gradually on their own. There may also be other times in a child's life when they feel anxious. For example, many children feel anxious when going to a new school or before tests and exams. Some children feel shy in social situations or if going to a new environment etc.



# What are the signs of anxiety in children?



## PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

- Increased clinginess
- Crying/whinging
- panic attacks, which can include having a racing heart, breathing very quickly, sweating or shaking
- shallow or quick breathing, or feeling unable to breathe
- feeling sick
- dry mouth
- sweating more than usual
- tense muscles
- wobbly legs
- irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), diarrhoea or needing to pee more than usual
- getting very hot
- difficulty sleeping

## THOUGHTS + FEELINGS

- preoccupied by upsetting, scary or negative thoughts
- nervous, on edge, panicky or frightened
- overwhelmed or out of control
- full of dread or an impending sense of doom
- alert to noises, smells or sights
- worrying about being unable to cope with daily things like school, friendships and being in groups or social situations
- worrying so much that it is difficult to concentrate and/or sleep
- have a lot of negative thoughts, or keep thinking that bad things are going to happen

# What are the signs of anxiety in children?



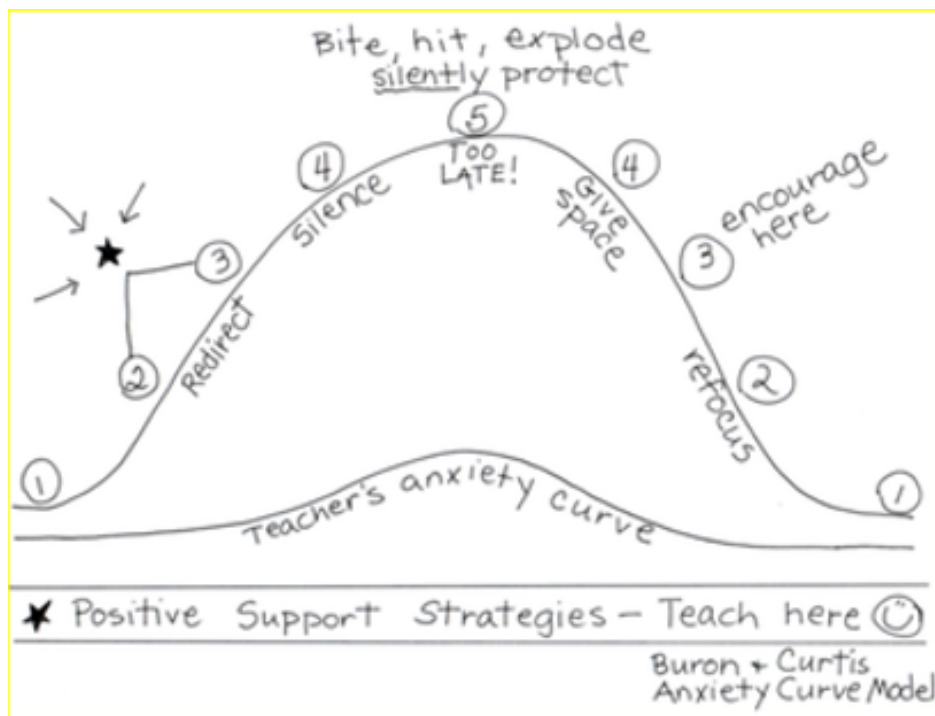
## COPING BEHAVIOURS

- withdrawing or isolating themselves – including not wanting to go to school, be in social or group situations, be away from parents or try new things
- repeating certain behaviours, actions or rituals (often called ‘obsessive compulsive behaviours’)
- eating more or less than usual
- self-harming
- lack confidence to try new things or seem unable to face simple, everyday challenges
- find it hard to concentrate
- have problems with sleeping or eating
- have angry outbursts
- start avoiding everyday activities, such as seeing friends, going out in public or going to school



## THE ANXIETY CURVE

The anxiety curve is a method of displaying a child's increasing and decreasing anxiety on a curve. It was developed by Buron and Curtis. Escalating anxiety is displayed in five stages, with stage '1' being a stage of calm where the child can be taught to use skills such as a calming sequence or visualization. The Yerkes-Dodson law is also a scale of anxiety that can be depicted as an upside-down U-shaped curve, with the left side representing low arousal or stress, the right side representing high arousal, and the centre representing a medium (or optimal) level of arousal.



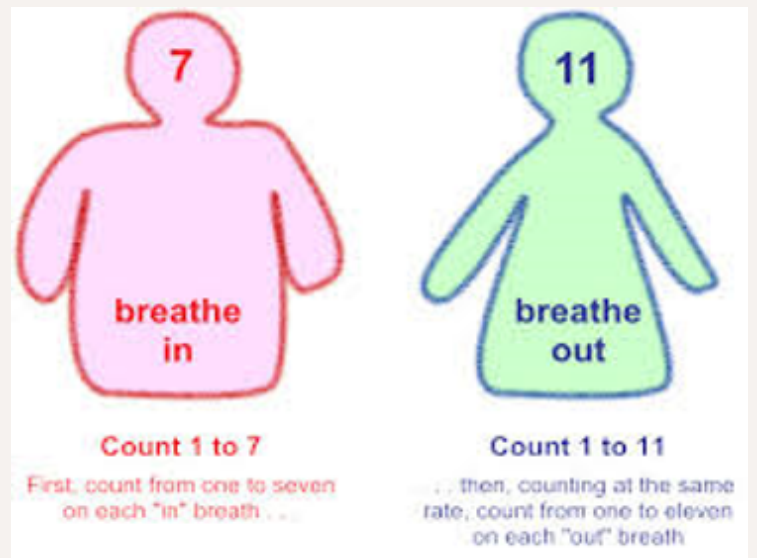
## ANXIETY AS A CONTINUUM

'It is helpful to think about anxiety as a continuum. We all experience feelings of anxiety in our daily lives and have the potential to move up and down the continuum, depending on the circumstances.'

# Strategies to support with Anxiety

## 7/11 Breathing

Breathing in for a count of 7 and out for a count of 11



## 5 Finger Breathing

Take the forefinger of your right hand, and slowly trace around the edges of your left hand. When your finger moves to the tip of a finger, breathe in. When your finger moves towards the palm, breathe out.

## Yoga/mindfulness breathing techniques

Sit up on seat, feet grounded (uncrossed), back straight, notice your breathing as an anchor (download a mindfulness body scan to play )



# Strategies to support with Anxiety

## Grounding Technique

5 things you can see, 4 you can hear, 3 you can touch, two you can smell, one taste/one good thing about you/your day

## The 5 Point Scale

The 5-point scale was first described by Kari Dunn Buron and Mitzi Curtis in 2003. It was developed to bring awareness to different emotions and emotional stages in a simplistic form. At each stage it helps a child label how they react, identify why it happens and teaches alternative behaviours or strategies. There are some examples below, but every child is different so what each child's 5-point scale will look like is different. Basically, with the child, you talk through their different stages of the emotion (in this case anxiety) what it looks like, how they feel, what might make them feel that way etc and then come up with strategies they can use (or can be used with them) at each stage to support them.



### SLOW DOWN & CALM DOWN

FIRST- TAKE 3 SLOW BELLY BREATHS!

- 5 List 5 things you can SEE 
- 4 List 4 things you can FEEL 
- 3 List 3 things you can HEAR 
- 2 List 2 things you can SMELL 
- 1 List something you like to TASTE 

FINISHED? - TAKE ANOTHER 3 SLOW BELLY BREATHS

	<i>How I feel</i>	<i>What I can do</i>
5	Panic has set in!	See my teacher. Take a 2 minute walk in the room.
4	I know this stuff but I can't remember.	STOP. Put down my pencil. Put head down and breathe for 30-60 seconds.
3	This test is <u>so</u> hard!	Breathe and try to relax.
2	Okay- I have questions I might double check.	Slow down! Read carefully and look for things I know.
1	Calm- I know this	Keep going!



It is really important that the strategies are practiced repeatedly during moments of calm and become routine so children (and adults) are experienced in using them and can then access them during moments of anxiety.



# Thank-you!

We hope this document provided useful tips and advice you can adopt.

if you need any further information or support, please feel free to reach out to us using the contact details below.

Make sure you also follow us on social media for the latest updates and advice.

## Contact:

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## Meet the Team

