

How to
understand & spot

Anxiety



Welcome to Day 1!

Anxiety can be overwhelming, but it's also a natural and necessary emotion that helps keep us safe.

Recognising the physical signs and understanding how anxiety works are crucial first steps in supporting your child.

This resource will help you to recognise the signs, and understand physically what your child is going through.



Physical Effects

Is your child or teen experiencing any of these?

Heart palpitations

Sweating

Upset stomach

Loss of appetite - or overeating

Irritability

Crying

Not being able to use words to make sense of feelings

Feeling sad without knowing why

Becoming overwhelmed quickly when asked to take part in something, particularly outside of the home

Wanting to spend a lot of time alone

Avoiding things they used to enjoy

Sleeping a lot or struggling to get to sleep



Physical Effects



Anxiety is a perfectly ordinary feeling - in fact we need it! It helps to keep us safe.

Imagine you were walking along the road and a saber tooth tiger jumps out in front of you.



- Your body will respond in one of 3 ways:
- Your body will run!
- Your body will fight the tiger, or
- Your body will become so flooded that you freeze.

This is your body making use of anxiety. It is a survival mechanism and it is helpful until it becomes out of control!

It's not really clear as to why anxiety becomes out of control, but it is usually linked to a fear of something that you might not be able to put your finger on.

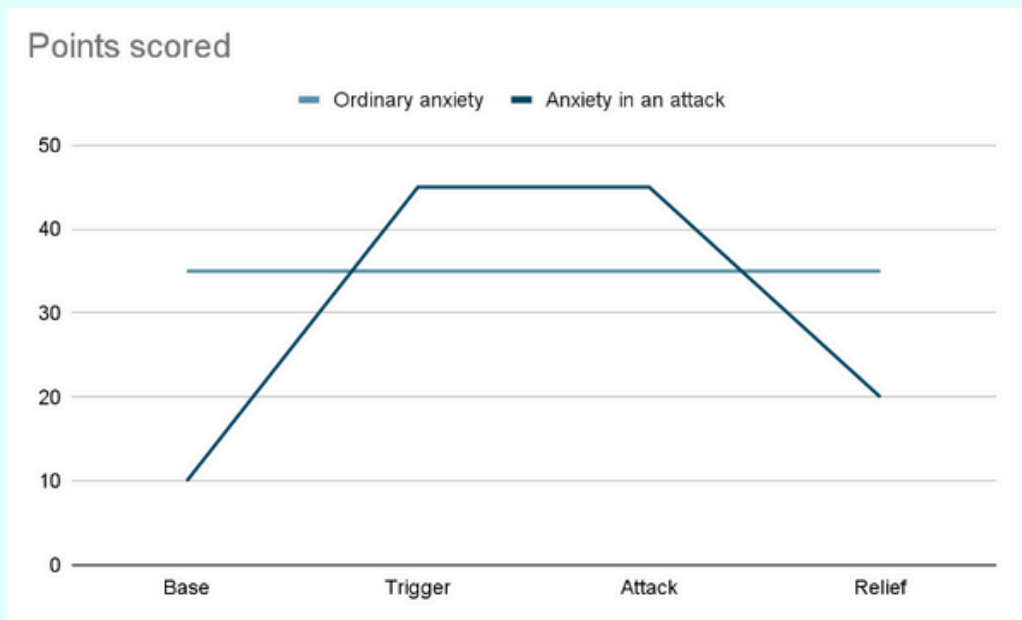
When anxiety becomes out of control our lives can become smaller in an attempt to protect us from a perceived danger...If we allow it! It is a perceived danger!

The likelihood of a saber tooth tiger jumping out on us in the street is, well, highly unlikely! And so we need to work hard to say to the anxiety:



Understanding Anxiety

Look at the chart below - it'll help you understand how anxiety operates.



Credit: The book, OCD Tools to help you fight back.
Written by: Cynthia Turner, Georgina Krebs, and Chloe Volz



How Anxiety Works

In basic terms. We all operate our daily lives with a certain level of anxiety, we use it to function. You probably know people who are much more anxious than others. It's just that their base level of anxiety is higher than others.

So picture it. If the person who operates with a lower tolerance level of anxiety (straight line) it will take them a lot LESS time to get to the position of OVERWHELM AND PANIC.

Those with a higher tolerance level means that it will take them longer to get to overwhelm and panic.

Think going to a job interview!

Some people seem to take it in their stride (higher tolerance level to anxiety). Others will be throwing up or going to the toilet every 2 minutes (lower tolerance level) - make sense?

It's all to do with our personality - some people just manage it differently to others which isn't a bad thing.



How Anxiety Works

Ok so now picture the anxiety or panic attack - here's the science!

Ultimately (and this will sound terrible!) we need to get into the position of panic (or very close to it), physically we cannot sustain this for longer than about 20 minutes before the panic begins to subside, we realise we are fine and haven't died!



Or that nothing bad has happened! It is only then that we can give the anxiety 'evidence' that nothing bad is going to happen - it just feels awful! The graph shows us climbing the ladder of anxiety, sitting in it and coming back down the other side.

Gradually, the more we prove to anxiety that nothing bad will happen the longer it will take us to get into full blown panic and so our tolerance levels will rise. This will build our resistance to an anxiety attack but also build our resilience.





Notes





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