

Understanding and Managing Anxiety

BICS

Agenda

- Introductions and group agreement
- What is anxiety?
- How is anxiety developed?
- What maintains anxiety?
- Understanding and challenging anxious thoughts
- Understanding and changing anxious behaviours

Group Agreement

- This is a group space for learning and reflection
- Be respectful to one another views and experiences
- Take what is helpful and leave what is unhelpful
- This is a confidential space but please consider anonymity
- Look after yourself

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is what we feel when we are worried, tense or afraid.

Anxiety is our natural alarm system, which goes off when we perceive that we are under threat.

Sometimes the alarm system is faulty - it goes off when it shouldn't. This can cause a lot of problems.

It's particularly common to experience some anxiety while coping with stressful events or changes, especially if they could have a big impact on your life.

What does anxiety affect?

Anxiety affects our thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and bodily sensations.

Anxiety can be impacted by changing our behaviours.

Anxiety can be reduced by challenging our thoughts.



How is Anxiety Developed?

No single factor is likely to have caused your child's anxiety disorder.

Typically, a number of factors play a role:

Biological Factors:

1/3 of what makes us anxious can be explained by genes. We may inherit characteristics i.e. sensitivity.

Learning by Example:

We can pick up fears from our parents or others around us.

Adverse Life Events:

Stressful events may have more impact on children.

Social Environment:

How others respond to the child when they are anxious. For example, parents may inadvertently encourage their child to avoid

Ages and Stages of Fear	
Age	Fear
0-6 months	Loss of support, loud noises, sudden movement
7-12 months	Strangers, sudden appearance of large objects, loud noises
1 year	Separation from parent, strangers, injury, toilet
2 years	Large animals, dark rooms, large objects and machines, loud noises, unexpected changes
3 years	Dark rooms, masks, large animals, snakes, separation from parent
4 years	Dark rooms, noises at night, large animals, snakes, separation from parent

5 years	Wild animals, bodily injury, dark, bad people, separation from parent
6 years	Ghosts, monsters, witches, dark, being alone, thunder and lightening
7 years	Dark, monsters, storms, being lost, kidnapping, being alone
8 years	Dark, people (kidnapper, robber, mugger), guns or weapons, being alone, animals
9 years	Dark, being lost, bad dreams, bodily harm or accident, being alone
10 years	Dark, people, bad dreams, punishment, strangers

11 years	Dark, being alone, bad dream, being hurt by someone, being sick, tests, grades
12 years	Dark, punishment (being in trouble, bad grades), being alone, being hurt or taken away, tests, grades
13 years	Crime, being hurt or kidnapped, being alone, war and nuclear war, bad grades, tests, punishment
14+ years	Failure at school, personal relations, war, tests, sex issues (pregnancy, AIDS), being alone, family concerns.

Source: Robinson III, E., & Rotter, J. (1991). Children's fears: Toward a preventative model. *School Counselor*, 38(3), 187.

Sensory Needs

Exposure to certain sensory stimulation can cause similar symptoms to anxiety in children and young people, including those who are neurodivergent.

Repetitive behaviours can help block sensory input

- Flapping hands or flicking fingers in front of eyes
- Pacing up down room
- Rocking in chair
- Tapping pencil on desk
- Repeating a favourite noise, song or script from a film
- Focusing intently on a preferred object e.g. spinning coin, light switch

Hyperactivity/Over-responsiveness

- Defensiveness e.g. pushing someone who is standing too close
- Avoidance e.g. running out of the classroom, hiding in a corner of the playground
- Easily upset
- Anxiety
- Distractibility
- Sensory overload, sometimes leading the child to 'shut down' and block out all input
- May engage in disruptive behaviours in order to get removed from the situation which is causing sensory overload and distress
- Avoids close physical proximity to others

Sensory Needs

Hypoactivity/Under-responsiveness

Low registration

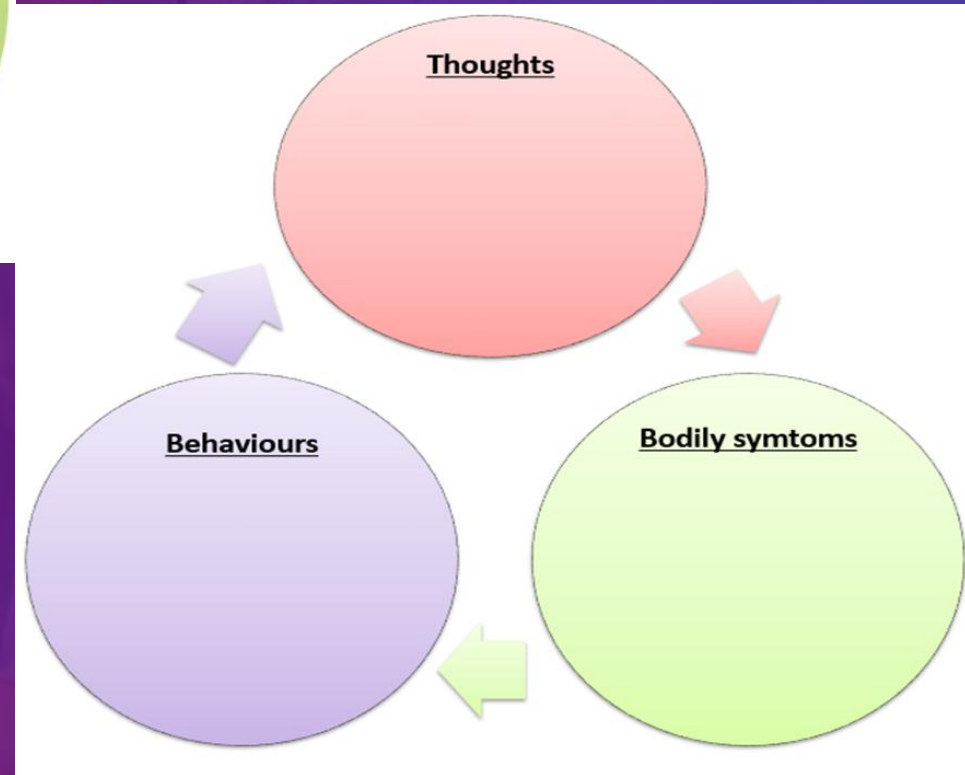
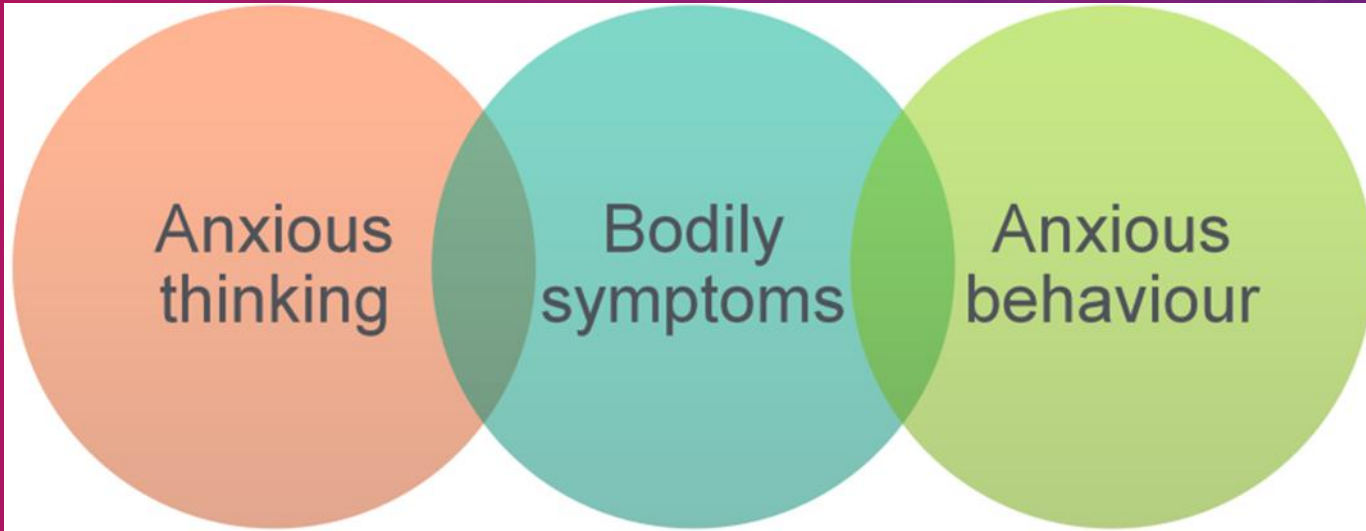
- Disengaged and disinterested in activities, especially more passive activities such as sitting at a desk to listen/read/write
- Appears lethargic
- Slow processing of information
- Delayed or no response to questions and instructions
- Becomes more alert and engaged in more active tasks and multisensory activities e.g. P.E., playground, Art, Music.
- Difficulty completing work

Sensory seeking

- Frequently stands or moves around the classroom instead of sitting
- Swings in chair
- Enjoys fast movement
- Frequently fidgets
- Frequently touching objects and people
- Likes to hold a fidget object
- Sniffs objects and people
- Makes noise in quiet environments e.g. Assembly, independent work time, exam hall
- Enjoys 'rough and tumble' play

Because Neurodivergent children perceive the world differently, we need to make adaptations to their environment to limit the distress of sensory input.

What keeps anxiety going?



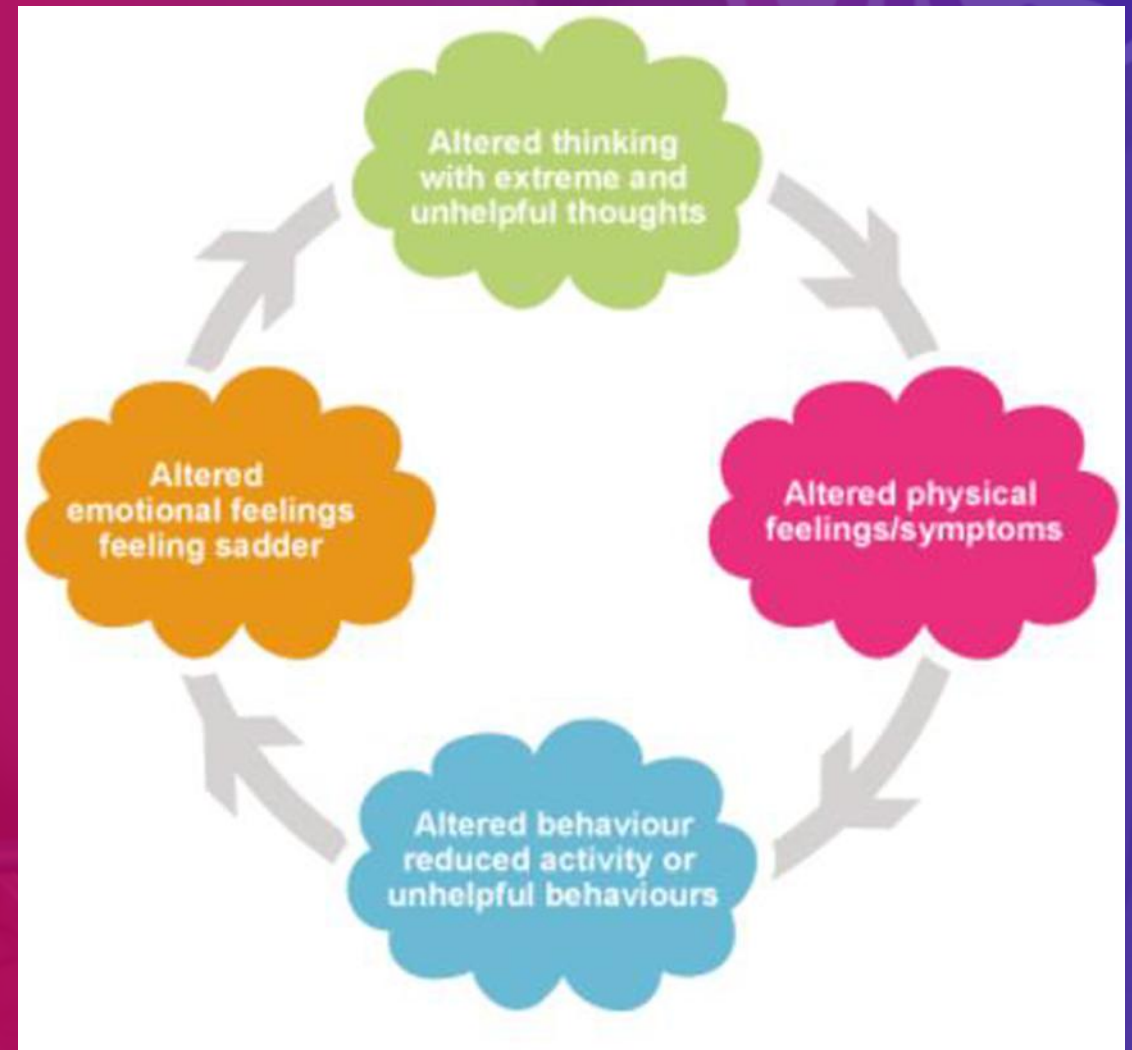
Vicious Cycle of Anxiety

When people are experiencing Anxiety they:

Overestimate the danger and

Underestimate their ability to cope.

We can look at the vicious cycle of anxiety and **make changes to try and break it.**

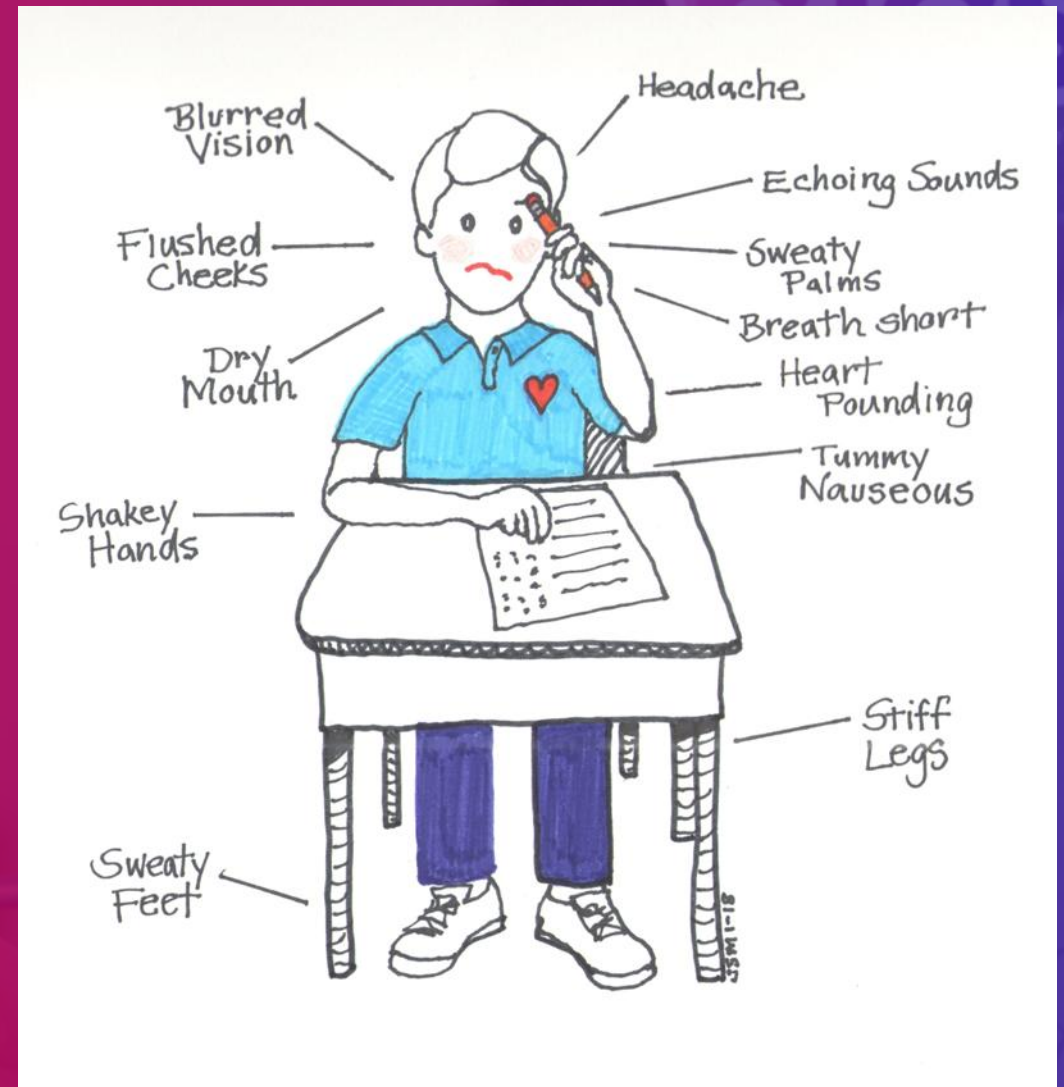


Bodily Response to Anxiety

Child interprets these as a sign that something bad is happening

Being aware of physical symptoms reduces confidence in coping with challenges

Can be unpleasant so can increase avoidance



Anxious Behaviour

Avoidance keeps fears going as child never knows if bad things will happen or not and they don't get the opportunity to develop coping skills

Reassurance can prevent children from learning that they can cope independently



Tips for understanding your child's anxious thoughts



Picking your moment

The time when you ask about your child's anxious expectations may make all the difference to your chances of success



Normalising

Helping your child feel normal



Asking open questions

Using "what" or "why"

- Why are you feeling worried?
- What is frightening/worrying you?
- What do you think will happen?
- What is it about ... which is making you worried?



Empathising

Helping your child feel understood

Tips for understanding your child's anxious thoughts



Making suggestions

It can be helpful to make suggestions if your child says they don't know...



Checking for understanding

'so you are worried that... have I got that right?'



Make it fun or rewarding

Helping your child know it's ok to talk about worries

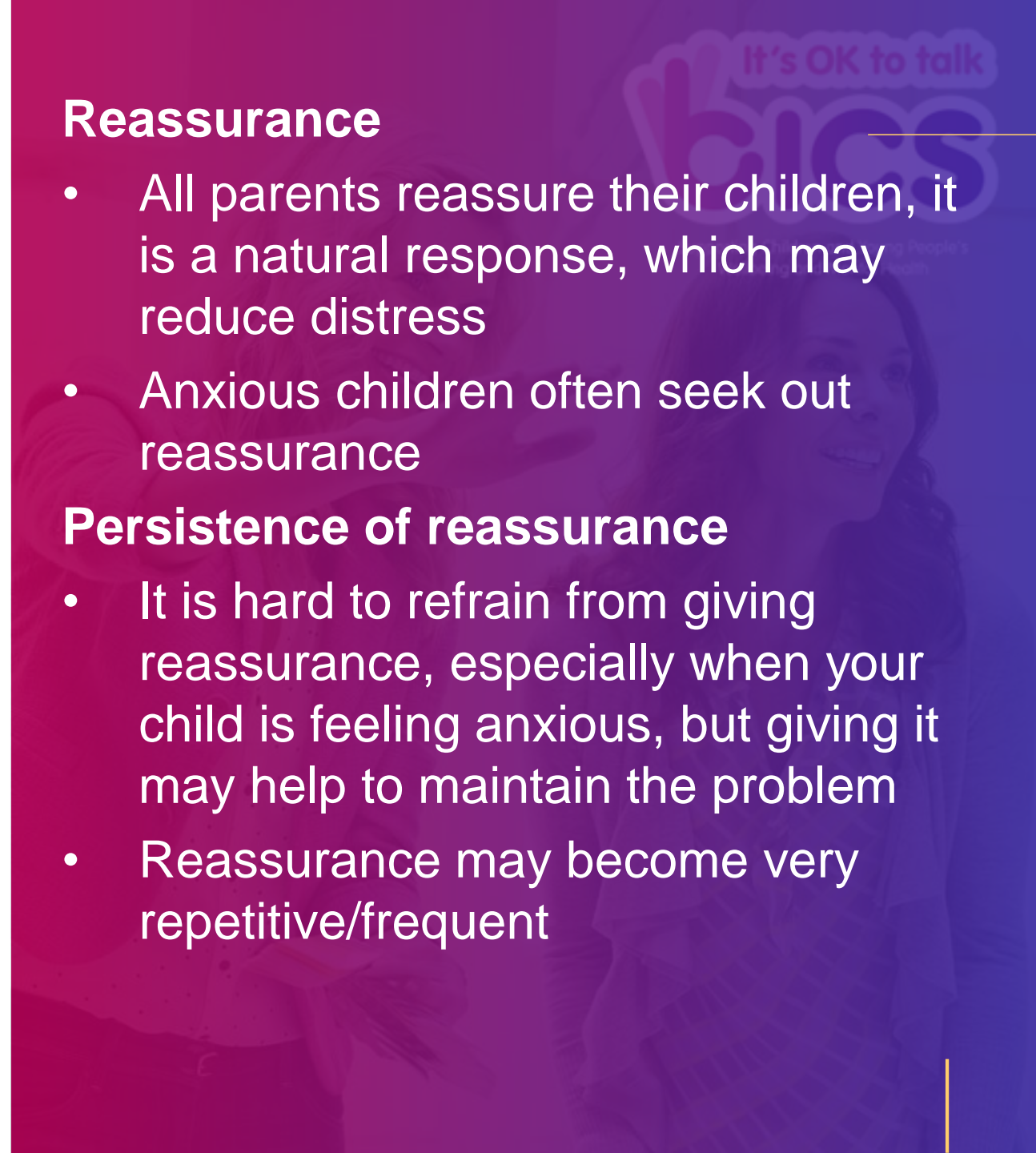
The problem with reassurance

Reassurance

- All parents reassure their children, it is a natural response, which may reduce distress
- Anxious children often seek out reassurance

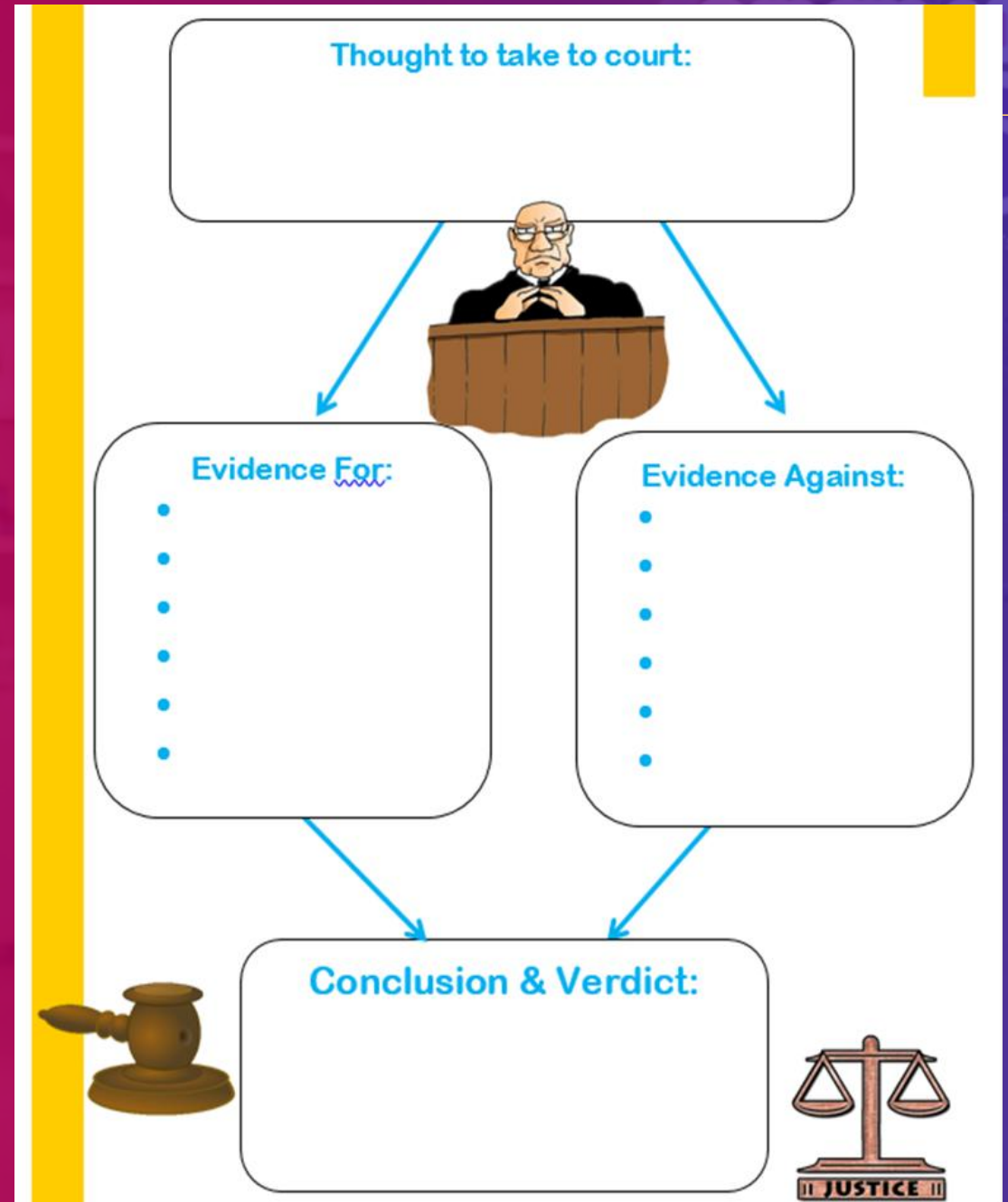
Persistence of reassurance

- It is hard to refrain from giving reassurance, especially when your child is feeling anxious, but giving it may help to maintain the problem
- Reassurance may become very repetitive/frequent



How to cut out reassurance

1. Empathising, understanding, connecting
2. Asking questions, not giving answers
 - Gets children to think for themselves
 - Helps children to remember the conclusions that were drawn because they have worked them out for themselves
 - Puts children in control
3. Thinking like a judge in court:
 - Identify the suspect (the thought) then...
 - Investigate other suspects (alternative evidence), and then...
 - Make a judgement about the first suspect; is the thought realistic or helpful



Building Brave Behaviour

Coming up with alternative thoughts is only one part of the solution.

In order for children to really start to feel different, they need to have a go at trying the things they are scared of.

It is important that children learn to become independent in order to overcome their anxiety and to increase their sense of accomplishment.

They need to learn that they can fight their own battles, without a parent coming to the rescue and have the opportunity to have a go for themselves.

Promoting 'have a go' Behaviour

Pay attention to your child's attempts at facing fears and being brave and give as much attention and praise as possible.

Need to give time and attention to the child when they are not showing anxious (or oppositional) behaviours

Rewards are another way of giving your child attention for being brave.

Rewards don't need to be expensive or cost money, but should fit with the achievement that your child has made

It is important for children to observe other people doing things they might be scared of.

Other people can model being brave.

Facing Fears

Think back to any difficulties your child had in testing out their fears previously

Some fears may be too overwhelming for a child to simply have a go at...

If this is the case, it is important to build up gradually what they are comfortable with.

Fears won't go away unless we actually stand up to them.

Avoiding things means we never find out whether they were really as bad as we thought and never find ways to deal with them

The only way of overcoming fears is to do the things that make us scared.

Behaviour Experiments

1. Helpful when the child is unsure what will happen (e.g. if they have always avoided a particular situation)
2. The child may feel differently, not just think differently

Prediction...

What is your prediction?

What do you think will happen?

How strongly do you believe this will happen (1-100 %?)



Experiment...

How are you going to test this?

When and where are you going to do this?



Outcome...

What happened?

Did your prediction come true?

Learning...

What did you learn?

How strongly do you agree with your original predictions now (0-100%?)



Take Care of You!

Notice when your stress response is activated

Take time out for yourself

Make your bedroom a safe haven for you

Savour something e.g. a song, a cup of tea, a nature walk

Ask for help



Helpful Resources

BICS Support Line - 020 8359 3130

Book – Helping Your Child with Fears and Worries by Cathy Creswell

Child Mind Institute - <https://childmind.org/topics/anxiety/>

Young Minds - <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/anxiety/>

BICS Online Workshops: <https://www.barnet.gov.uk/children-and-families/support-parents-and-carers/barnet-integrated-clinical-services-bics/online>

Early Help – www.barnet.gov.uk/0-19

Barnet CAMHS – www.behcamhs.nhs.net.uk

Barnet Crisis Line – 0800 1510 023

Bereavement services - <https://www.barnet.gov.uk/directories/support-organisations/barnet-bereavement-service>

Bereavement services - <https://www.hopeagain.org.uk/>

Helpful Resources

1. YouTube videos
2. Calm App (for kids)
3. Headspace App (for kids)
4. Zones of Regulation App
5. Breathe, Think, Do with Sesame App
6. Smiling Mind App
- 7.

**Thank you for
joining us!**

Any questions?