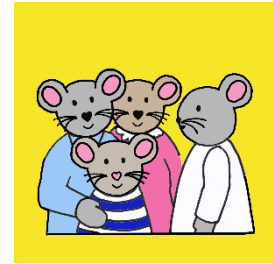


## Learning about Anxiety - Family

### Use This:

To establish rapport, teach the family how anxiety works and to introduce concepts needed for treatment.



### Goals

- Continue to establish rapport with parent/s and child
- The parent/s and child will understand how anxiety works and will have a rationale for exposure practice
- The parent/s and child will know the importance of completing worksheets, practice assignments and regular attendance
- The child will be optimistic about his or her situation
- The child will be interested in participating in and learning more about treatment

### Materials

- **Anxious Feelings and Thoughts** worksheet (p. 305)
- Picture book, magazine, or other material depicting someone scared
- **Learning About Anxiety** worksheet (p. 308)
- **Helping Your Child Succeed** parent handout (p. 314)
- **Understanding Anxiety** parent handout (p. 315)
- **Weekly questionnaires** and **Monitoring sheet** (see pages 277-293)
- **Therapist Note Taking Sheet** (p. 276)

*⌚ If time is tight: Teach the child about how unwanted anxiety can be similar to a false alarm and how gathering clues and practising can help reduce unwanted anxiety. Develop the parent's enthusiasm about the programme, especially practice and learn more about anxiety from a parent's perspective.*

### Main steps

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Set an Agenda</b>         | Remember to start by setting an agenda together.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> <b>Obtain Weekly Ratings</b> | Review the <b>Weekly questionnaires</b> and <b>Monitoring sheet</b> . Discuss any difficulties with monitoring, usefulness of monitoring, what is being monitored etc. |

**This session has 2 different versions – one to use if the child/young person is present in the session and one to use if the session is only with the parent.**

## VERSION IF THE CHILD/YOUNG PERSON IS PRESENT:

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>ACTIVITY</b> <i>Ice Breaker</i>	<p>If you have not met the child before, an ice breaker activity may be a good idea to build a therapeutic alliance. The appropriate activities will depend on the child's age and interests, so you should prepare beforehand, trying to obtain enough prior information about the child to plan a uniquely tailored ice breaker. The exercise may be as simple as engaging in a discussion with the child centred on three things about him or her that are unusual or interesting.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Warm Up</b>	<p>Try to get a conversation going at a pace that suits the child. It is often helpful to make sure that formal treatment does not begin too quickly, since anxious children tend to be avoidant, generally fearful or wary, and typically not familiar with questions about their feelings. Try to refrain initially from asking a lot of personal questions of the child. Let the child know that you will be talking about anxiety today. It may be helpful to ask the child for words that they like to use to describe anxiety such as 'scared', 'worried' or 'frightened'. Praise the child's definitions of anxiety and incorporate them into your own.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>ACTIVITY</b> <i>Body Map</i>	<p>Explain to the child that anxiety has three parts to it. One part is what we feel in our bodies (i.e. sensations), like feeling out of breath, having a racing heart, having our muscles become all tense, becoming shaky or sweaty, or having "butterflies". Introduce the <b>Anxious Feelings and Thoughts</b> worksheet (use only the girl or boy drawing, as appropriate). Using questions (and pointing to different areas as necessary), have the child label each area that feels different to him or her during anxiety.</p> <p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Can you mark places on the drawing where you feel things when you are anxious or scared?</i></li><li>• <i>Do any other places ever get those feelings when you are scared?</i></li></ul>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>ACTIVITY</b> <i>Thought Bubbles</i>	<p>Explain that the second part to anxiety is what we think when we are anxious. To make sure that the child understands what a thought is, use the third page of the <b>Anxious Feelings and Thoughts</b> worksheet, or draw some of your own characters with empty "thought bubbles" over their heads. Try to get examples of some anxious thoughts the child has had recently, and write those in the bubbles.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>ACTIVITY</b> <i>Finding Anxious Behaviour</i>	<p>Explain that the third part to anxiety is what we do when we are anxious, such as running away from the things that make us scared. Go through a book, magazine, or other materials together to see if the child can find an example of someone behaving in a way that looks anxious.</p>

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**Normalise** Explain that anxiety is an emotion that all people experience. Reassure the child that all people have fears and anxieties (including adults, heroes, and brave people). You can explain that even you get anxious about things sometimes, being sure to give an appropriate example.

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**Introduce the Alarm Concept** Staying within the selected area, identify as many feared situations, cues, sensations, or obsessions as possible. Try to generate a diversity of items while sticking to the domain that will be the target of treatment. For a specific phobia or discrete social phobia, try to identify as many variations of the particular stimulus as possible.

**Example script**

*That's right! Alarms protect us from harm by letting us know when danger might be near.*

Explain that anxiety is the body's alarm system, a very special one. It is so well designed that it actually has two parts to it. The first is a warning that danger might be coming, and the second tells us the danger is here.

**Example script**

*So anxiety acts as our own alarm system, and it has two parts. The first part tells you that something bad might be about to happen. It is just like a yellow warning light that says "be careful now." Have you ever felt like you knew something bad was going to happen? Yes, that was the "yellow light" part of your alarm. The second part of our alarm system tells us that the danger is here right now. That part is like a red light that says, "Oh no!" or "Let's get out of here!"*

Make sure to explain that people's alarms are not just for warning about fires or robbers. People can feel alarms about teasing, tests at school, taking a trip, getting sick, and lots of other things.

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**Quiz About Alarms** Make sure that the child understands the difference between the "yellow light" and the "red light" stages of the alarm system by asking him or her to state in his or her own words what you have just discussed. Give some examples, as follows:

**Example script**

*If I were really scared of lightning, and I heard it start to rain, what kind of alarm would I have? Would that be a yellow light or a red light? What if lightning struck nearby? What kind of alarm would I feel then?*

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- Show How Anxiety Can Be Good** Ask the child whether he or she thinks anxiety is good or bad. Ask the child to explain why. Praise any response, and then go on to ask whether anxiety can really be both good and bad.

**Example script**

*You: So, do you think anxiety is a good thing or a bad thing?*

*Child: Um, bad.*

*You: OK, so can you tell me what makes you think anxiety is bad?*

*Child: It feels bad.*

*You: Right! Sometimes too much anxiety can make us feel really bad inside, and nobody likes that. But can anxiety sometimes be a good thing, too? How might anxiety be good for us?*

Ask the child what would happen if we did not have anxiety. Illustrate this point by asking the child what would happen if they tried to cross the street without looking (i.e., we might get hit by a car). See if you can get the child to say that anxiety can protect us from dangerous situations or from getting hurt.

- 
- Discuss False Alarms** Ask the child if he or she knows what a false alarm is. If the child is unable to answer this question, explain that false alarms are when alarms go off, but there is actually nothing bad happening, such as when a car alarm goes off, but there is really no one stealing the car.
- Test to see if the child understands the difference between a false and a real alarm. It may help to draw a picture of a house with a smoke alarm going off and no fire and another house with a fire that has a smoke alarm going off. Ask which one is the real alarm and which one is the false alarm. Explain that anxiety – people's alarm system – can have false alarms, too. That is when people get scared or anxious when there is really no danger. It is when people begin to have a lot of false alarms that their anxiety has got out of control, and it is in these cases that anxiety becomes harmful.

- 
- Set Goal to Reduce Excess Anxiety Only** Tell the child that one of the goals in working together will be to get rid of the extra anxiety (that does not help), not the good anxiety (that does help). We do not want to get rid of the alarms altogether. We just want to stop having so many false alarms.
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**Set up Tests**

See if the child can explain how to tell if an alarm is real or false. First, give an example of something like a fire alarm at school.

**Example script**

*How do the teachers know that there is no fire and everyone can go back inside? Did someone check for fire?*

Then ask how the child could test out whether his or her own “anxiety alarms” are real ones or false ones.

**Example script**

*What could you do when your anxiety alarm goes off to see if the danger is real? How could you find out if there is anything to hurt you?*

Encourage the child to give answers that suggest one needs to check or test to see if the alarm is real. Make sure the child understands that this would mean going toward the scary thing or situation sometimes, just like one has to go look at one's car when a car alarm goes off.

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**Explain the Importance of Practice**

Explain that conducting these tests of whether alarms are real or false is why practice is so important. Ask the child why they think practice, in any area, might be important (answer: to improve). Also point out that practice involves getting used to something and learning it is safe.

**Example script**

**You:** *What if I tried to teach you how to play football, and I told you everything about football – what the rules were, how people score points, and why people get penalties. After I told you everything there is to know about football, would that help you to play football really well?*

**Child:** *Probably not.*

**You:** *Why not?*

**Child:** *'Cause I need to learn how to kick the ball and stuff like that.*

**You:** *That's right, you need to get good at kicking and running, right? How do people get good at those things?*

**Child:** *Practice.*

**You:** *Right!*

Other examples can be incorporated into the above discussion that are more applicable to the child, such as playing an instrument, learning to swim, or better yet, something the child is already skilled at and about which the child is not anxious.

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- Relate Practice to Anxiety** Explain how the same principles that apply to learning how to play football are true for anxiety. By practising situations that make the child a little anxious, he or she can learn to test and control the false alarms. Use questioning to arrive at the idea that practice can be gradual, and that small steps will be required until bigger ones can be taken. It can help to reverse roles and ask the child how to help you with a false alarm, picking an example that involves an area of relatively little anxiety for the child (e.g., his or her pet, high places, being teased). Praise for good examples.

**Example script**

***You:** So, you're a good swimmer. Let's say I'm really scared of going in a pool – even in the shallow end where I can touch the bottom and even though I can swim. How would you help me?*

***Child:** I would tell you not to be afraid of the pool.*

***You:** But how would you convince me to go in?*

***Child:** Maybe I'd go in first and show you.*

***You:** Good! That might help me. Now, what if I was still too afraid to jump in where you are? What else could you do?*

***Child:** I'd tell you to go in by the steps first, where it's really shallow.*

***You:** That's great! I think I could do that.*

- 
- Introduce Monitoring** Finally, introduce the idea of monitoring, which is just like gathering clues or evidence.

**Example script**

*Now, working on anxiety can be a bit like solving a mystery.*

*What do detectives look for when solving a mystery? That's right – clues! So, just like two detectives, we are going to gather clues to help us learn more about your anxiety.*

*Sometimes when you're practising things to help with anxiety, I will need you to write down some things (or tell your parents some things to write down). This will help us solve the mystery!*

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- PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT**  
*Learning About Anxiety* Tell the child the **Learning About Anxiety** worksheet is to be completed at home. Explain that you will go over it together the next time you talk.

- 
- Summarising** Ask if they would like you to summarise the session, if they want to summarise or if you should do it together.

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**VERSION IF SESSION IS ONLY WITH THE PARENT/S:**

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Aim</b>	<p>The aim of this session is for the parent to understand more about anxiety and the rationale behind practising and relay this information to their child <i>if appropriate</i>.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Introducing Anxiety</b>	<p>Explain that anxiety is an emotion that all people experience. The parent should let their child know that everyone has fears and anxieties (including adults, heroes and brave people). The parent may also want to let the child know that they themselves can get anxious about things sometimes, being sure to give appropriate examples.</p> <p>Discuss with the parent that idea that anxiety has three parts to it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What we feel in our bodies (i.e. feeling out of breath, having a racing heart)</li> <li>• What we think</li> <li>• What we do (i.e. running away)</li> </ul> <p>The parent should discuss this with the child after the session and complete the <b><i>Anxious Feelings and Thoughts</i></b> worksheet (use only the girl or boy drawing, as appropriate) with the child after the session.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Introduce Alarm Concept</b>	<p>Point out that anxiety is an emotion that all people experience, and that it works as the body's natural alarm. Usually, that alarm is helpful and protects us from danger. Ask the parent to imagine what someone would do if he or she felt no anxiety (the parent should be guided to provide an answer suggesting that a person could not avoid danger, which would be bad). Then point out that, in their child's situation, the alarm is a little too sensitive – it goes off too easily. Thus, the goal of therapy is to make sure that their child is better able to tell what fears are real and what dangers are only false alarms. The goal is not to help the child get rid of all of his or her anxiety, but rather to have them experience anxiety only when it is appropriate.</p> <p>When explaining the alarm concept to their child, the parent may find it helpful to draw a picture of a house with a smoke alarm going off and no fire and another house with a fire that has a smoke alarm going off. Ask which one is the real alarm and which one is the false alarm. Explain that anxiety – people's alarm system – can have false alarms, too. That is when people get scared or anxious when there is really no danger. The aim is not to get rid of the alarms altogether but is to stop having so many false alarms.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT</b> <b><i>Learning About Anxiety</i></b>	<p>The child should complete the <b><i>Learning About Anxiety</i></b> worksheet at home.</p>

<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Check In</b>	<p>Answer any questions at this point, and try to frame your answers within the alarm model of anxiety reviewed so far.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Discuss What Does Not Work</b>	<p>Begin with a brief discussion of what does not work for anxiety. For example, telling a child "just relax," or explaining that their anxiety is unnecessary or does not make sense will not help. Also, with the exception of problem solving around everyday worries, "talking it out" is generally not considered to help in the long run. Another common approach, "getting to the origin of the fears", has not been show to help reduce anxiety, either.</p>
<p><b>Example script</b></p>	
<p><i>Have you ever been really worried about something and had someone tell you "just relax?" Did it make you relax? Why not? That's right, it is not that simple! You see, one of the things we have learned is that just talking about worries or telling people to relax doesn't really show them how to get started. So what we would like to try will be a bit different than just "talking it out" or saying, "just relax."</i></p>	
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Manage Expectations</b>	<p>Explain to the parent that this means they will not be "talking it out" with the child nor will they be "searching for the root of the fears." It is important that the parents understand that those types of approaches are not likely to help.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Discuss What Can Work</b>	<p>Follow this with an explanation of what can work. The one skill that has been shown more than any other to help anxiety problems in children is practice. Ask the parent to give an example of how someone who is scared of something could get used to it by practising.</p>
<p><b>Example script</b></p>	
<p><i>Have you ever known someone who was scared to fly in airplanes? How would they get over that fear?</i></p>	
<p>Be sure to point out that practice involves getting used to something and learning that it is safe. Praise the parent for good examples. If relaying this information to the child the parent may want to use examples that are applicable to the child, such as playing an instrument, learning to swim, or better yet, something the child is already skilled at and not anxious about.</p>	
<p>When explaining practising to their child, the parent may find it helpful to tell the child that practising is a way of testing whether their alarms are real or false. They could give an example of a fire alarm at school i.e. the teachers check to see whether there is a fire and whether it is safe for everyone go back inside. This means that sometimes, people have to go towards the scary thing or situation, just like the teachers may go into school to see if there is a fire.</p>	



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- Describe Your Role** Explain that your job, then, is not really to be just a listener, but to be a coach. Use an example from sports or exercise to explain how the coach's job is to:
- make sure practice is goal-directed (children are not asked to stand around with a football during practice, they are asked to dribble or practise penalties);
  - ensure that practice is safe (coaches make sure that children are properly warmed up and don't do anything that could lead to injury);
  - maintain enthusiasm (coaches often give pep talks, especially when practice is hard or things are not going well).
- This is what you will do as a therapist: plan, organise, supervise, troubleshoot, and give feedback about practice. If things are getting in the way of practice, your job is to help make practice easier.
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- Describe Parent's role** Explain that another important goal is for the parent to become the coach as quickly as possible. To the extent possible, the parent will be asked to learn how to do all the practice exercises with the child, and to learn how to fix problems that come up. As soon as the parent can start to take over, the therapist backs away a bit, providing support only when needed. Eventually, the family will be able to do all the practice without help and won't need the therapist anymore. Remind parents that all this represents an active approach to treatment, and that children always do better when their parents participate actively.

**Example script**

*So, remember, we won't just be talking about how [child] feels each week. I am going to teach you skills to practise. I'd like you to help with the practice and work as a coach for your child to continue to improve these new skills.*

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- Acknowledge the Parent's Perspective** Explain that in order to facilitate conducting practices with their child in future sessions, you will be getting specific information about the child's anxiety and functioning. Remind the parent of his or her invaluable role in the child's treatment programme and the unique perspective he or she brings. As much as possible, you should build the parent's enthusiasm and increase his or her motivation to participate in the child's treatment.

**Example script**

*One of the things that will help me the most in working with your child will be getting your perspective on her anxiety and the kinds of things that happen for your child when she experiences anxiety. Because you are really the expert on your child, your perspective on how things have been going for her will be very valuable.*

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<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Review the <i>Helping Your Child Succeed</i> handout</b>	At this point, go over the <b><i>Helping Your Child Succeed</i></b> handout together. Make sure to stop and answer questions as you go along.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Monitoring</b>	Finally, ask the parent to note down any information when practising on the <b><i>Monitoring sheet</i></b> .
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Review <i>Understanding Anxiety Handout</i></b>	Tell the parent/s to review the <b><i>Understanding Anxiety</i></b> handout after the session, and finally, thank the parent enthusiastically for making the time to talk with you.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Send the materials for the session</b>	Tell the parent/s you will send a written summary and the materials for the next session. Remind them that they <u>do not</u> need to be completed for next session as you will go through them together in the session. Tell the parent/s you will also send the <b><i>Weekly questionnaires</i></b> and <b><i>Monitoring sheet</i></b> which need to be completed for the next session.
	Confirm date and time of the next call.
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Summarising</b>	Ask if they would like you to summarise the session, if they want to summarise or if you should do it together.

## Leave 'Em Laughing

End the session on a positive note with the family by perhaps talking about things that are unrelated to treatment or a game or activity that will leave them feeling good about the work you've done today. The end of each session should be used to praise the family's efforts and to convey support and encouragement.

## Helpful Tips

- If this is too much material, it can be covered in two (or more) sessions. The most important concepts are the false alarm idea and the importance of practice and monitoring.
- If a child finds it difficult to discuss his or her own experiences, introduce concepts in the abstract or by referring to other people, rather than focusing on the child's own experience. What do other people do when they are scared? How do you know your little sister is scared?
- Therapists should be careful when discussing commitment and motivation with families, so as to avoid suggesting that the family is "not interested" in their child's progress. Many families are motivated for their child to improve, but do not have the time or resources to help. A better approach is to describe that treatment must be an important goal for both the parent and the child by using the words "high priority" instead. Parents should be encouraged to inform their therapist if they are not finding enough time to practise outside of the sessions, as well as to discuss any other difficulties they are having with treatment as such difficulties arise.

## Special Cases

<i>Generalised Anxiety</i>	A child with generalised anxiety may never experience many "red light" alarms, but can have a "yellow light" that seems to be always on. It can be helpful to talk about what kinds of things the yellow light comes on for – if it is saying "be careful!" why might that be? What kinds of things is it saying could go wrong? Be sure to point out that people's yellow light can come on for all sorts of little things, like homework, teasing, or being on time, not just serious danger.
<i>Panic</i>	For a child with panic disorder, the "alarm" metaphor can be used to describe what happens when the child begins to notice sensations in his or her body (sweaty palms, heart beating, rapid breathing). The panic attack itself is really a "red light" alarm for the child, whereas the worry about having another panic attack may be more of a "yellow light" alarm. The false alarm of a panic attack may feel to the child very similar to a real alarm (having a heart attack, going crazy), so this may be a good time to identify the core fear the child has attached to the panic attacks.
<i>Obsessions and Compulsions</i>	For a child with Obsessive compulsive Disorder (OCD), the obsessions can be described as an alarm that keeps going off, all the

	time, for no reason (like when a smoke alarm has a bad battery). Because the alarm is so distressing, the child tries to turn it off by doing something in response (compulsions). However, the more he or she tries, the louder the alarm becomes and the more often it goes off. This is a good time to identify the behaviours that the child has developed to try and "turn off the alarm."
<i>Posttraumatic Stress</i>	For a child with Posttraumatic stress, explain that sometimes when we have experienced a real alarm, people, places, sounds or memories that remind us of the scary experience can make us feel like the experience is happening all over again. This is actually a false alarm, but it can feel very real in the moment.
<i>Separation Anxiety</i>	For a child with separation anxiety, the alarm is likely to be false and the parent/child are likely to be fine. It can feel very real in the situation due to real alarms in the past related to epilepsy but nevertheless should be considered as false.
<i>Epilepsy</i>	At times it is very hard to distinguish between real and false alarms and some children have non-epileptic seizures which makes it even more complicated. If it is difficult to distinguish between the two, discuss the specific case with the neurologist.

### **How's Your Style?**

- Did you praise often?
- Did you review often, by asking questions?
- Did you simplify the steps as needed?
- Did your pace match that of the child or family?
- Did you stay on track?