



Community Education Service

**Child & Youth
Mental Health Program**

**Ron Joyce
Children's Health Centre**

**Anxiety in
Children and Youth**
January 11, 2022

Presenters: Sue Kelley, Behaviour Therapist
Michelle McVittie, Child Life Specialist

Everyone experiences symptoms of anxiety. The symptoms are usually short and do not cause significant problems.

Anxiety becomes an issue when the persistent combination of thoughts, emotions/physical and behaviour patterns get in the way of daily tasks, such as with school and friends.





“An overestimation of threat
+
an underestimation of the ability to cope
=
An Anxious Response”

Tamar E. Chansky, PH.D. “Freeing Your Child From Anxiety”,
(Broadway Books, New York, NY 10019)



Understanding *Fight, Flight or Freeze*

- Anxiety is normal and adaptive. It serves as a natural alarm system to alert us to danger.
- Survival response
- The word freeze has been added to the “fight or flight” phrase to identify in an additional response. Instead of fighting or fleeing, sometimes we tend to freeze (like a deer in the headlights).
- “Freeze”, is a survival response, hoping you won’t get noticed and by freezing you can keep yourself safe.

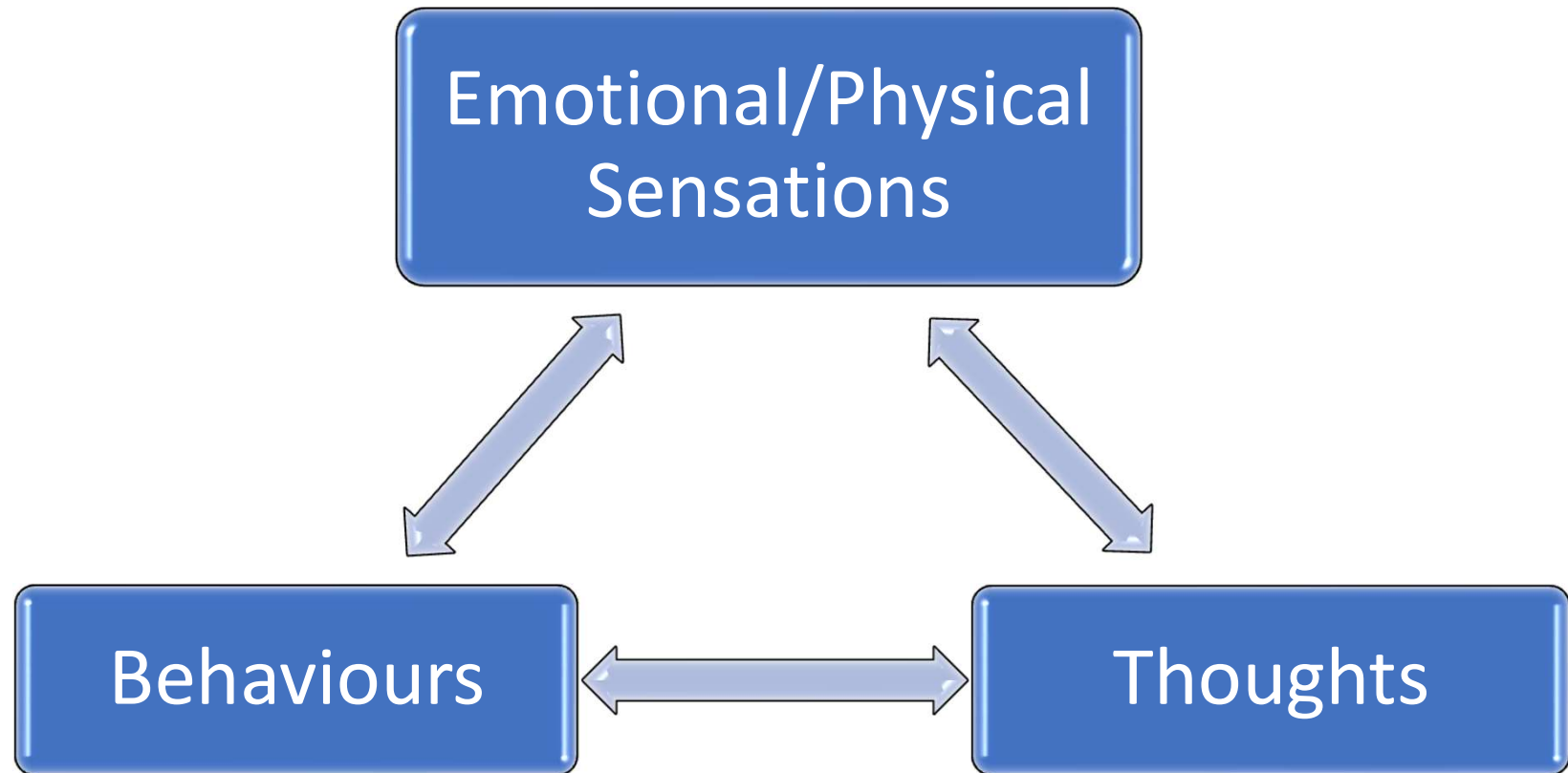
Anxiety

- Anxiety is a normal reaction to a real or perceived threat to either your physical or emotional safety
- It's an appropriate and essential emotional response that enables the child to protect themselves from potential dangers.
- Behaviour and anxieties change with age and developmental stages

“Normal” Fears

- All children are afraid of something at one point or another in their development.
- Very little, children are often afraid of loud noises, strangers or being separated from their parents.
- Preschool aged children often experience fear of the dark
- School Age children experience Fears of imaginary creatures
- Up until their teens, their most frequent fears have to do with injuries, death, natural disasters and social situation (e.g. to have to speak in class)

Components of Anxiety



Thoughts: Thinking Errors/Distortions*

- Expecting the worst to happen
- Predicting the worst is actually likely to happen
- Focusing on the negative
- Black and white thinking
- Overgeneralizing
- Mind reading

***Thoughts that may seem irrational to you, but which feel very real and logical to your child or youth**



Emotional

Feeling...

- Overwhelmed
- Anxious
- Angry
- Lonely
- Worthless
(self-esteem)
- Sad
- Moodiness
- Irritability
- Short temper
- Agitation



Physical Sensations

- Tense muscles
- Chest pain
- Crying
- Tired/Lethargic
- Stomach pains
- Headaches
- Heart beating fast
- Nauseous
- Toileting
- Feeling cold/hot



Behavioural

- Avoidance
- Seeking reassurance often
- Becoming withdrawn
- Easily agitated (e.g. Big reaction to minor problems)
- Restless
- Going back to less mature habits
- Increased behaviour problems (e.g. Biting, Kicking, Argumentative)
- Clinging behaviour
- Trouble eating, relaxing or sleeping
- Inability to concentrate
- Forgetfulness
- Daydreaming
- Confusion
- Indecisiveness



Thinking Trap	Example
<p>Fortune-telling:</p> <p>This is when we predict that things will turn out badly. But in reality, we cannot predict the future because we don't have a crystal ball!</p>	<p><i>"I know I'll mess up."</i></p> <p><i>"I will never be able to manage my anxiety."</i></p>
<p>Black-and-white thinking:</p> <p>This is when we only look at situations in terms of extremes. For example, things are either good or bad, a success or a failure. But, in reality, most events call for a more "moderate" explanation.</p>	<p><i>"Anything less than perfect is a failure."</i></p>

Thinking Trap	Examples
<p>Mind-reading:</p> <p>This trap happens when we believe that we know what others are thinking and we assume that they are thinking the worst of us. The problem is that no one can read minds, so we don't really know what others are thinking!</p>	<p><i>"Others think I'm stupid."</i></p> <p><i>"She doesn't like me."</i></p>
<p>Filtering:</p> <p>This happens when we only pay attention to the bad things that happen, but ignore all the good things. This prevents us from looking at all aspects of a situation and drawing a more balanced conclusion.</p>	<p><i>Believing that you did a poor job on a presentation because some people looked bored, even though a number of people looked interested and you received several compliments on how well you did.</i></p>

Thinking Trap	Examples
<p>Catastrophizing:</p> <p>This is when we imagine that the worst possible thing is about to happen, and predict that we won't be able to cope with the outcome. But, the imagined worst-case scenario usually never happens and even if it did, we are most likely able to cope with it.</p>	<p><i>"I'll freak out and no one will help."</i></p> <p><i>"I'm going to make such a fool of myself, everyone will laugh at me, and I won't be able to survive the embarrassment."</i></p>
<p>"Should" statements:</p> <p>This is when you tell yourself how you "should", "must", or "ought" to feel and behave. However, this is NOT how you actually feel or behave. The result is that you are constantly anxious and disappointed with yourself and/or with others around you.</p>	<p><i>"I should never feel anxious."</i></p> <p><i>"I must control my feelings."</i></p> <p><i>"I should never make mistakes"</i></p>

Thinking Trap	Examples
<p>Over-generalization:</p> <p>This is when we use words like “always” or “never” to describe situations or events. This type of thinking is not helpful because it does not take all situations or events into account. For example, sometimes we make mistakes, but we don’t always make mistakes.</p>	<p><i>“I always make mistakes.”</i></p> <p><i>“I am never good at public speaking.”</i></p>
<p>Labeling:</p> <p>Sometimes we talk to ourselves in mean ways and use a single negative word to describe ourselves. This kind of thinking is unhelpful and unfair. We are too complex to be summed up in a single word!</p>	<p><i>“I’m stupid.”</i></p> <p><i>“I’m a loser.”</i></p>

Thinking Trap

Over-estimating danger:

This is when we believe that something that is unlikely to happen is actually right around the corner. It's not hard to see how this type of thinking can maintain your anxiety. For example, how can you not feel scared if you think that you could have a heart attack any time?

Thinking Traps Examples

"I will faint."

"I'll go crazy."

"I'm dying."

<https://www.anxietycanada.com/sites/default/files/ThinkingTraps.pdf>

ACTIVITY: What are your thinking traps?

- Fortune-telling
- Black-and-white thinking
- Mindreading
- Filtering
- Catastrophizing
- “Should” statements
- Over-generalization
- Labeling
- Over-estimating danger

ACTIVITY: What do you think your child's thinking traps are?

- Fortune-telling
- Black-and-white thinking
- Mindreading
- Filtering
- Catastrophizing
- “Should” statements
- Over-generalization
- Labeling
- Over-estimating danger

Be aware of your own emotional responses and reactions

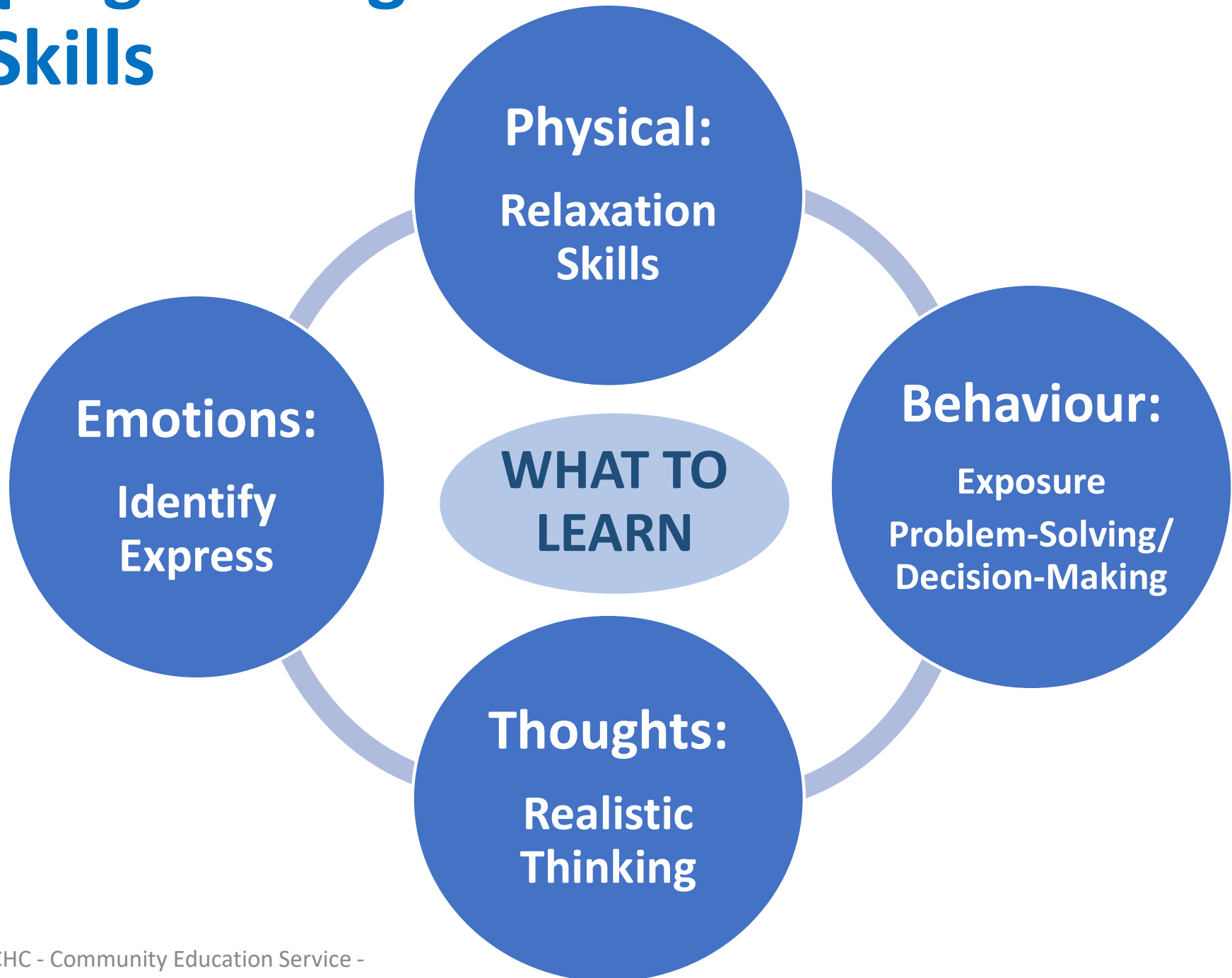
- What is the feeling about your child that makes you feel most uncomfortable?
- What do you really believe is a more likely explanation?
- Do you think other parents would feel the same way?
- Most anxious kids can read their parents like a book.
- However, your child may **not** be accurately interpreting those expressions - they often negatively distort the meaning of our expression/reaction.



How is the anxiety affecting...

- Your child?
- The family?
- Their schooling/education?
- Their involvement in the social world?

Coping Strategies & Skills



Detective Thinking

- Detective thinking to change perception of the problem
 - What is happening
 - How big is it? (scale of 1-10)
- What is the evidence supporting my thought?
- What is the evidence against my thought?
- More realistic thought?

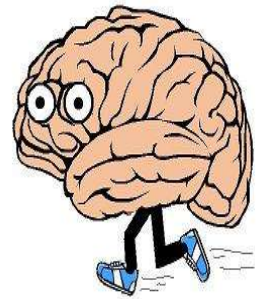


EXAMPLE:



UNHELPFUL/HELPFUL THOUGHTS

We have thousands of thoughts running through our heads every day. Some thoughts are helpful thoughts and some are unhelpful thoughts. Unhelpful thoughts are usually one of the negative traps. A helpful thought makes us feel confident, happy and brave. An unhelpful thought makes us feel worried, nervous, scared, or sad.



Situation	Unhelpful Thoughts	Helpful Thoughts
A group of kids looking at her and laughing	Oh no, they are laughing at me. I must look stupid!	They are probably laughing about something funny, and I just walked by. I don't actually know that they were laughing at me!
Not being invited to a birthday party.	She doesn't like me. I bet I am the only one who didn't get invited in the whole class.	They probably just forgot. Or maybe it was just a small party. I have other good friends.
Getting a low grade on a quiz.	I suck. I am never going to do well in spelling.	Well, I tried my hardest. It's only one grade! I will practice more next time.

Unhelpful/Helpful Thoughts

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Your Worry or Fear	Your Unhelpful/ Automatic Thought	Your New Coping/ Helpful Thought
#1		
#2		

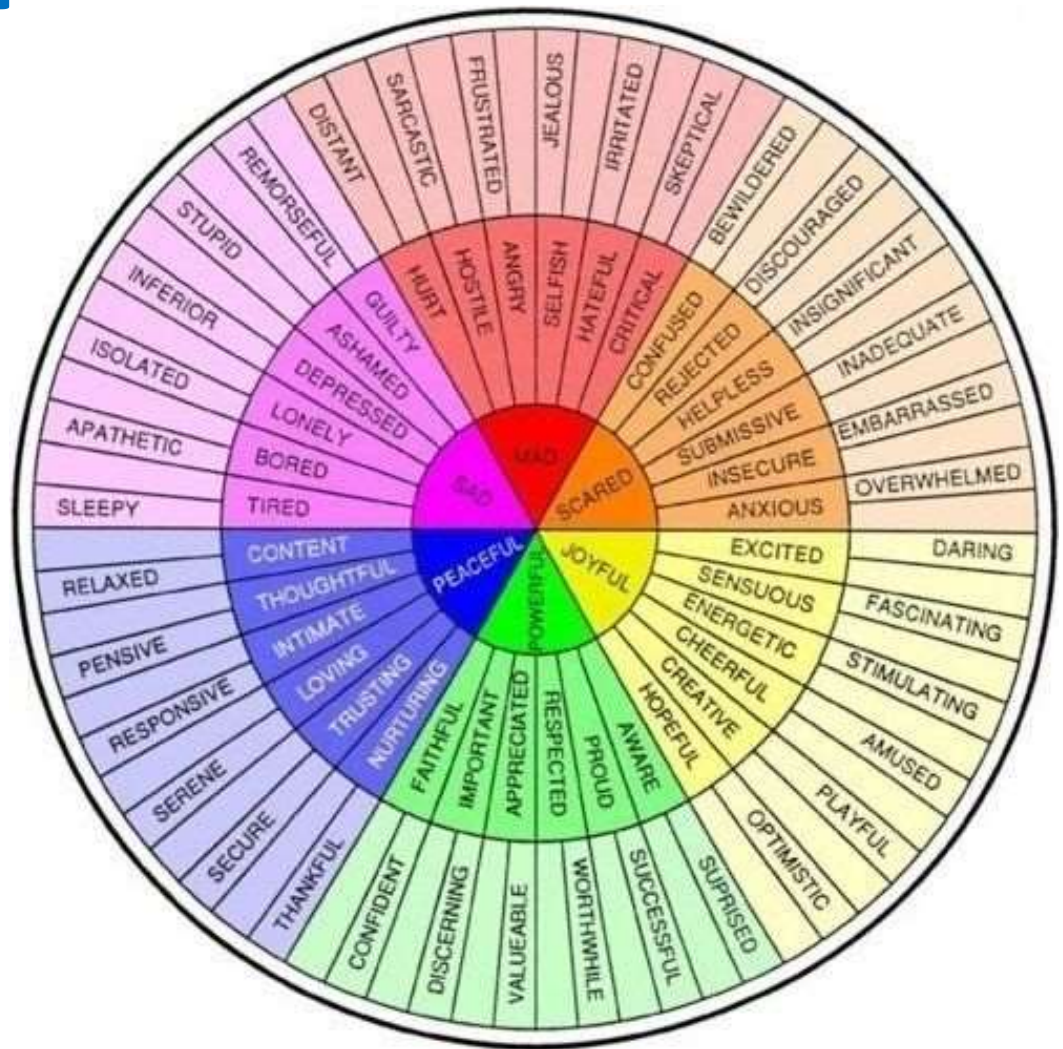
Positive Thinking

- Focus on child's strengths and foster strengths
 - Ask yourself: What are my child's strengths?
 - How can I bring that picture to mind for both of us?
- Increase positive interactions with your child
- Acknowledge your child's efforts: "I really noticed..."
- Have your child use positive affirmations
- Use distraction techniques



Emotion Wheel

- Expand emotional vocabulary
- Play emotion charades
- Emotion of the day
- Practice High and Low



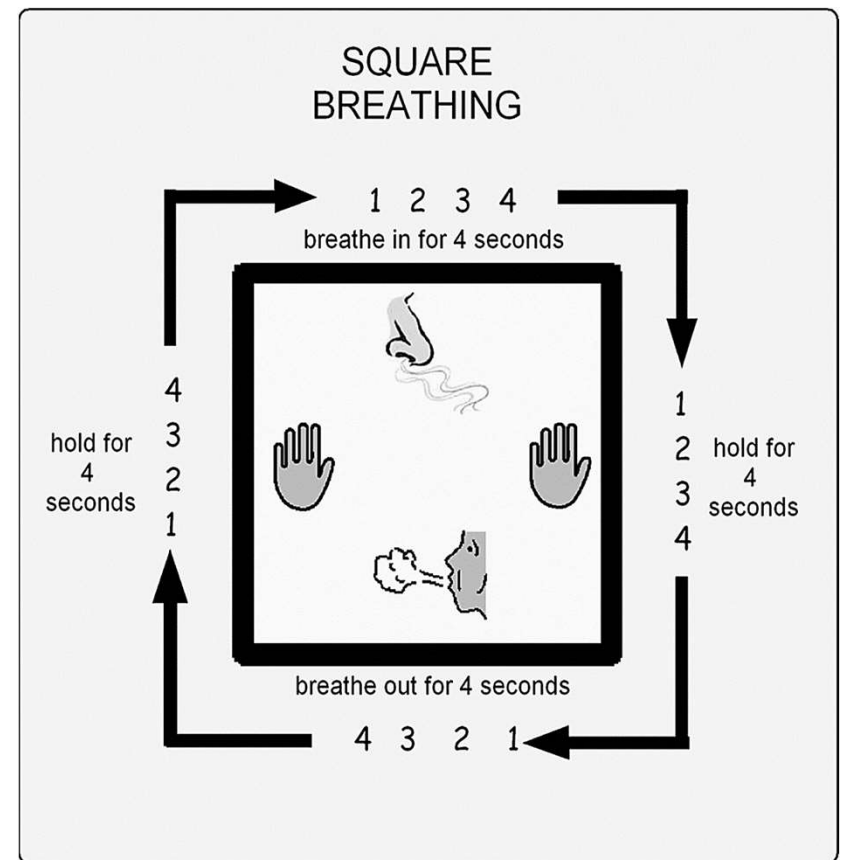
Physical Relaxation Skills

To manage and cope with physical sensations:

- Calm breathing
- Muscle tension and relaxation
- Visualization
- Mindfulness skills

Apps can be helpful

- Website address:
<http://youth.anxietybc.com/>



Physical Relaxation - Stress Busters

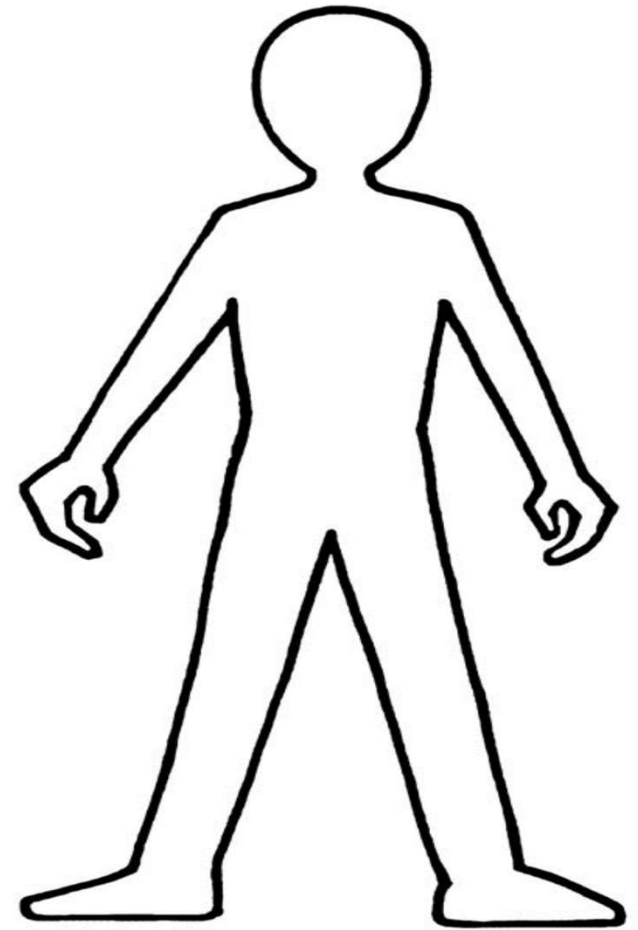
Try teaching your child one or two of the following techniques to begin, and then gradually add in more as he or she feels ready to try them.

- Go for a walk
- Take a nap
- Play with a pet
- Take a bath
- Listen to music
- Talk to a friend
- Exercise
- Write in a journal
- Write a letter that you never send
- Do something creative – an art project, poem, write a rap
- Watch television
- Talk on the phone
- Read

What other calm, enjoyable activities does your child enjoy?

1. Take a look at the feeling words at the bottom of the page.
2. Underline the words you have felt in the past month.
3. Use a different color for each word you use.
4. Colour in how much of your body feels that feeling.

Colour In Your BODY TALK



Worried Happy Scared Angry Sad Overwhelmed Agitated Content
Discouraged Tired Frustrated Proud Lonely Excited Confused Nervous

The Worry Ladder

Generate gradual positive solutions to problems resulting in reduced conflict and further problem patterns.

The diagram illustrates 'The Worry Ladder' as a tool for managing anxiety. On the left, a ladder with five rungs is shown. To its left, the words 'G R A D U A L' are stacked vertically, and to its right, the words 'S T E P S' are stacked vertically. To the right of the ladder, there are two text prompts: 'My Goal Is...' at the top and 'My worry/ fear is...' at the bottom. To the right of these prompts is a vertical column of five downward-pointing chevrons. The chevrons are labeled from top to bottom: 'Worry or Fear', 'Goal', 'STEP 1', and 'STEP 2'. To the right of each chevron is a horizontal rectangular box for writing. The box corresponding to 'STEP 1' is highlighted with a blue border.

G
R
A
D
U
A
L

S
T
E
P
S

My Goal Is...

My worry/ fear is...

Worry or Fear

Goal

STEP 1

STEP 2

Parent/Caregiver Self- Care: Take Care of Yourself

- Self care is not a luxury, it is basic maintenance
- It's just like changing the oil filter on your car every 3000 miles.
 - Yes, your car will run if you don't do that, but it won't run well and eventually it mucks up the whole system
- Train yourself to put your feelings of guilt aside
 - make the call to the sitter
 - draw a bath
 - read a good book
 - take the dog for a walk
- View recording of related session: [Taking care of yourself](#)

Helpful Numbers

Need help right now?

If you are having trouble coping or are in crisis, help is available. You can contact:

- Kids Help Phone: 24/7 crisis support and resources for youth
 - Live chat at www.kidshelpphone.ca/live-chat
 - Call 1-800-668-6868
 - Text 686868
 - en Français: www.jeunessejecoute.ca/
- COAST (The Crisis Outreach and Support Team) – Crisis support line (youth, families and others can call for assistance which may be offered by phone or mobile support team):
 - Hamilton Phone Line: 905-972-8338 or Toll-free 1-800-972-8338
- McMaster Children's Hospital – Emergency Department (under 18 years old) – 1200 Main St. W., Hamilton, ON
- St. Joseph's Healthcare – Emergency Department (18 years and older) – 50 Charlton Ave. E., Hamilton, ON

If you or your child or youth are at risk of harming yourself or someone else right now, call 9-1-1 for immediate help.

Helpful Numbers

Contact Hamilton: 905-570-8888

For information about accessing child and youth services or developmental services and supports:

www.contacthamilton.com

Ontario Caregiver Helpline: 1-833-416-2273 (CARE)

www.ontariocaregiver.ca/find-support/helpline

Community Education Resources: 905-521-2100 x74147

www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca/mcmaster-childrens-hospital/family-resources/