



BEDFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Quality First Teaching Strategies

Supporting Children and Young People with Anxiety



What is anxiety?

Anxiety is our body's internal alarm system which is there to protect us from danger. It's really useful when there is real danger and makes us change our behaviour in order to protect ourselves.

However sometimes it goes off when it doesn't need to; there's a false alarm. When these false alarms happen a lot they can start to affect our behaviour and have a negative impact on our everyday life.

When we react to the false alarms frequently, it can make us feel like there is constant danger. This can start to prevent us from doing things we want to do.

There are three ways our body responds:

1. Cognitively – the thoughts we have (“I’m going to fall”).
2. Physically – the changes in our bodies (Hands are sweaty, heart beats faster).
3. Behaviourally – our response to the situation (Avoiding the situation).

In children and young people, anxiety can present as fearful, shy, quiet, tearful. However, they can also present as irritable, defiant, aggressive and show a lot of attention seeking behaviours. On first impressions, these children don't seem to be anxious, but more “difficult” and this behaviour can be confusing for parents and teachers; however this behaviour is often driven by frustration and low self-confidence due to their anxiety.

Anxiety can come from a stressful or traumatic event (e.g. ‘I was bitten by a dog, so I’m always anxious around dogs’). It can also be due to a genetic tendency to be more anxious, and react more strongly, or a generally more anxious temperament. Anxiety can be maintained and reinforced by home or school environment and the people around the child.

Strategies to support a child / young person experiencing anxiety

Help the child / young person to explore and reflect on their anxious feelings by keeping an anxious behaviour diary to look for:

1. What happens beforehand? What is the situation?
2. What are the anxious behaviours?
3. How do adults around the child respond?
4. What happened afterwards? Is it likely to happen again?

Following this, a trusted adult could support the child / young person to devise an anxiety plan so that they have some ownership of how to manage times when they are feeling emotionally dysregulated.

A plan may look like this:

- **Situation** - Record the situation(s) that make you feel dysregulated.
- **Symptoms of anxiety** - Record how you feel in this situation, including physical responses.
- **Solution** - Record an activity that helps you feel less anxious in the identified situation.

Useful coping strategies to learn are:

1. Make coping cards – when we feel anxious it is hard to think clearly, so a coping card is a little reminder in a phrase or a picture that everything will be ok. The coping card could have a picture(s) or word(s) on one side to remind them of what they can do to help them to regulate and calm (e.g. listen to music / stroke the dog / go for a walk / calm 5 breathing / drawing etc).
 2. Use controlled breathing – when we feel anxious our breathing gets fast and shallow so we need to take slow, deep breaths to feel calmer. Actively teach the child / young person to use grounding activities such as those included below. Encourage the child / young person to practice using these techniques when they feel calm so that they are more likely to be successful at using them when in a state of heightened emotion.
- **Grounding activity 1:**
Hold out your hand and trace round your thumb and fingers. As you move up your thumb / finger breathe in. As you move down breathe out. Continue until you have traced your whole hand. Then repeat, but this time do it slower. Keep repeating slower and slower until you feel calm.

• Grounding activity 2:

Name...

5 things you can see;



4 things you can hear;



3 things you can feel;



2 things you can smell;



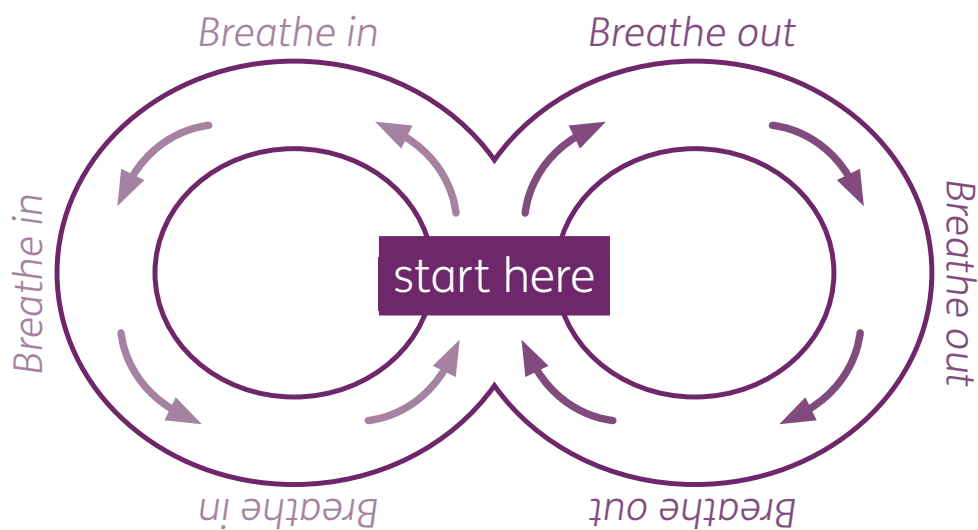
1 thing you can taste;



Repeat until you feel calm.

• Grounding activity 2:

Start with an 8 on its side. Starting in the middle, go up to the left and trace the left part of the 8 with your finger while you breathe in. When you get to the middle of the 8 again, breathe out while you trace the right part of the 8 with your finger.

**Help the child / young person to build emotional resilience (see the Building Resilience Guide for detail):**

1. Guide them in learning to recognise, understand and accept feelings – to understand that uncomfortable feelings are normal, that we can share them and then we can learn to accept them.
2. Help them to express feelings in a way that is not hurtful to others – talk about feelings with a trusted adult and for that adult to reward the expression of feelings.
3. Help them to develop an optimistic outlook – encourage them to take part in activities where they can experience success, use phrases like “You can do this, I believe in you”, set small achievable goals to build confidence.
4. Help them to learn coping strategies for when they feel anxious (see below).

Changing the way of thinking:

When something happens, we have beliefs about the event which leads to behaviours (thoughts, feelings and actions). Often when people feel anxious they can have negative beliefs which can lead to hurtful and sad emotions, a physical response in the body and negative behaviours.

We can help the child / young person to see that:

1. There may be more positive beliefs about the situation – reframing (e.g. Another YP might not be talking about them, they might be asking for help from their neighbour);
2. That what they are worried about happening is not that likely (e.g. “The teacher is going to shout at me for getting the answer wrong”);
3. That they could cope with the situation if it did happen.

Constructive problem solving:

Encourage the child / young person to use their problem solving skills. Acknowledge their anxiety, remind them that you are there to support them and that you are proud they are facing their worries and not trying to avoid them.

1. Identify the problem – check you have understood what they are anxious about.
2. Remind them that their reaction has an element of choice and together you will think through what these choices could be.
3. Prompt them to think of as many possible solutions as they can - they don't all have to be realistic or sensible.
4. Praise them for their effort in thinking the choices through.
5. Ask them to think what the consequences for each solution might be and rate the solutions out of 10.
6. Prompt them to choose the solution they think is most positive.
7. Test it out and see what happens. Choose an alternative if needed.

Additional support and resources

Much of this information sheet is based upon the following programme: Fear-Less Triple P, helping children to manage anxiety by Vanessa Cobham PhD and Matthew Sanders PhD. Fear-Less Triple P is a 6 week cognitive-behavioural parenting intervention that supports parents to help children manage their anxiety more effectively. Parents can sign up to the course by clicking the following link:

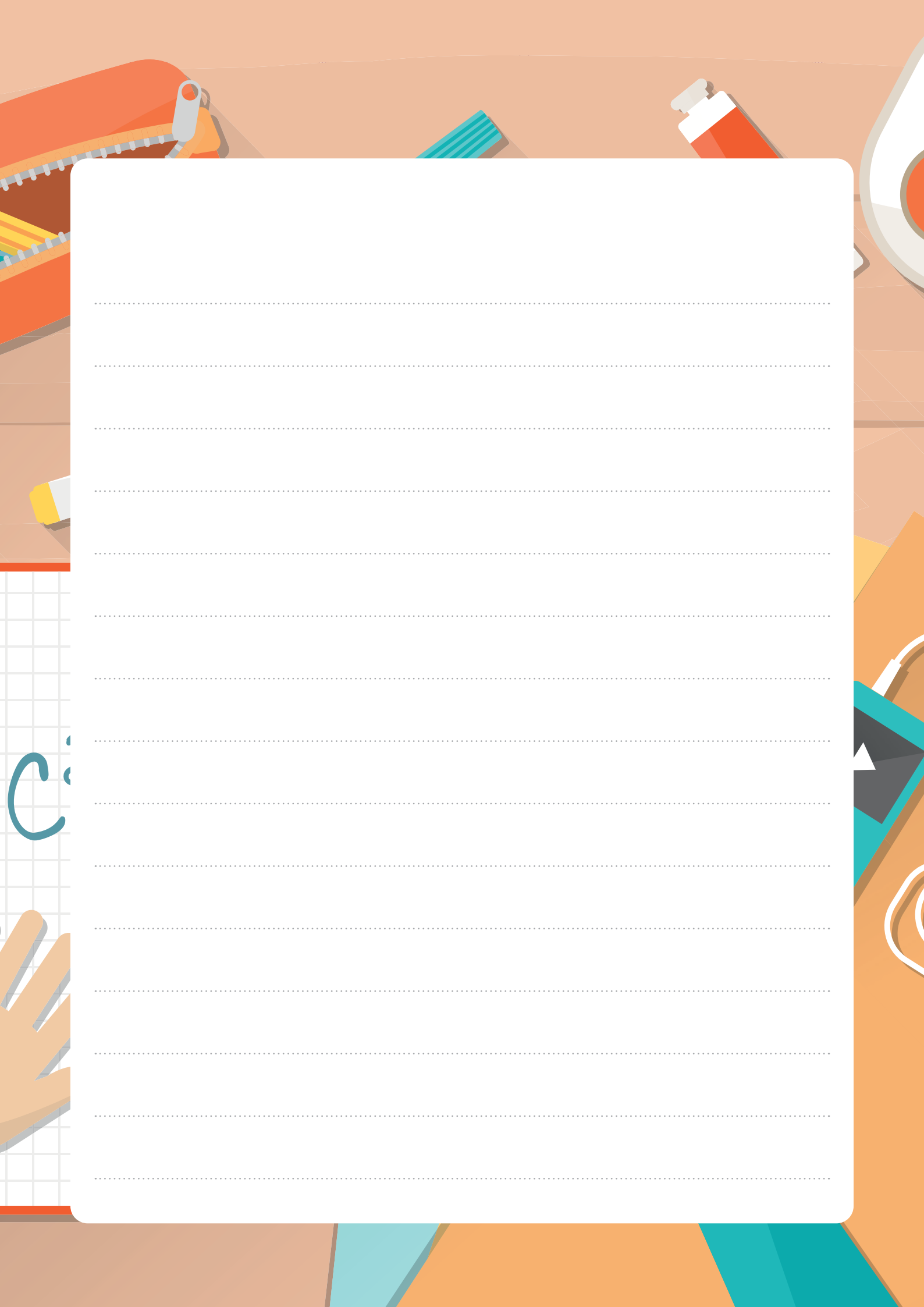
- [Triple P – Positive Parenting Programme | Bedford Borough Council](#)

Further information and support can also be found at the following:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anxiety-disorders-in-children/>
- <https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-guide-to-support-a-z/parents-guide-to-support-anxiety/>
- <https://youngminds.org.uk/resources/school-resources/>
- <https://mentallyhealthyschools.org.uk/>
- [Mental Health Support for Children and Young People | Bedford Local Offer](#)

Books:

- Starving the anxiety gremlin: A cognitive behavioural therapy workbook on anxiety management for young people by Kate Collins-Donnelly
- The huge bag of worries by Virginia Ironside
- How are you feeling today? by Molly Potter
- Helping your Child with fears and worries (2nd edition): A self-help guide for parents by Cathy Creswell



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Finding out more

If you would like further copies, a large-print copy or information about us and our services, please telephone or write to us at our address below.

Për Informacion

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Informacja

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