

Working with Worrying

Understanding childhood anxieties



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Why are we are wired to worry?



Physiological arousal
- Increased heart rate, sweaty, muscular tension, gut motility, thinking patterns and hyper-focus

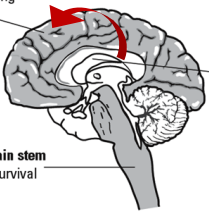
Survival necessity

- Brains are wired to survive
- Perception of threat is the primary focus
- From birth the startle reflex is present

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The developing brain and the regulation of feelings



The rich learning of childhood and Teaching the process of identifying 'warning signs' from the body and knowing triggers from the environment is the very first step in helping a child to get their anxiety under control.

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When does worrying become worrying?



- When worry settles in and becomes anxiety, significant issues occur
- Worry changes the way the brain works – and when experienced over prolonged periods of time becomes the default response

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Anxiety – the different ways we worry



Specific / Phobic anxiety	Performance anxiety	Separation anxiety	Social anxiety
Panic disorder	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder	Post Traumatic Stress Disorder	Generalised Anxiety Disorder

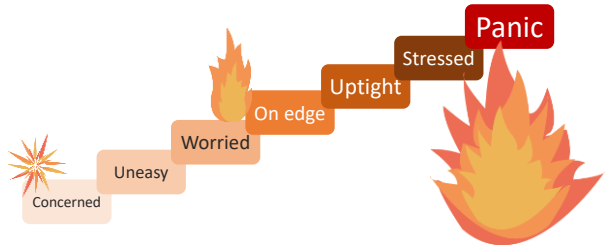
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- Response to an internal sensation
- Sensory overwhelm
- Competing demands
- Change
- Previous experience
- External stimulus



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Not all worrying is equal



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Anxious temperament

Internalise

Reactive to real or perceived threat

Often cautious

Familial/exacerbated by family

Not all worriers are equal



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Anxiety - it's no fun at all



Scary

Exhausting

Isolating

Overwhelming

Confusing

Self-fulfilling

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What does worrying look like at home?

- Temperamental and easy to upset
- Withdrawn
- Clingy and needing of reassurance
- Sleep and eating may be affected
- Difficult around siblings
- Fear and avoidance (chores, routines, activities)
- Complaining about sore head/tummy...



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What does worrying look like in the playground?

- Silliness and hysterical, excitable arousal
- Withdrawn
- Irritable and often frustrated
- Emotionally explosive
- Clingy and needy within friendships
- Hovering close to teacher
- Overstating of 'the rules' of games and being upset if not followed
- Telling on other children



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What does worrying look like in the classroom?

- Wanting things to be perfect – re-doing work, worrying about mistakes.
- Reluctance to ask for help.
- Being very needy – requiring ++ reassurance.
- Difficulty joining in - class discussions, in sport or games or school camp.
- Requests to go to sick bay.
- Fearful of test situations.
- Self-conscious when performing in front of the class.



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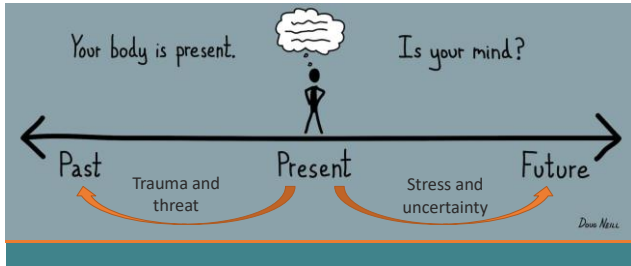





Hey - are you a worrier? Take the survey...

- Do you consider yourself to be a worrier?
 - Are/were one or both of your parents worriers?
 - Do you imagine the worst?
 - Does uncertainty make you uncomfortable?
 - Have you been described as a 'control freak'?
 - Do you find yourself worrying about what's happened and/or what might happen?
 - Do you worry about what other people think of you?
 - Do you worry about making mistakes?
 - Do you worry about what might happen to your family?
 - Do you tend to make little things into big things?
 - Do you feel worried even when there's nothing to worry about?
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Anxiety and presence



The ripple effect - it starts with you...



Think about how you calm down
Use that process explicitly and openly
Know your triggers
Say what you need early to avoid stress
Self-care – including sleep and exercise
Catch yourself and change your thinking

Teaching by example

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How to help your child to manage their anxiety



A Acknowledge

C Clarify and coach

E Engage with empathy

A Acknowledge – WHAT?

Your rating of the event might be very different to your child's.

Your child's worry might be imagined or a perceived threat – it doesn't have to make sense to you.

Your child's emotional state will have an impact of your own. Frustrated, irritated or stressed – manage the situation later.

A Acknowledge – HOW?

Listen
REFLECTIVELY

Listening without a solution is powerful.

"Hear" your child's feelings and thoughts – not content

"That sounds like you feel very worried."

C

Clarify and coach

Is your child having the same response to the situation as you? Rate it.

Avoid taking over – easy to do with an overwhelmed child but very unhelpful for their long term self-management.

Practise a solution – like a calming down technique

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The Triple B's 4 Calming Down



E

Engage with empathy

Your response is going to inform your child about their own response.

Normalise their feelings and thinking – mostly your child doesn't want to feel alone.

Support your child while they have a go. Expect it to be difficult and emotional and remember to praise every success – it's showing your child that they can cope.

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5 top tips for working with a worrier

- #1 **Teach calming down** – choose a technique and practise it together.
- #2 **Try not to catastrophise** – about the way your child is worrying, about what your child is worrying about or about the possible consequences of your child's worrying.
- #3 **Routines help** – anxiety isn't helped by change – so stick to your routines even when the anxiety is running high.
- #4 **Identify the cause** – social anxiety has a solution, night terrors have a solution, performance anxiety has a solution – once you understand the cause.
- #5 **Don't buy in** – empathise – absolutely, normalise – necessary but don't add to the story or become engaged in the story. Listen reflectively, stay objective, notice how you might have been triggered – and deal with that as your own baggage.

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What gets in the way?

- Mini-adult syndrome** – sometimes we expect our children to think and behave like adults. They won't – they're still learning to toggle.
- Bringing your own agenda** – complicating the issue, bringing your experiences to the party, making a mountain out of a molehill.
- Changing your boundaries to minimise the anxiety** – over-compensating does not lead to coping. Be firm, be fair and be consistent.
- Conflicted parenting** – parents working against each other. One empathises and the other talks about 'the bag of concrete.' Work together even if it means taking a different approach – but not if it's a source of conflict and one parent becomes the buffer.

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