BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND MANAGING ANXIETY IN YOUR CHILD

Tower Hamlets Education Wellbeing Service (THEWS)

Led by: Renee and Lizzie

Who Are The Tower Hamlets Education Wellbeing Service?

THEWS is part of a national initiative to improve emotional and mental wellbeing for children and young people by introducing Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs) in schools across England.

MHSTs have three aims:

- To help children and young people, aged 5-19 years old, get earlier access to mental health and wellbeing support
- To help schools embed mental health and wellbeing provisions
- To connect young people and families with other services providing mental health and wellbeing support

Each school has an Education Wellbeing Practitioner who provides support via:

- 1:1 sessions
- Introductory workshops
- Groups sessions

Housekeeping

1. Listen to and respect other group members
2. Doing and sharing only what you are comfortable with
3. If you are having any issues or feeling uncomfortable please feel free to step away
4. Confidentiality- do not share anything outside of this group

Today's Aims

- Introduce the topic of anxiety in children
- Discuss different factors that lead to the development of anxiety in children
- Tips on how to manage anxiety
- How to build confidence in your children and strategies you can use

What is anxiety?

Everyone experiences anxiety! It is an important process designed to help us respond to danger.

When we feel threatened in some way this triggers processes in the body that help us fight or avoid the threat. This is also known as the **flight or fight response**

This response developed in early humans where it was useful as they faced lots of dangers for example avoiding attacks from predators or hunting wild animals.

In the modern world this same response can help us be alert to danger e.g. looking before we cross roads.

But the threats we tend to experience can't be fought or ran away from so the flight or fight can often do more harm than good!



Fight or Flight Response

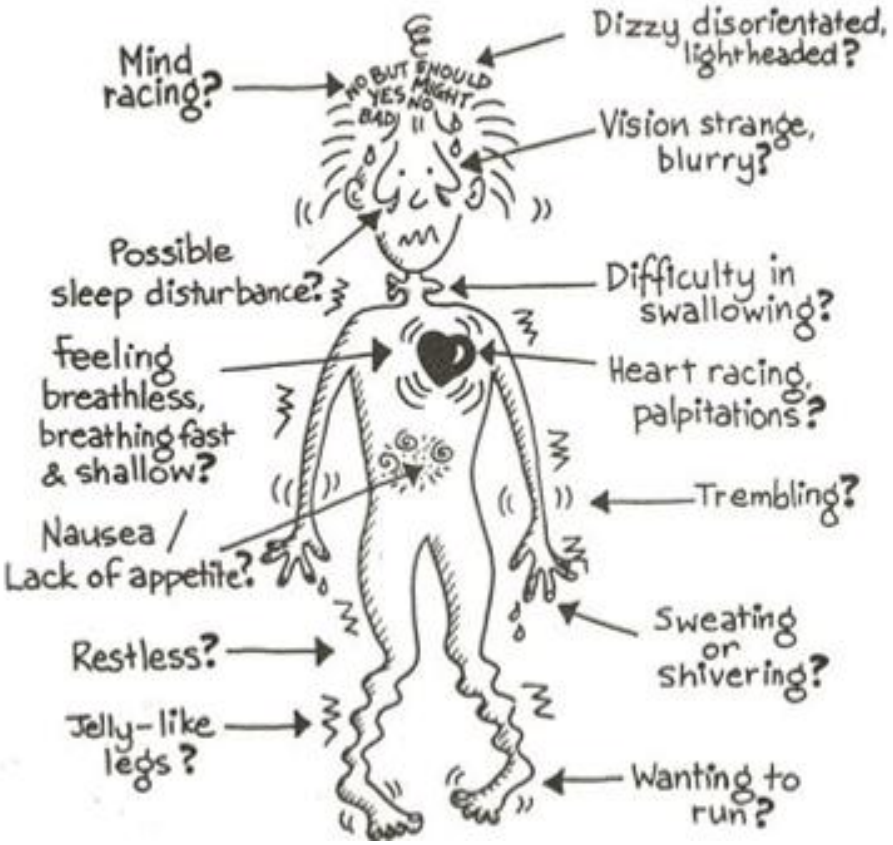
Prepares the body to run away (flight) or fight the danger (fight) in different ways

These processes can feel uncomfortable



Anxiety is like a fire alarm that goes off to prepare us for danger.

Problematic anxiety is when our fire alarm is too sensitive and is triggered when we are not in danger.



Types of Anxiety

- Generalised anxiety – “a bit of a worrier”
- Social Anxiety
- Separation Anxiety
- Phobias (fear of specific things)
- Panic attacks
- Obsessive thoughts and behaviours
- Post traumatic stress disorder







CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT OF FEARS (MOORE & CARR, 2000)

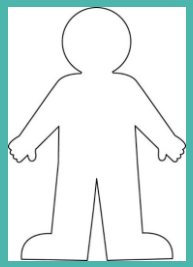
Age	Fears and worries
0 - 6 months	Strong sensory stimuli (e.g. loud noises); loss of support
6 – 12 months	Strangers; separation from caregivers
2 – 4 years	Imaginary creatures; potential burglars; the dark
5 – 7 years	Natural disasters; injury/illness/death; animals; media-based fears
8 – 11 years	Poor academic and athletic performance
12 – 18 years	Peer rejection; world issues

WHAT IS ANXIETY?

What do your children get anxious about?

How do you *know* they are anxious??

How do your children *feel* when they are anxious?





Thoughts - Feelings - Behaviours



EMOTIONS: *Overestimate "danger"; underestimate ability to cope*

SAYING: I'm not walking to school, I won't get ready

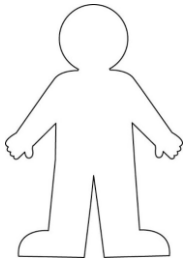
THINKING: *The neighbour's dog is scary, I feel scared*



BEHAVIOUR: *aimed at avoiding danger, e.g. looking out for danger (hypervigilance), avoiding worrying situations*

SAYING: I can't go to school, tell me I'm going to be ok

THINKING: *I can't cope, I can't do it alone*



BODY: *Associated with adrenalin - preparing the body for action*
E.g. sweating, heart beating faster, trembling

SAYING: I have a tummy ache, my head hurts

THINKING: *I'm going to be sick, I'm nervous*

N.B. Anxiety occurs in children AND parents!!!

Is My Child's Anxiety Normal?

Is it a “normal” response? Consider the following....

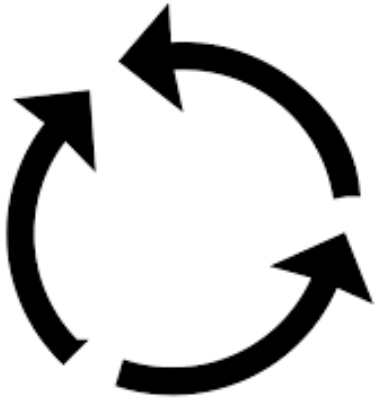
1. Is the anxiety stopping them from doing what they want to / should be doing?
    - In their social life (causing problems with friendships?)
    - Academically (stopping them from doing as well as they could be?)
    - Is it impacting their mood (Often sad / withdrawn / low?)

1. Is their anxiety stopping you from doing what you want to/should be doing?

Why Does Anxiety Stick Around?

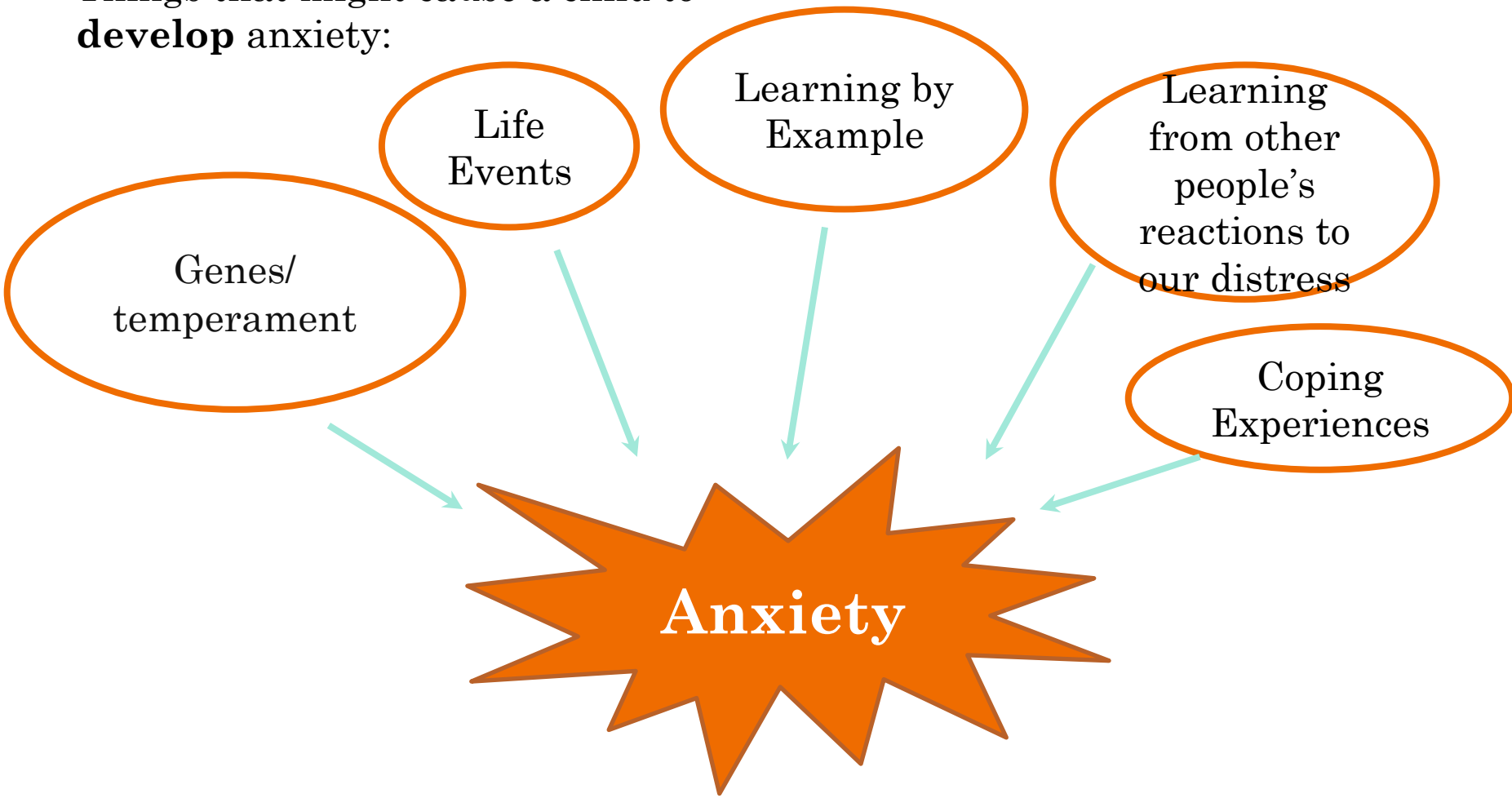
Research looking at factors that influence the development of anxiety in children suggests three key areas:

- Things that cause it to develop in the first place
- Things that keep it going
- How these factors link together



[e.g. Rapee (2001); Hudson and Rapee (2004); Murray, Creswell and Cooper (2008)]

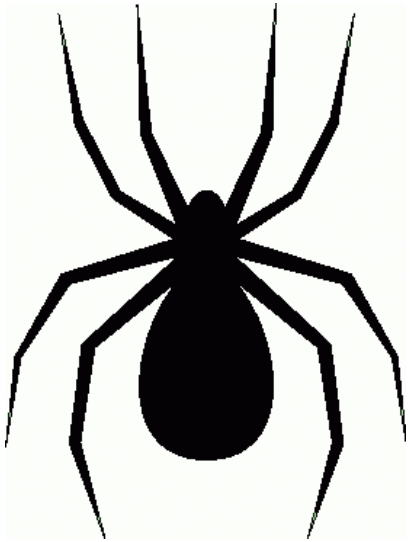
Things that might cause a child to **develop** anxiety:



ACTIVITY:

A. Genes
B. Life Event
C. Learning by example
D. Learning from reactions
E. Coping experiences



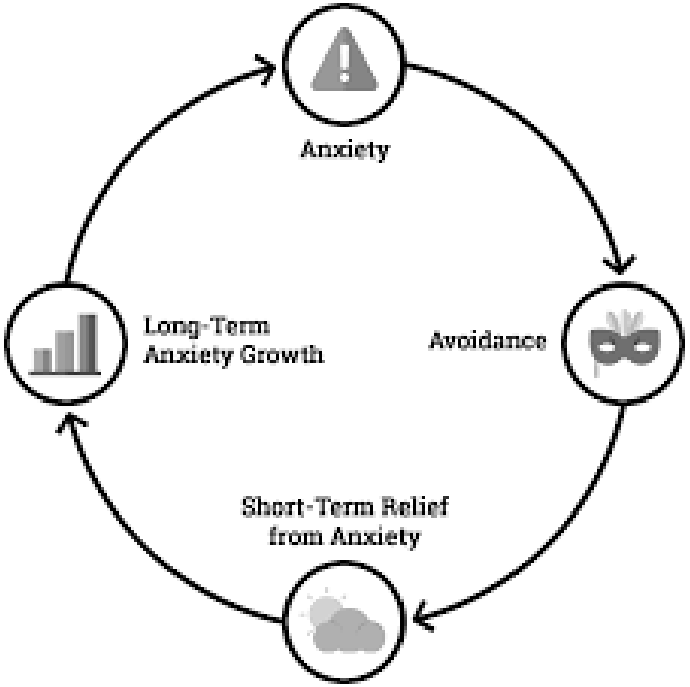








Things That Tend To Keep Anxiety Going



Things other people do to help/protect them feed in to this cycle:

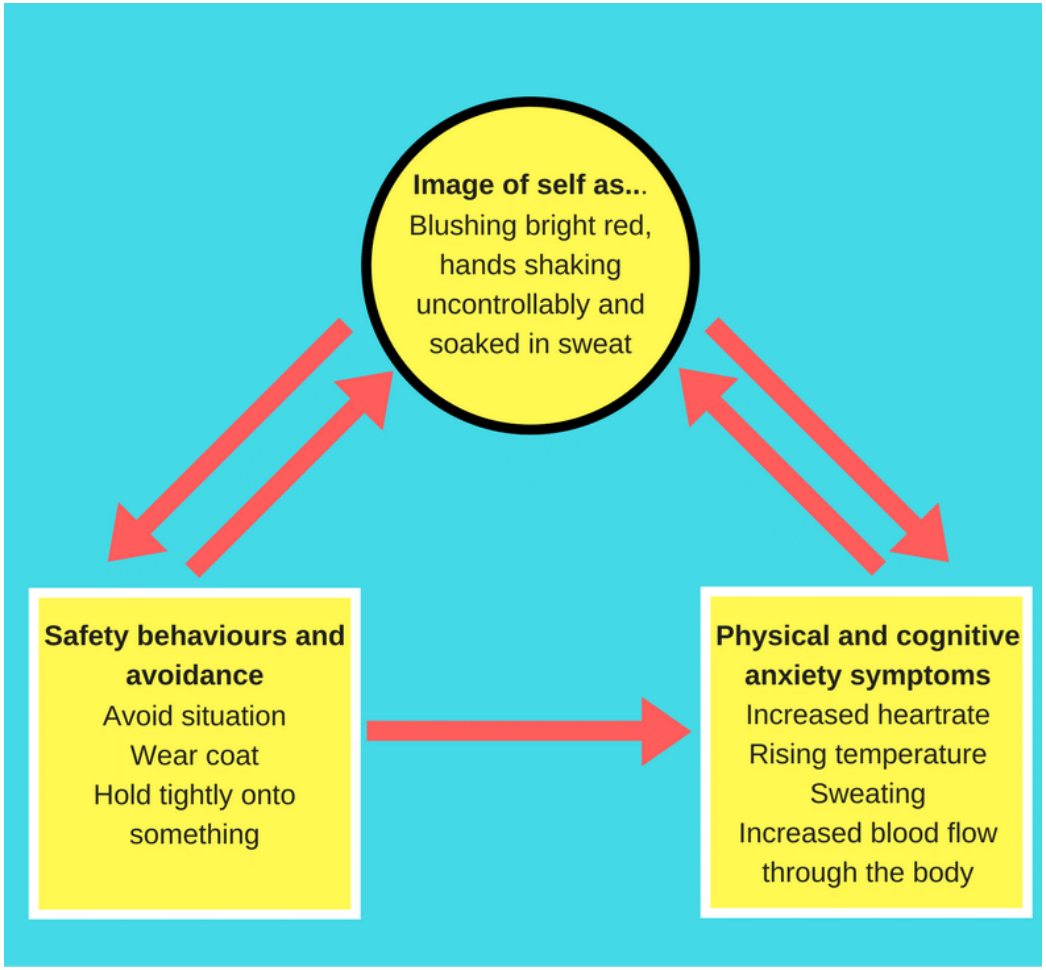
- “Encouraging” Avoidance Behaviour
- Reassurance
- Stepping in to solve all the problems

EXAMPLE

Aminah is anxious around groups of people, she often refuses to go to friend's parties and will not speak in class.

Aminah may sometimes be seen as challenging, she gets upset, cries and screams rather than be in a social situation.

If we look at her cycle, we can see that there is more to it than simply challenging behaviour.







Anxiety In Parents

Before we look at how to help our children with anxiety **we need to remember:**

- *We are designed by evolution to protect our children!!*
- *If our children seem vulnerable to us, we will be on the look-out for signs that they are in danger*
- *We will step in to protect them at all costs*



What do you think the advantages and disadvantages of these are?

What Can Parents Do?

Be aware of your own anxiety responses and those of others around your child. Children's perception of danger is affected by our responses.

- Appear calm when you or your child are feeling anxious!
- Think about how you reassure your child

Promote "brave" behaviour. When your child stands up to anxiety and "has a go" at doing something:

- Pay attention to it
- Give clear and specific praise for it
- Model brave behaviour to your child
- Allow and encourage independence



What Can Parents Do?

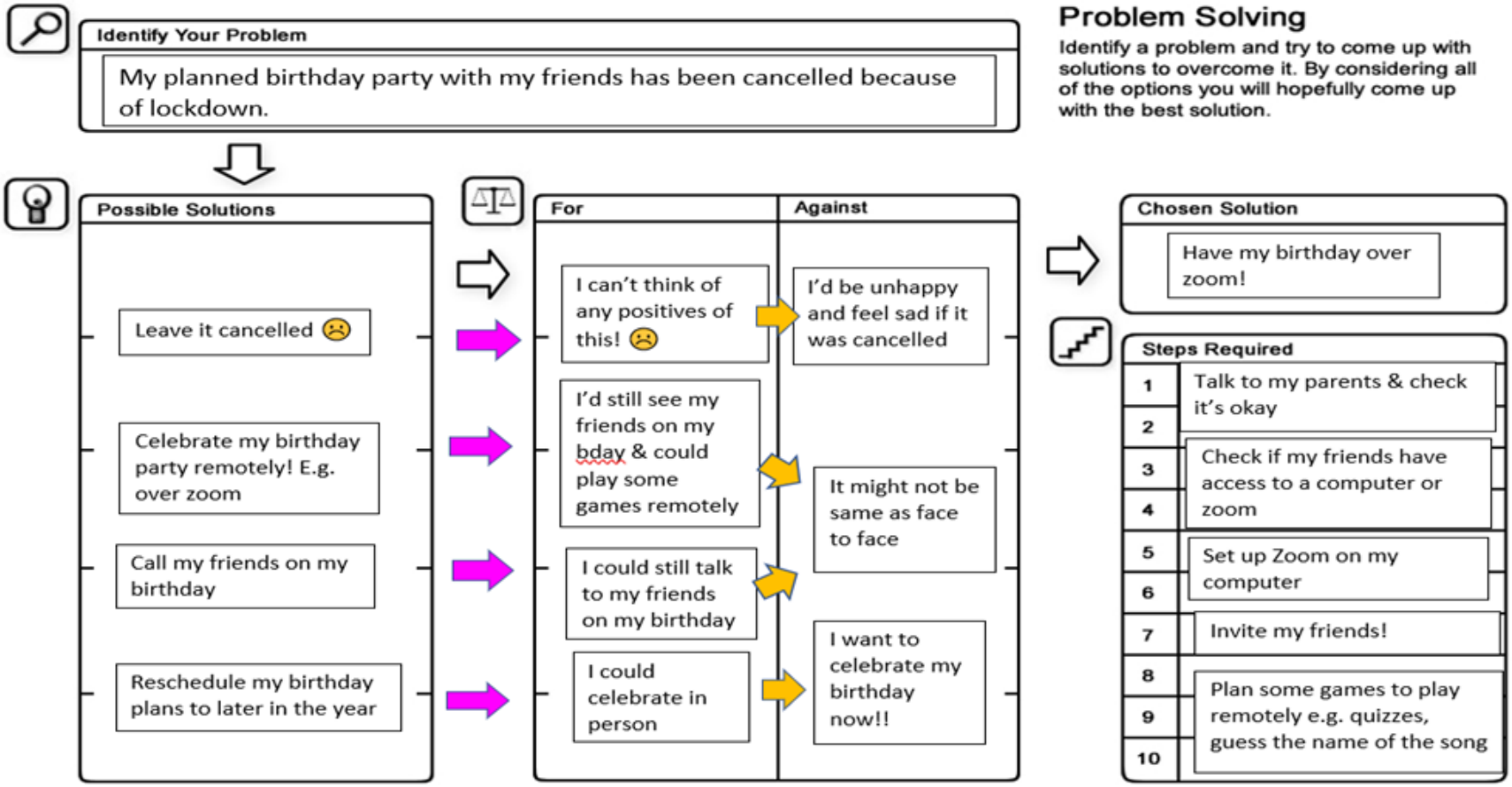
Model ways of coping with worries that aren't worth worrying about i.e., "*it's one of those annoying worries again*" then using distraction strategies to refocus attention. Modeling this yourself can optimise your child's learning.

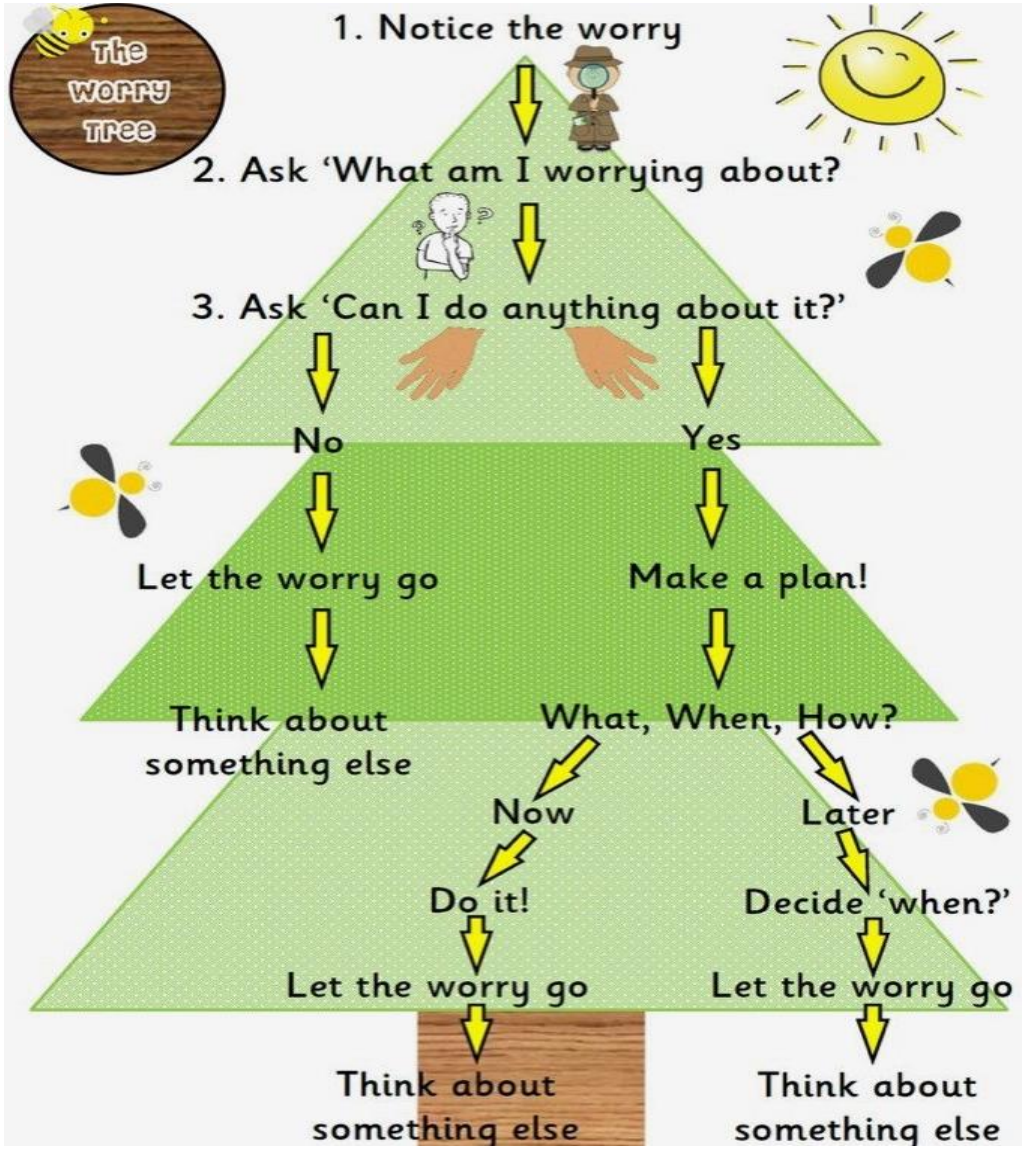
For worries which are bigger or more difficult problem-solving can be used - this allows children to think about alternative solutions and support around them

I.e., How will they cope? Is there a solution? Who else can help them?

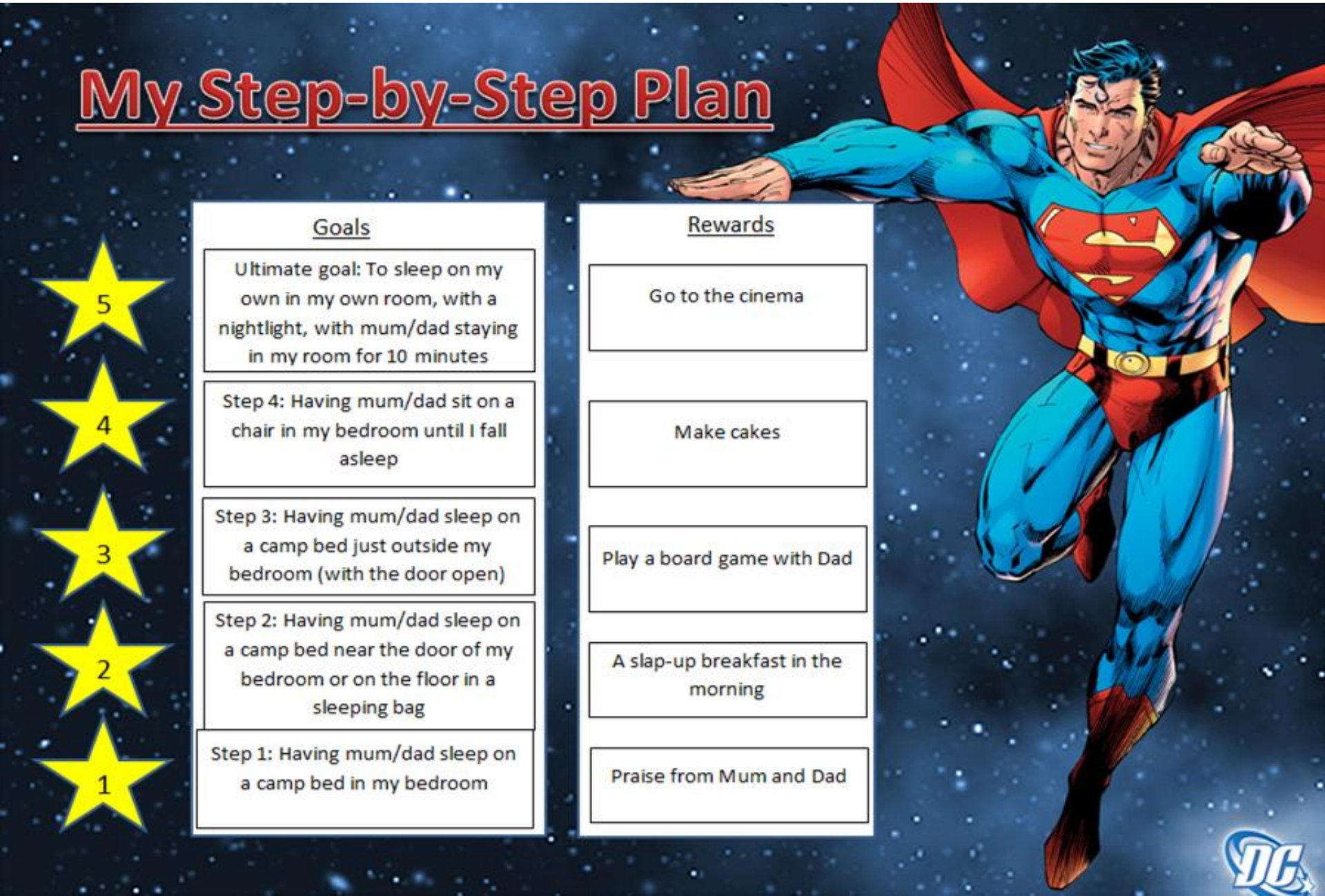
The next few slides will cover this in more detail on how you can present this to your child.

Problem solving




The worry Tree
1. Notice the worry
2. Ask 'What am I worrying about?
3. Ask 'Can I do anything about it?'
No
Yes
Let the worry go
Make a plan!
Think about something else
What, When, How?
Now
Later
Do it!
Decide 'when?'
Let the worry go
Let the worry go
Think about something else
Think about something else

STEP BY STEP


My Step-by-Step Plan
Goals
Ultimate goal: To sleep on my own in my own room, with a nightlight, with mum/dad staying in my room for 10 minutes
Step 4: Having mum/dad sit on a chair in my bedroom until I fall asleep
Step 3: Having mum/dad sleep on a camp bed just outside my bedroom (with the door open)
Step 2: Having mum/dad sleep on a camp bed near the door of my bedroom or on the floor in a sleeping bag
Step 1: Having mum/dad sleep on a camp bed in my bedroom
Rewards
Go to the cinema
Make cakes
Play a board game with Dad
A slap-up breakfast in the morning
Praise from Mum and Dad
5
4
3
2
1

Principles For Building Independence

- ★ **Be confident in your child** – Show and let them know you are confident
- ★ **Encouragement** - Allow and encourage them to be independent rather than jumping in and doing things for them.
- ★ **Encourage their internal voice** that says “have a go – I can do this”
- ★ **Be Understanding** - Be tolerant of and respect their struggle, rather than criticising them
- ★ **Patience** - Slowly build up what your child can do
- ★ **Promote independence** - Give your child choices, rather than choosing for them

I think you can do this really well, let’s give it a go!

Shall we try this again, or try again tomorrow?

I can see you found it hard, but I’m really proud you tried

PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE



Usual age	Skill
6+	Choosing own clothes, dressing self
6+	Tying shoes
7+	Taking a bath independently
7+	Brushing teeth or combing hair without help
8+	Putting dirty clothes in the washing basket
9+	Making breakfast or a packed lunch
9+	Packing own bag for school
10+	Choosing own haircut/ hairstyle
11+	Getting up in the morning without a reminder (using an alarm)
11+	Being responsible for own bedroom (tidiness, decorations)
12+	Arrange own transport to certain places (e.g. bike, bus)







Strategies We Might Already Use To Help Manage Anxiety















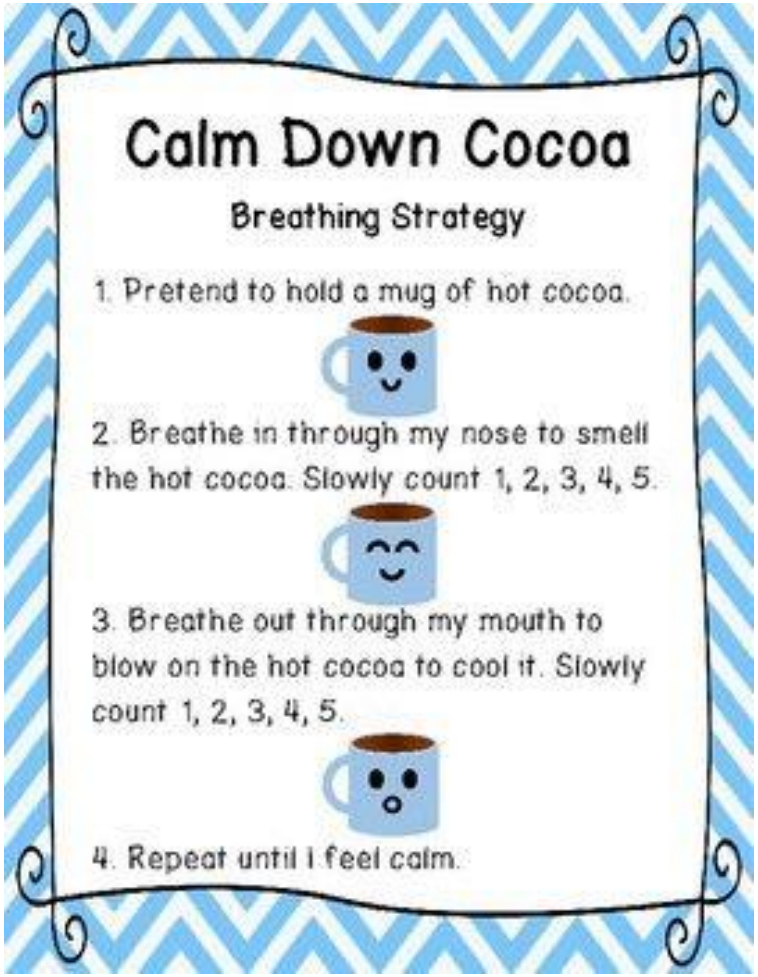
Grounding Activities

- *Count back from 20 in 2s*
- *Describe something you can see in detail*
- *Spell the names of your family*
- *Room Searching: All things a certain colour*
- *A- Z Game*





Relaxation Activities





Useful Resources

For Guidance on how to approach fears and worries:

- **Helping Your Child with Fears and Worries 2nd Edition: A self-help guide for parents** (available in TH libraries or amazon).

Relaxation and Mindfulness for Children:

- **Chill Panda App**: Suitable for younger children. Includes breathing exercises.
- **Mindful Gnats**: to teach young people simple mindfulness and relaxation skills.
- **Smiling Mind**: Mindfulness activities for all ages. Parent-led and sensory exercise included.

Websites:

- **Anxiety Canada**
- **Young Minds**
- **MindEd**
- **Mindfulness for Te e gu edita ons**





YOUNGMiNDS
fighting for young people's mental health



THEWS - 1:1 Support?

We offer one to one interventions (6-8 weeks). This includes:

- **Parent sessions for anxiety management for children** aged 5-11 (This is for mild anxiety e.g. children who are: scared of the dark, have fears/phobias, worries, feel panicky or are generally nervous).

- **Parent sessions for mild behavioural difficulties for children** aged 4-8 (e.g. children who display temper tantrums or have difficulties following rules and requests).

To access our support you can:

- Complete a short referral form
- Speak to your children's class teacher or the school's pastoral team

ANY QUESTIONS?

