

Anxiety Disorder

Definition

Everybody experiences anxiety at some point in time. Anxiety is a natural response, useful in helping us to avoid dangerous situations and motivating us to solve everyday problems. Anxiety can vary in severity from mild uneasiness through to a terrifying panic attack. It can vary in how long it lasts, from a few moments to many years.

Anxiety disorders may be caused by environmental factors, medical factors, genetics, brain chemistry, substance misuse or a combination of these. It is commonly triggered by stress in young people lives. Usually anxiety is a response to outside forces, but it is possible that young people make themselves anxious with negative self-talk – a habit of always telling themselves the worst will happen.

First Aid for Anxiety Disorder

Step 1: Ask, assess and act (assess the risk of suicide or self-harm)

Young people with anxiety disorder are at an increased risk of completing suicide, particularly if depression is present.

With anxiety disorder there is also the possibility that a young person may have an exaggerated belief that they are at risk of harm. For example, a young person may have a strong but unrealistic fear that they will have a heart attack. This fear can spiral up into a panic attack.

Things to say:

- Can you tell me more about your experience?
- I'm sorry you're going through that.
- This is not your fault.
- That must be really hard for you.
- Are you OK?
- I'm always here if you need to talk
- Your fears/worries/triggers are not silly
- Let's sort through this together
- How can I help?
- I know you can't control it.
- Just don't give up.

Things not to say:

- What do you have to be anxious about?
- Get over it.
- It's all in your head.
- It's not that big of a deal. Stop worrying too much.
- Don't worry, things will turn out fine.
- It's all in your head.
- It could be worse.

Step 2: Listen non-judgementally

These problems are not due to weakness or laziness, the young person is trying to cope:

- Do not be critical of the young person
- Do not express frustration at the young person for having such symptoms
- Do not give glib advice such as “pull yourself together!
- Avoid confrontation unless necessary to prevent harmful acts
- Seek to understand before you seek to be understood
- Give your undivided attention to the speaker
- Use silence effectively
- Listen to the young person
- Accept their worries are real for them
- Don't be critical, try not to get frustrated
- Don't try to solve their problems
- The most common problem in communication is not listening.

Step 3: Give reassurance and information

Help the young person realise that:

- An anxiety disorder is a real and common illness
- Effective help is available
- Skills can be learned to reduce the effects of stress and anxiety
- Anxiety can be unpleasant but is rarely harmful
- Help and effective treatment is available from a range of professionals and non-professionals
- Depression and anxiety can take a while to develop and time to resolve

Anxiety often produces frightening physical sensations, frightening thoughts and/or mental effects such as poor concentration and impaired memory. Concentrating on physical symptoms will only increase the fear and anxiety. The young person needs to concentrate on controlling anxious thoughts as well as the physical symptoms. The physical symptoms will reduce if a young person can reduce the anxious thoughts.

Step 4: Enable the young person to get the most appropriate professional help

There are several types of health professional who can provide help for anxiety disorders.

- School nurse and GP, including full physical check up
- SOLAR
- Children and Young people's improving access to psychological therapies (IAPT) 0-18 years
- Psychiatrists
- Psychologist/counsellor (person centred, CBT, family therapy, interpersonal therapy, psychoanalytic therapy)
- Education about depression and what helps

Treatment and support for depression and anxiety:

- Advice on the young person's lifestyle and education about anxiety and depression
- Psychological therapies are the preferred treatment
- Mild (2 – 3 months): non-directive supportive therapy, group cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), guided self-help
- Severe (at least 3 months): individual CBT, interpersonal therapy, family therapy.
Antidepressants (fluoxetine) given rarely and only in addition to psychological therapy

Step 5: Encourage self-help strategies

- Anxiety is best overcome by confronting fears rather than avoiding them. Support the young person to recognise that avoiding feared situations allows the anxiety to grow even stronger. The sooner the fears are confronted the sooner they will get better
- Practice daily relaxation methods to reduce physical symptoms of tensions.
- Reduce and/or avoid caffeine intake
- Engage in regular physical activity (at least 30 mins-60 mins a day)
- Engage in leisure time and fun activities
- Get adequate sleep (9-10 hours a night)
- Practice controlled breathing methods (slow, relaxed breathing) to reduce physical symptoms of anxiety, fear and panic. Avoid breathing too deeply and rapidly (hyperventilation) as this can cause physical symptoms of panic
- Identify and challenge exaggerated worries and pessimistic thoughts
- Follow a set of specific steps to help overcome fear or phobia
- Help a young person to recognise that self-help is hard work but can be very successful
- Encourage the young person to talk about their anxiety problems with suitable and appropriate persons whom they feel comfortable and safe with.

Useful websites

Anxiety UK

www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Helps all those suffering with anxiety disorders. Self-help leaflets and contact lists. Self-help groups, counselling, phone self-help groups, email support Section on Young people and anxiety

No panic

www.nopanic.org.uk

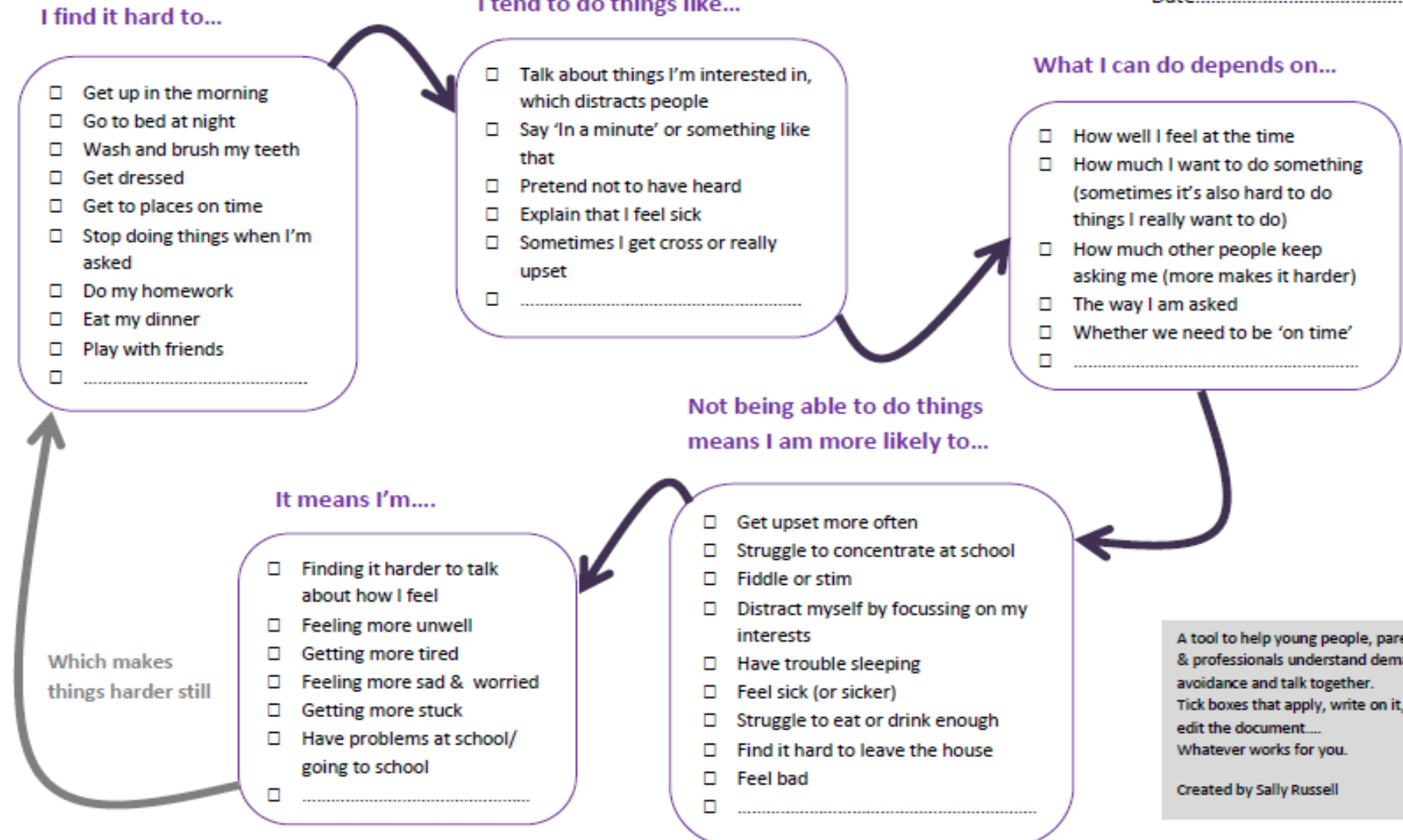
Helpline for anxiety disorders, panic attacks etc. Provides advice counselling, listening, befriending and can make referrals. Local self-help groups and produces leaflets.

The Demand-Anxiety Cycle

Profile of Difficulties

Name.....

Date.....



A tool to help young people, parents & professionals understand demand avoidance and talk together. Tick boxes that apply, write on it, or edit the document.... Whatever works for you.
Created by Sally Russell