

What is anxiety?

## Activity 1:

Myth or fact?

1. If a panic attack gets too bad, you can pass out. **Myth**
2. People who usually cope well in life and 'have their stuff together' can still develop anxiety problems. **Fact**
3. If you have an anxiety disorder, it is important to avoid the things that may trigger stress or symptoms of anxiety. **Myth**
4. Always carry a paper bag in case of hyperventilation. **Myth**
5. Some people are just worriers anyway - it's who they are so there's nothing that can be done about it. **Myth**
6. Anxiety can cause physical problems. **Fact**
7. People suffering from anxiety need lots and lots of reassurance (that everything will be ok) from family and friends. **Myth**
8. The combination of therapeutic support and self-help is the most effective way of dealing with mild-moderate anxiety problems. **Fact**
9. Medication is necessary to treat anxiety at diagnosable disorder levels. **Myth**
10. You can only manage anxiety symptoms but never completely cure anxiety. **Myth**
11. People experience anxiety in many different ways. **Fact**
12. Anxiety disorders/problems cannot always be detected in how someone presents themselves. **Fact**
13. Anxiety problems always arise for specific reasons, e.g. a fear, a negative past event. **Myth**
14. Anxiety is a very common mental health issue. **Fact**
15. Sufferers of anxiety are also prone to suffering depression. **Fact**

# Anxiety spectrum

Relaxed

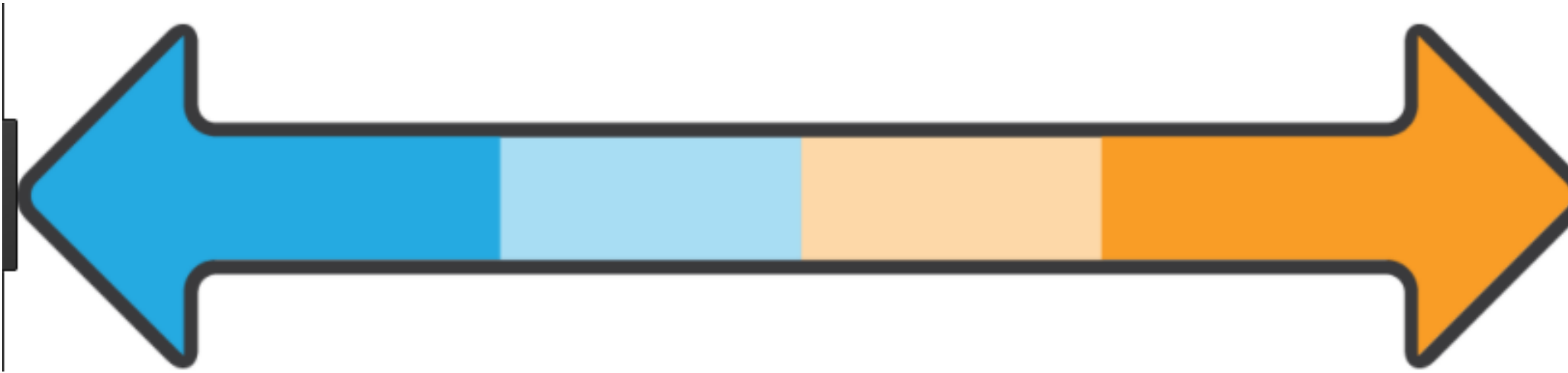
Coping

Stressed

Anxiety

Panic

Severe



## Statistics

10% of children and young people (aged 5-16 years) have a clinically diagnosable mental health problem, yet 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age

50% of mental health problems are established by age 14

1 in 10 young people experience a mental health disorder

Increase in prevalence of mental health problems at 16-19

Over half of all mental ill health starts by age 14 and 75% develops by age of 18

Anxiety and depression are most common mental health difficulties

School learning, stress tolerance, confidence, motivation, personal relationships will be adversely affected

Untreated anxiety or depression can have a significant impact on employment, income and relationship stability in adult life

**Developmental anxiety** - that is usual/expected or learnt behaviour

**Age 2-4**

Potty, dark, shadows, sleeping alone, weather, loud noises, separation

**Age 5-7**

dark, toilets, tests, fire, baddies, insects/animals, peer rejection, illness, separation

**Age 8-11**

mortality, supernatural, being alone, vomiting, school failure, peer rejection, diseases, natural disasters

**Age 12-18**

safety, illness/disease, peer rejection, romantic liaison/rejection, being made a fool of, perception of others, violence, global issues

**Age 18-20**

germs, health issues, becoming an adult, university, being away from home, homelessness, academic performance, romantic rejection, life purpose, employment

## Types of anxiety disorders

Separation anxiety  
Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD)  
Phobias  
Social Anxiety  
OCD  
Panic Disorders  
PTSD

Please see handout for specific information

## The caveman story



Back in the distant past, when we were still cavemen walking around in furs, we came across many dangers, like dinosaurs and sabre teeth tigers. Our bodies (naturally wanting to protect us from danger) designed a special alarm inside us that was set to go off whenever danger was present. This alarm gave us the ability to fight the danger, or run away by increasing our heart rate, and supplies of blood to our muscles - making us breathe faster.

It also made us think more quickly, and be on the alert for dangerous situations. **It worked brilliantly!** However, as we don't have dinosaurs or sabre tooth tigers on the planet anymore, we don't need the special alarm as much. Unfortunately we can't turn it off, and some peoples' alarm system gets stuck in 'on' mode, which causes them to feel ready for danger at all times. This is what anxiety is.



## Fight or flight behaviours

### **Fight**

Anger

Aggression

Confrontational behaviours

Bravado

Disruptive behaviours

Oppositional behaviours

### **Flight**

Withdrawal

Nervousness

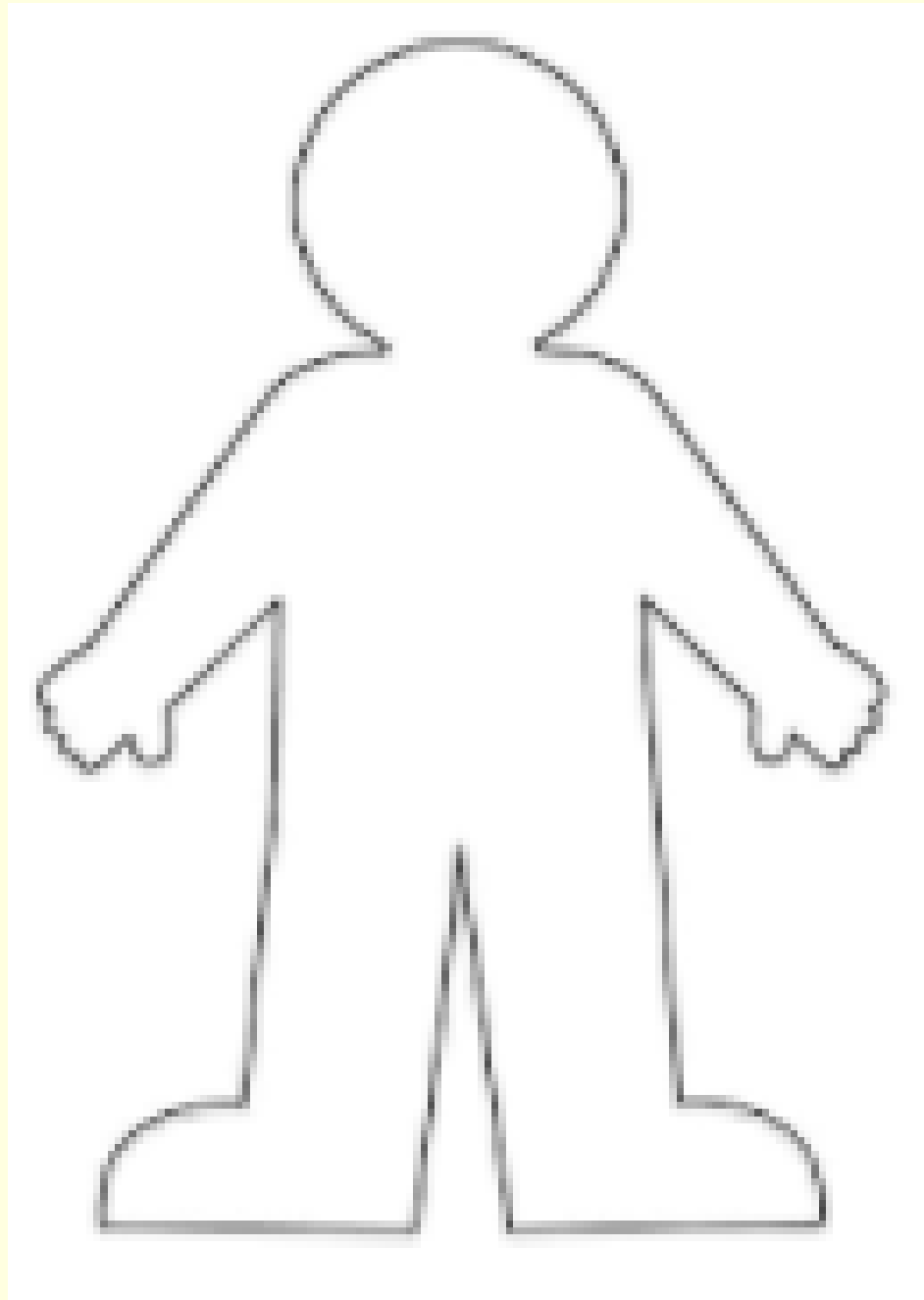
Avoidance

Non-attendance

Low mood

Disengagement

Explaining the physical effects of anxiety:



All of these effects can be explained by **fight or flight** (see next page)

sweating  
shaking  
redness of skin  
muscles tightening  
clenched fists  
heartbeat change  
tense

# Fight or flight

All the physical effects of anxiety are your body's **normal** reaction to a stressful or 'dangerous' situation.

These reactions are 'left over' from caveman times!

These physical reactions are preparing your body for action!

In these 'dangerous' situations, are you going to **fight** or run away (**flight**)?

*Did you know?*



Vomiting and needing the toilet when anxious, are the body's way of making a person lighter - this prepares them for fight or flight.



some people  
even 'freeze'

## Good and bad things about Anxiety

**Anxiety affects how our bodies feel, how we think and how we behave.**

Good 	Bad 
<p>Anxiety is Natural</p> <p>Tells you something is wrong</p> <p>Keeps you safe</p> <p>A little bit of anxiety can help you pay attention</p>	<p>Can make you feel scared</p> <p>Can make you want to go to the toilet</p> <p>A lot of anxiety can stop you paying attention</p> <p>Can make you feel like your not in control</p> <p>Can stop you doing things you want to do!</p>

## Symptoms outside of the home

Disengagement from usual activities

Withdrawal

Avoidance behaviours

Struggling to make friends

Isolating self

Behavioural problems

Physical manifestations

Communication difficulties

Appears tired

Overly frustrated at small triggers

Becomes easily distressed

SITUATION: Time to go to school



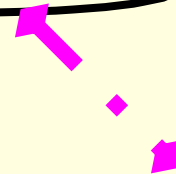
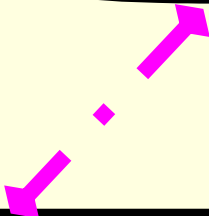
CHILD'S IMMEDIATE THOUGHTS: I don't want to leave Mum; something bad could happen to her



CHILD'S EMOTIONS: Fear, Worried

CHILD'S CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: I'm going to faint. I shouldn't go to school

CHILD'S PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS: Fast breathing, heart beating fast, feeling hot



## Activity 2: Case study

General tips:

Help the child *manage* anxiety, not avoid the triggers

Express positive and realistic expectations

Acknowledge, but do not collude with the anxiety

Be aware of colluding with the anxiety

Do not ask leading questions

Encourage the child to tolerate the anxiety

Reinforce successful instances of tolerating the anxiety

Keep periods of anticipation short

Think things through with the child

Model healthy ways of dealing with anxiety

### Helpful things to say

I'm here; you are safe

Tell me about it

How big is your worry?

What do you want to tell your worry?

Can you draw it?

Let's change the ending

What else do you know about

(insert problem: e.g. bees, spiders)

I'm going to take a deep breath

Which calming technique do you

want to use

It's scary AND (evidence to

contradict the worry, e.g. you did it

last time/you know what you can do)

What do you need from me?

This feeling will pass

### Unhelpful things to say

Don't be silly

Everything is going to be alright

That [insert worry] will never happen

It's fine; trust me

I'm here, I will make sure nothing

happens to you

You don't have to [insert task] if it's

too stressful/worrying

Try not to panic

Breathe deeply or you might faint

I'll tell school/your parents not to

ask you to do that again [advocating avoidance]

Are you sure you can cope?

We don't understand why you are so

worried about it



### **Tips for parents/carers**

Do not collude with anxiety or avoidance behaviours

Encourage facing the trigger situations

Engage with school for management strategies

Proactively seek support for yourself and access useful websites

Be as approachable as possible

Try worry time, or a regular discussion about anxieties with your child/young person

Stay calm when child becomes anxious

**Do not punish behaviours arising from anxiety**

Recognise/praise small steps/achievements

What reassurances are you putting in place? Think realistically!

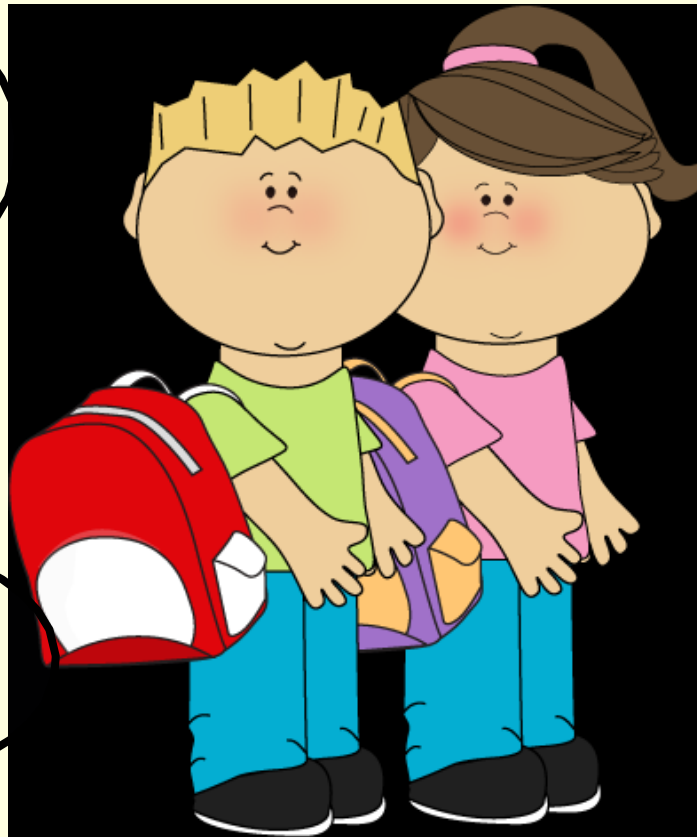
As a parent; anxiety can be contagious. Keep calm!

Make sure children understand the physiology of anxiety **first!**

## Interventions

### Self-talk

It's just my body's  
alarm system



I know I can focus  
on something else

I was okay last  
time

Nothing went wrong  
before

## Interventions: Playing detective



Finding evidence to the contrary:

When did it not turn out bad?

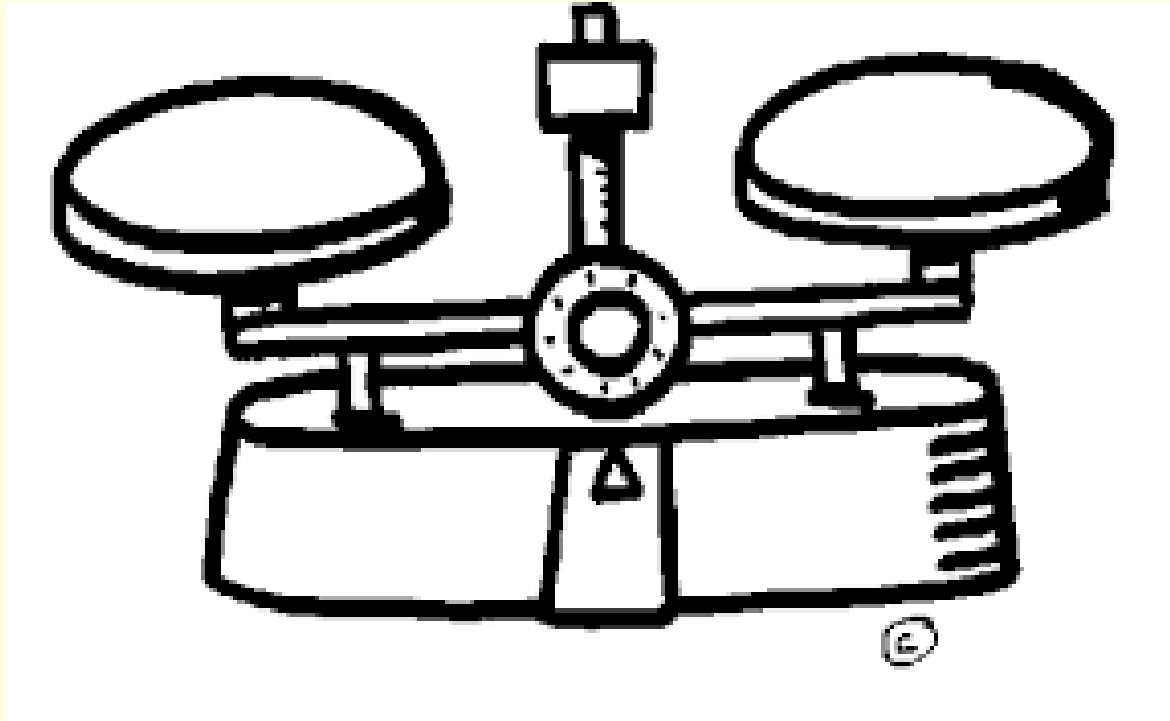
How many times has the worst case scenario actually happened?

How many times has everything turned out okay?

# Balancing thinking

Negative  
thoughts

Positive  
thoughts



Turn negative thoughts on their 'head', e.g. catastrophising.

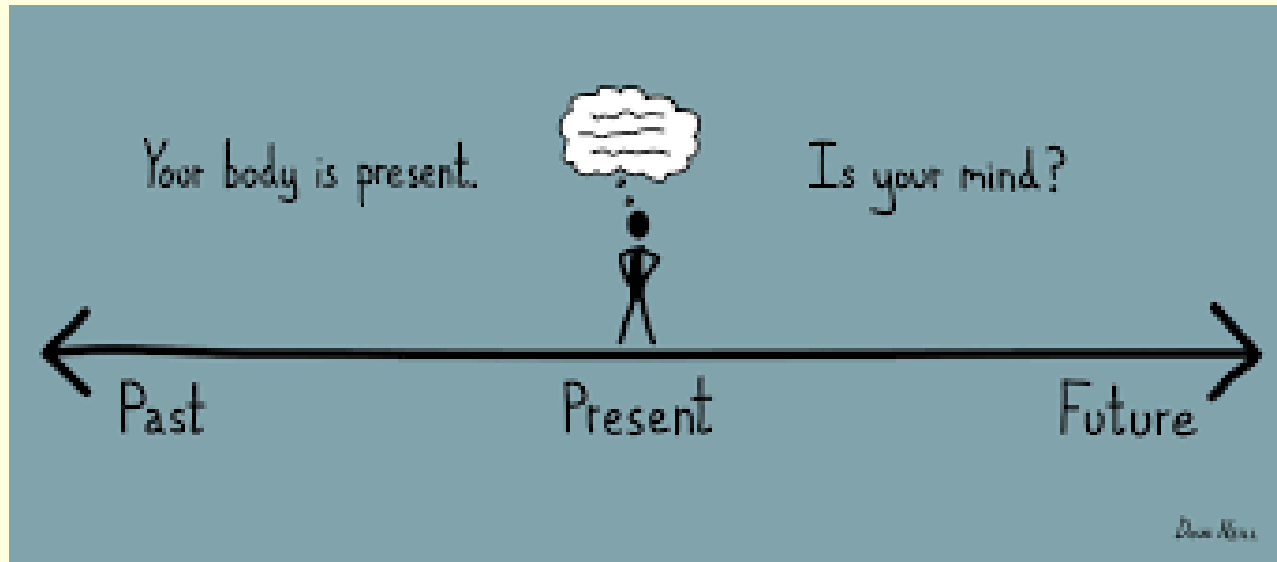
# Managing Worries



'Worry time' - same time and place, allocated amount of time to read through worries and discuss

# Mindfulness

When practiced effectively, it can override fight/flight



Tuning in to the present moment, intentionally with focus

Using a focus on the senses as an anchor to be present in the moment

Mindful focusing overpowers parts of the brain responsible for the fight/flight mechanism involved with stress and anxiety

# Mindful focusing

Experiencing the world through the 5 senses before anything else



*A useful grounding strategy:*

- 5 Sight
- 4 Sound
- 3 Smell
- 2 Touch
- 1 Taste

## Useful links:

<https://www.pinterest.co.uk/encourageplay/coping-skills-for-anxiety/>

<http://www.moodcafe.co.uk/download-relaxation-exercises.aspx>

[https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIhqLom7D61gIV6L3tCh31gQhzEAAYASAAEgLq1fD\\_BwE](https://youngminds.org.uk/find-help/conditions/anxiety/?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIhqLom7D61gIV6L3tCh31gQhzEAAYASAAEgLq1fD_BwE)

<http://www.annafreud.org/parents/>

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/mental-health/cyp/iapt/>



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