

# Parent Coffee Morning - Managing Anxiety

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM (MHST)

Emotional Health Service

Achieving for Children

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South West London  
Clinical Commissioning Group



achieving  
for children



Are you OK?  
Kingston?



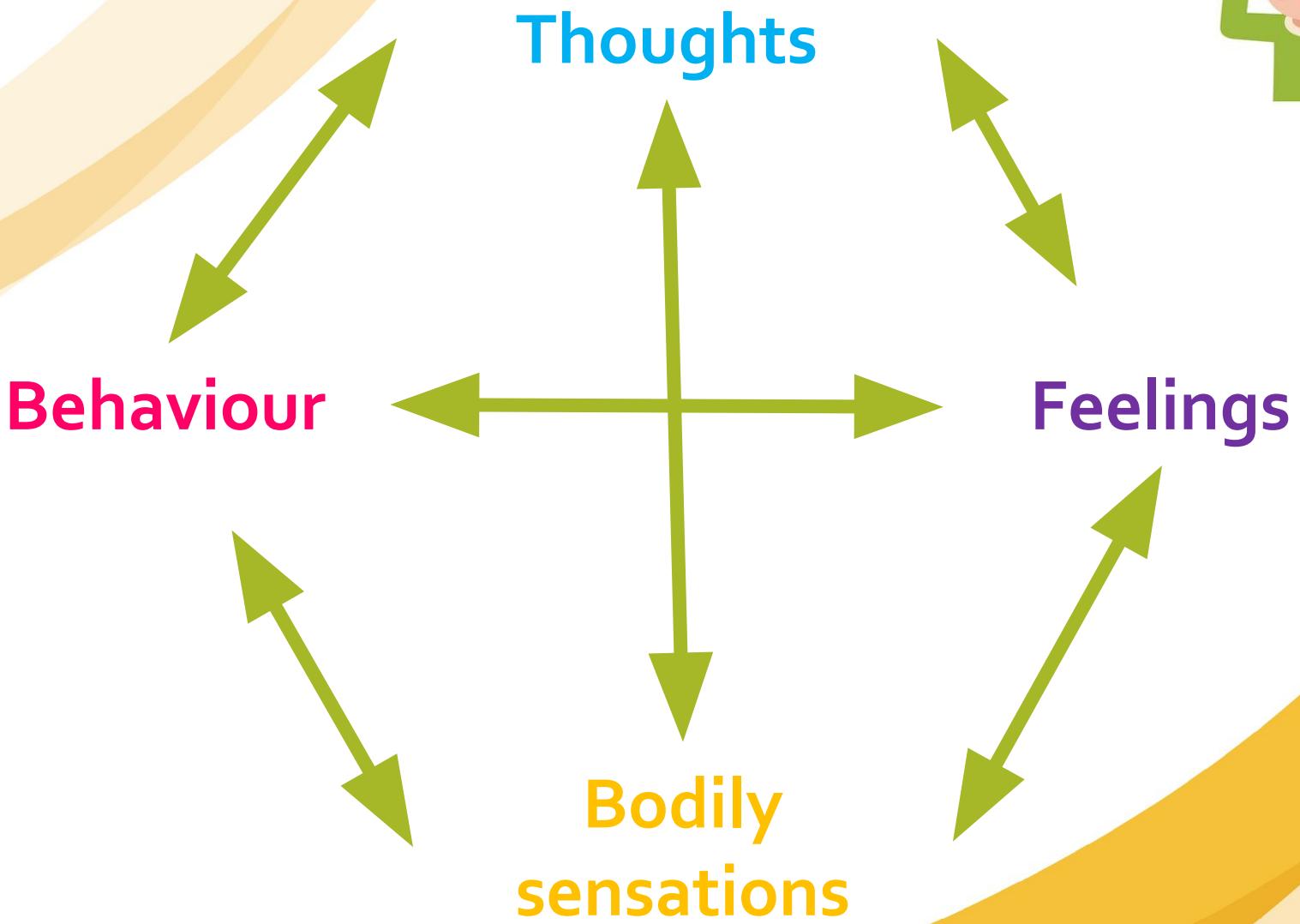
Are you OK?  
Richmond?

# Agenda



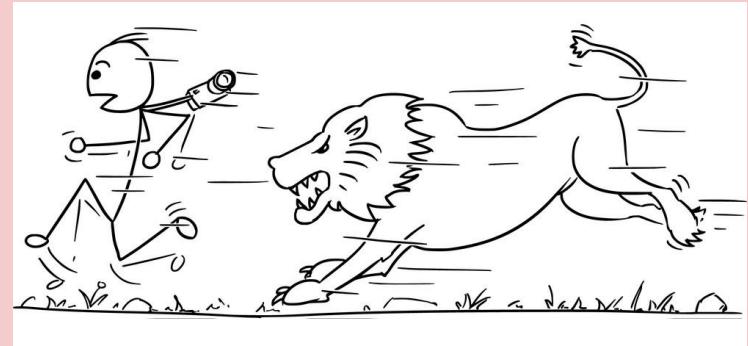
- To understand more about anxiety
- Factors that lead to the development of anxiety
- Strategies of what you can do as a parent to help with anxiety

# CBT Model



# Why do we have anxiety?

- Anxiety is a normal emotion
- It can be very useful
- Fight/ flight/ freeze response



**Fight** is to confront the threat aggressively.

**Flight** means you run from the danger.

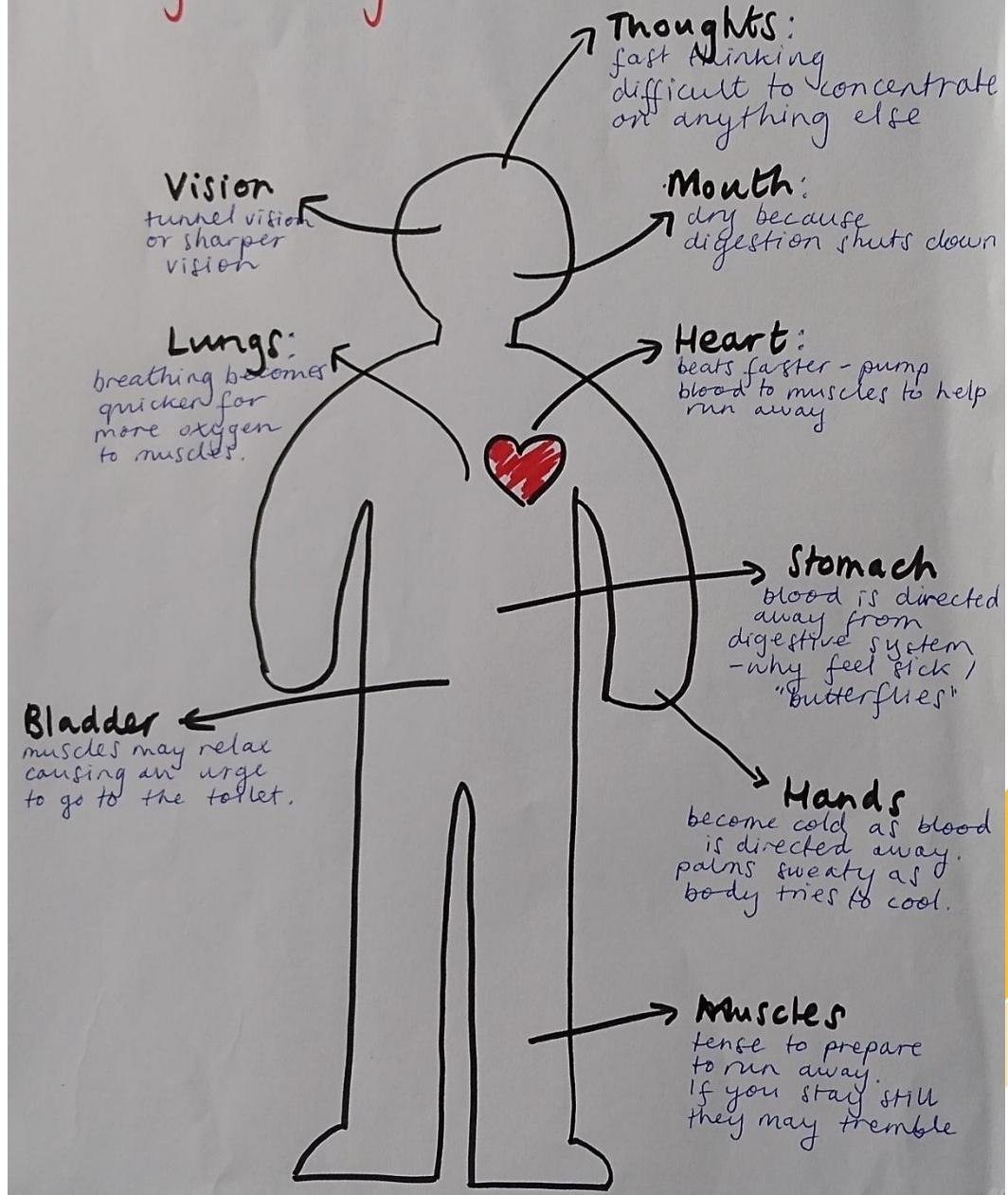
**Freeze** - unable to move or act against the threat.

## Priming the body for action

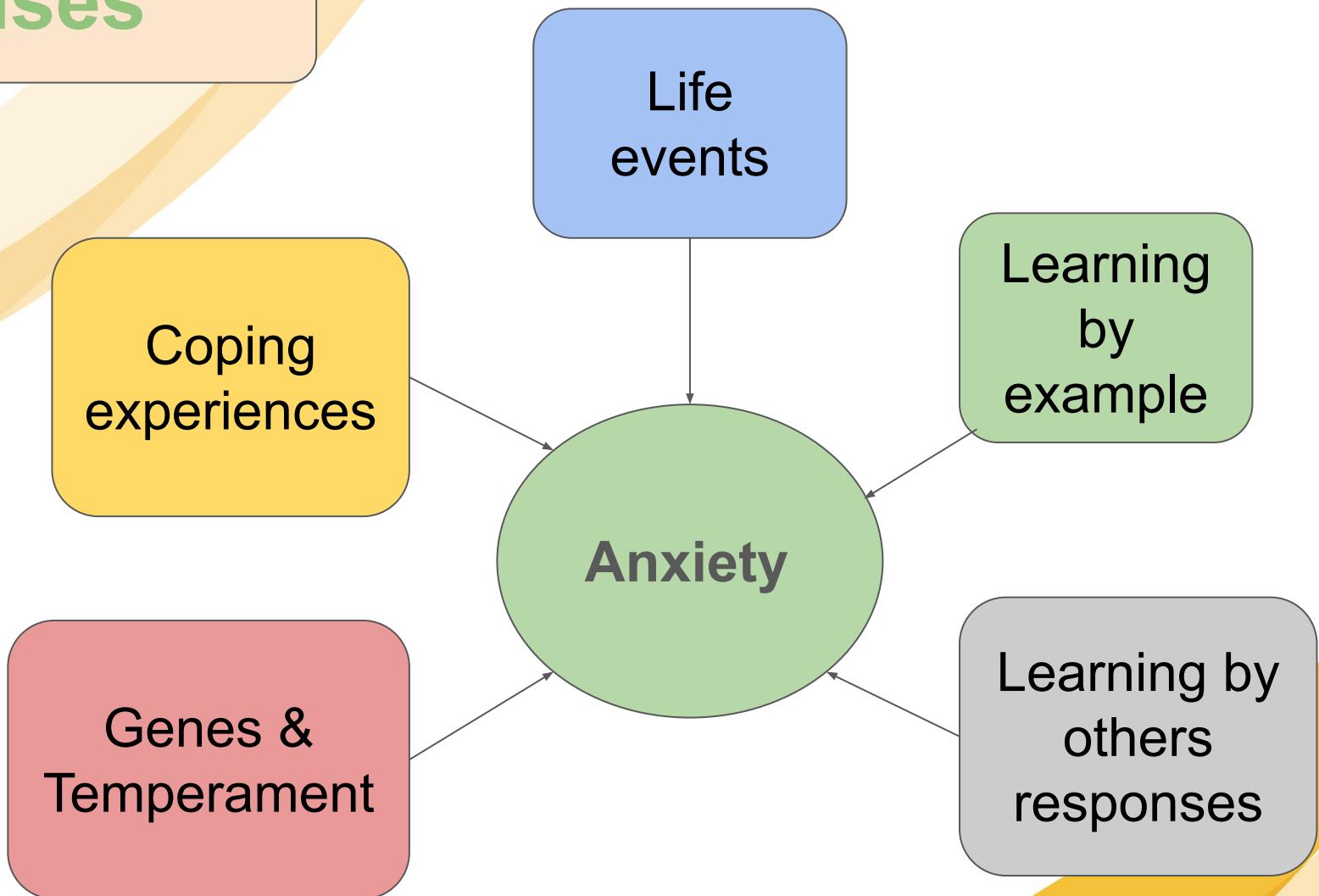
Becomes a problem when these responses triggered despite no immediate threat – a bit like a fire alarm going off for burnt toast.

# Examples of how the Fight Flight Freeze response shows in the body.

## Fight / Flight / Freeze response



# Causes



Anxiety =

**OVERESTIMATION** of threat

+

**UNDERESTIMATION** of ability to cope

# Things that tend to keep anxiety going

## Things other people might do

(parents, family, friends, teachers etc) to try and help/protect them:

- **Demonstrate** anxious behaviour
- **React** to the child **in an anxious way**
- Become **very involved and protective** – maybe too much?
- Reassure them – **maybe too much?**
- **Not encourage** them to try/do things



# CBT Model

## Thoughts

Notice / remember things that fit in with their worry; overestimate danger; underestimate coping



## Bodily sensations

“something bad is happening”, “I can’t bear the feeling”, “something is wrong with me”

## Feelings

I feel anxious, therefore something bad will happen

## Behaviour

Avoidance: “safety behaviours”; seek reassurance from others

# What strategies do you already use to help your child relax?



# 1. Educate children about anxiety

- A very important way of managing your child's anxiety is by giving them an **understanding of the bodily symptoms** they experience when they are anxious
- YouTube - watch short clips on the fight and flight response for children

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfSbWc3O\\_5M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FfSbWc3O_5M)

- Teach them that these are **normal responses to anxiety** (even if they are not pleasant)
- **Encourage your child to practice breathing** when they are feeling anxious and other relaxation exercises

## 2. Responding to anxiety

- All children feel anxious at times – **at different ages they struggle with different anxieties.** Sometimes these anxieties connect to life experiences; other times they come from worries inside them that they might not recognise or understand.
- **Stay calm** and try not to express any strong emotional responses
- **Talking calmly to your child**, and helping them to unpick and make sense of what they are worried about
- If your child is unable to tell you what is wrong, using more **indirect ways of communicating**, e.g. tell me one good thing about your day and one bad thing
- Showing the child **you are there when they need you**, e.g. with a hug, making them a hot chocolate. sitting with them and listening.
- Monitoring your responses and being aware of them

**Pick your moment!**

# 3. Recognising anxious expectations

- Recognise their anxious expectations. What do they need to learn to help them overcome their anxiety? Can you help them do this?

## Questions to explore...

Why are you feeling worried?

What do you think will happen if you ....?

What is the worst thing that might happen?

What is it about this situation that is making you feel worried/frightened?

## Be curious:

"I wonder if you're feeling \_\_\_\_\_?"

"I wonder if you're worried about \_\_\_\_\_?"

"I imagine that would feel \_\_\_\_\_"

- Empathising

- Normalising, making suggestions

"lots of children feel / think about \_\_\_\_\_ when they are worried. Is that like what's going on for you?"

- Check your understanding

- Label emotions

- Make it fun or rewarding

# What to do if a child's worry is realistic

## Problem solving

Problem:

.....

Solution	Pros?	Cons?	Doable?	Rate this solution 1-10

# 4. Promoting Independence and brave behaviour

- Be confident in your child and let them know this
- Show them how to be independent
- Encourage them to tell themselves “have a go – I can do this”
- Be tolerant of and respect their struggle, slowly building up what they can do
- Break down feared situations into a step-by-step plan
  - Set a positive goal and break into steps using a step-by-step plan
  - Attach a reward to each step
  - What helpful thought could they use to help them during each step?
  - Review after each step is complete – what did they learn? Was it as bad as they expected? Did they cope better than they thought?



# 5. Distraction techniques

- Count back from 20 in 2s
- Count all the colours in the room
- Imagine a big red STOP sign and stop your/their worries
- Get involved in absorbing activities e.g. making/building something, being active
- Describe something you can see in detail, or describe an event in detail i.e. a holiday
- Make a time of the day to think/ talk about worries, or write them in a book – “worry time”



# 6. Relaxing

- Teach calm, gentle breathing i.e. 5 finger breathing or square breathing
- Do relaxing activities i.e. draw a special place, have a bath, or read a story
- Give Mindfulness a go, e.g. Apps: HeadSpace, Smiling Mind, Chill Panda, Sleep Meditations for Kids, My First Yoga, "Sitting still like a frog: Mindfulness Exercises for Kids (and Their Parents)- Eline Snel
- Use stories and books to talk to them about worry e.g. The Huge Bag of worries" by Virginia Ironside
- Grounding techniques i.e. 5 senses, or counting colours around the room.

# 7. Other ways to help

- **Building self-esteem** – focus on their strengths and positive self talk
- Support them to **challenge worried thoughts** with more realistic ones
- Focus on **uplifting thoughts** e.g. how much they will learn at school or how they can paint picture for mum/dad at school
- **Practice:** Offering opportunities to practice, this can help them to see that they are able to cope successfully
- **Model:** calm and coping behaviour.



# Questions - Ideas - Feedback

Contact us on:  
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