

ANXIETY

Introduction

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear that can be mild or severe. Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life, and usually this is a necessary feeling in order to help us cope with challenges and to keep ourselves safe. For example, you may feel worried and anxious about sitting an exam or having a medical test or job interview. During times like these, feeling anxious can be perfectly normal. General anxiety symptoms can last for extended periods; it is more than just being nervous.

Following on from last week's article, we will be looking at some examples of unhelpful automatic thoughts:

- Being judged negatively by others
- Being unable to cope
- Something terrible is happening
- Being unable to control worry

Try thinking about a time when you started to feel anxious. Consider what was running through your or your child's mind at that time – was it an automatic thought?

Patterns of unhelpful thinking

Knowing the common patterns that unhelpful thoughts follow can help you and your child recognise and challenge them before they have a negative effect on the things you do. Here are some common patterns of unhelpful thinking:

- Catastrophising: people often catastrophise when they are anxious. This means the anxiety makes them feel like something that has happened is far worse than it really is.
- Black and white thinking: people often see things as black or white when they are anxious – there is no 'in between'
- Emotional reasoning: this means treating emotions as if they are facts.
- Must and should statements: people often live by fixed rules for themselves about what they 'should' do and how they 'should' feel, and judge themselves harshly if they do not meet them. When people think like this, they are being critical of themselves, which makes the anxiety worse. If you find yourself thinking this way, it can help a lot to accept that and people are not always perfect and they do not have to be in order for you to be calm and relaxed.
- Jumping to conclusions: people often assume they know what others are thinking, and the assumptions are usually about the future – there are frightening 'what ifs' running through their minds. Jumping to conclusions can also make you feel like you know the future, and that it will be bad.
- Over-generalising: based on one isolated incident, people with this thinking pattern assume all future events will follow a similar pattern. It becomes hard to see a negative



event as a one-off.

- Dismissing the positives: often people can ignore the positive aspects of life or situations and instead focus on the negative.
- Labelling: people who are anxious often label themselves in negative ways.
- Personalisation: people who think this way believe everything is to do with them, and it is usually negative – they place blame on themselves for now logical reason.

Once you have recognised an unhelpful thought, try this week to categorise it yourself or with your child. This will help you or your child to challenge the thought. Next week, we can have a look at how we can start to challenge these unhelpful thoughts. Keeping an unhelpful thought diary or journal and the categories will help you to reflect on these and will build a list of supportive strategies to refer back to.

Working together to keep our children safe and happy.

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