

# Supporting children who experience anxiety

Mental Health  
Support Team



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South West London  
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achieving  
for children



Are you **OK**  
Kingston?



Are you **OK**  
Richmond?

# Children's mental health and wellbeing

**Emotional health** refers to a person's ability to cope with day to day life. It includes the way they feel about themselves and how they respond to whatever happens around them.

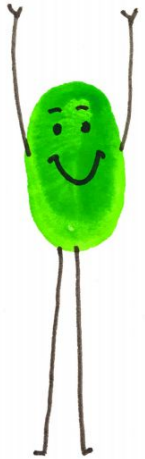
Good mental health and emotional wellbeing is **not about being happy all the time**, but rather having the **resilience** and flexibility to cope with changes and challenges that are part of life.

Half of all mental health difficulties start before the age of 14. Therefore it is vital to provide support to children experiencing anxiety and struggling with fears and worries to ensure that this does not develop in to a more complex issue.

Your role as a parent is vital. The fact that you are attending today's session already demonstrates that you are taking measures to support your child's overall emotional health and wellbeing.

## Focus for today...

- Understanding anxiety
- Strategies to manage worries
- The importance of parent wellbeing
- Seeking further support



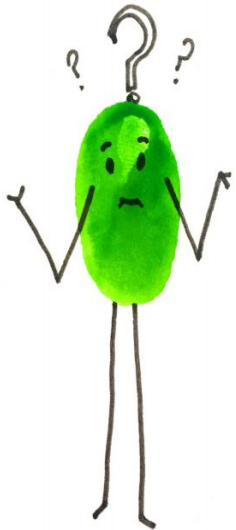
# What is anxiety?

Anxiety can have a lot of names - worry, apprehension, dread, fear. Essentially, you are expecting that something bad is going to happen.

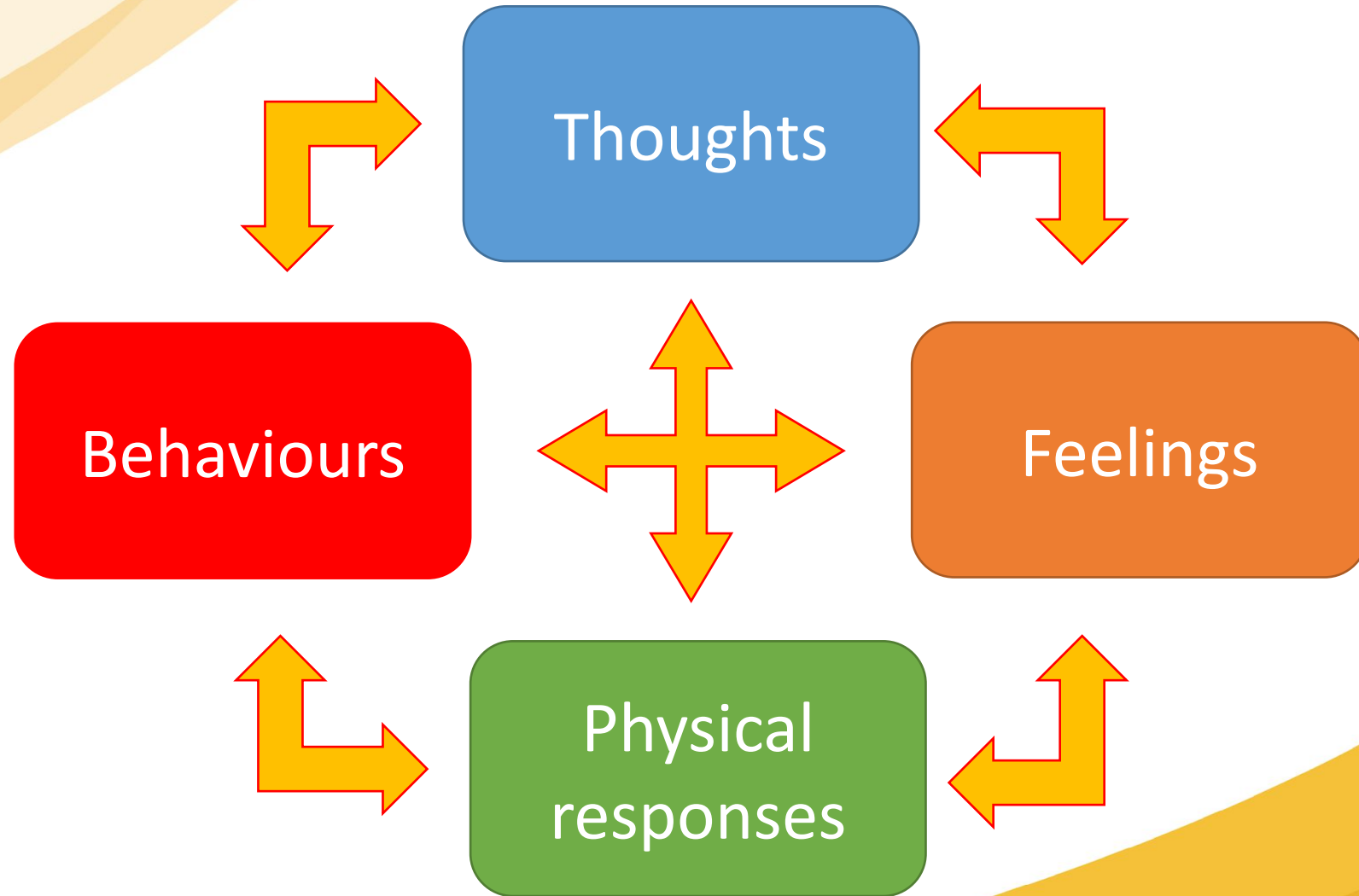
Anxiety is a normal emotion and it is not always bad. It can help to keep us to stay safe and motivates us to be prepared and do our best.

However, too much anxiety too often can interfere with our day to day life. Sometimes our worries can interfere with our ability to learn and keep going.

This is why it is important that children can learn and practice ways of managing these feelings.



# The Cognitive Behavioural Model



## An example...

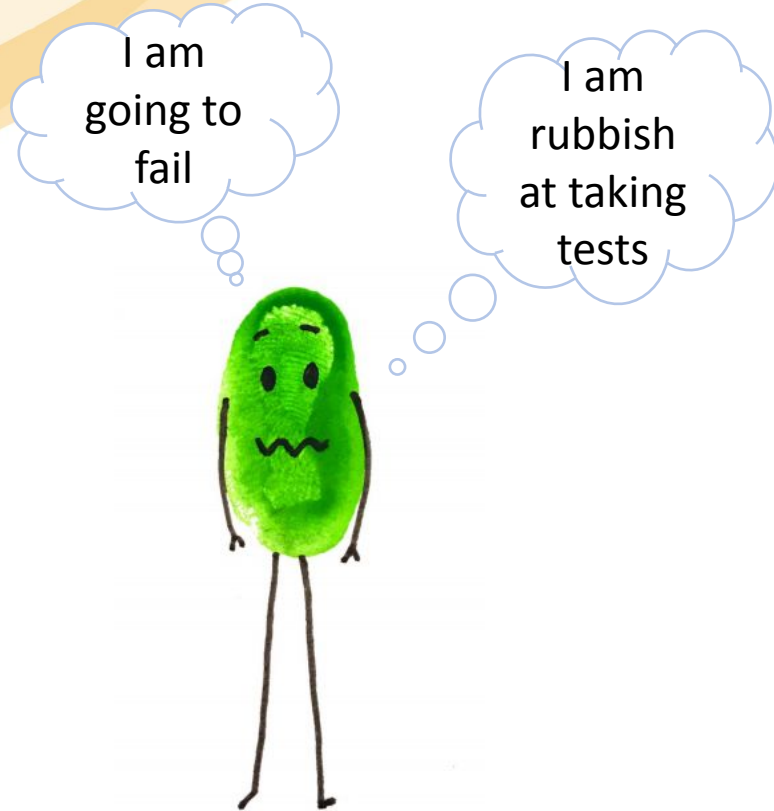
Sometimes applying things with a real world example is more helpful.

This is Arthur, and he is feeling anxious. We know this because of the way he is thinking, feeling and behaving,



# Thoughts

Arthur has a lot of worried thoughts:

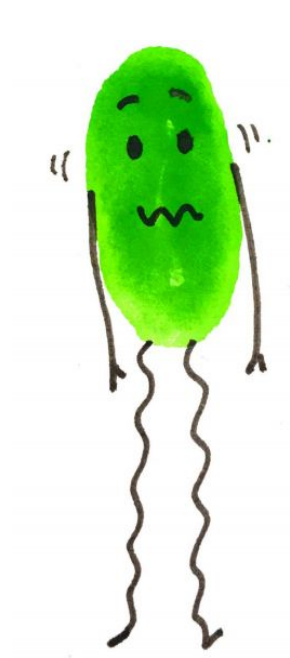


- He tends to think the worst is going to happen and that he is bad or not good enough.
- He has trouble concentrating on what he is doing

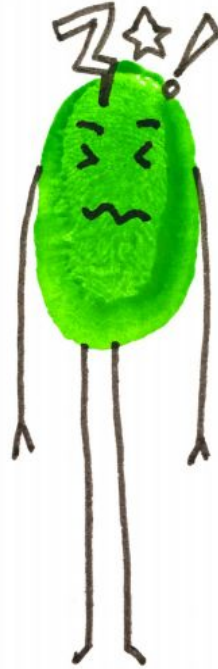
# Physical responses

Arthur also notices changes in how his body feels:

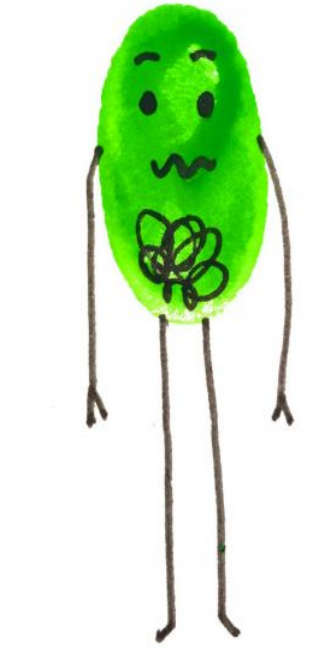
Shaky and jelly legs



Headaches and feeling dizzy



Tummy aches

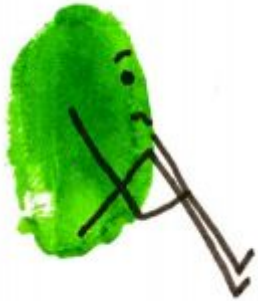




# Behaviour

This can change how Arthur behaves:

- He does not want to play with his friends
- He does not want to spend time with his family
- He avoids doing his homework because he worries he will get it wrong



# A vicious cycle

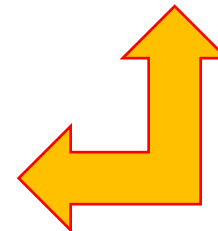
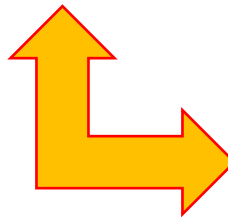
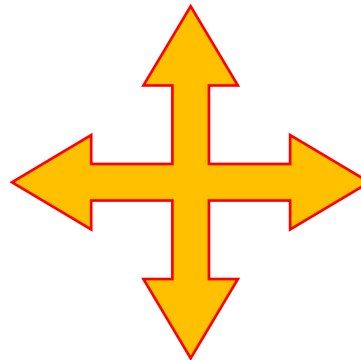
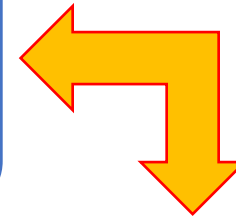
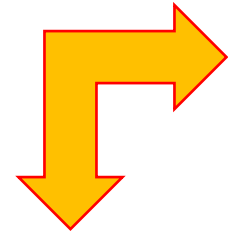
These responses create a vicious cycle that maintain anxiety

**Thoughts**  
*"I will never pass any tests"*  
*"I am a bad person"*

**Behaviours**  
*Avoid school*  
*Avoid sharing how I feel*

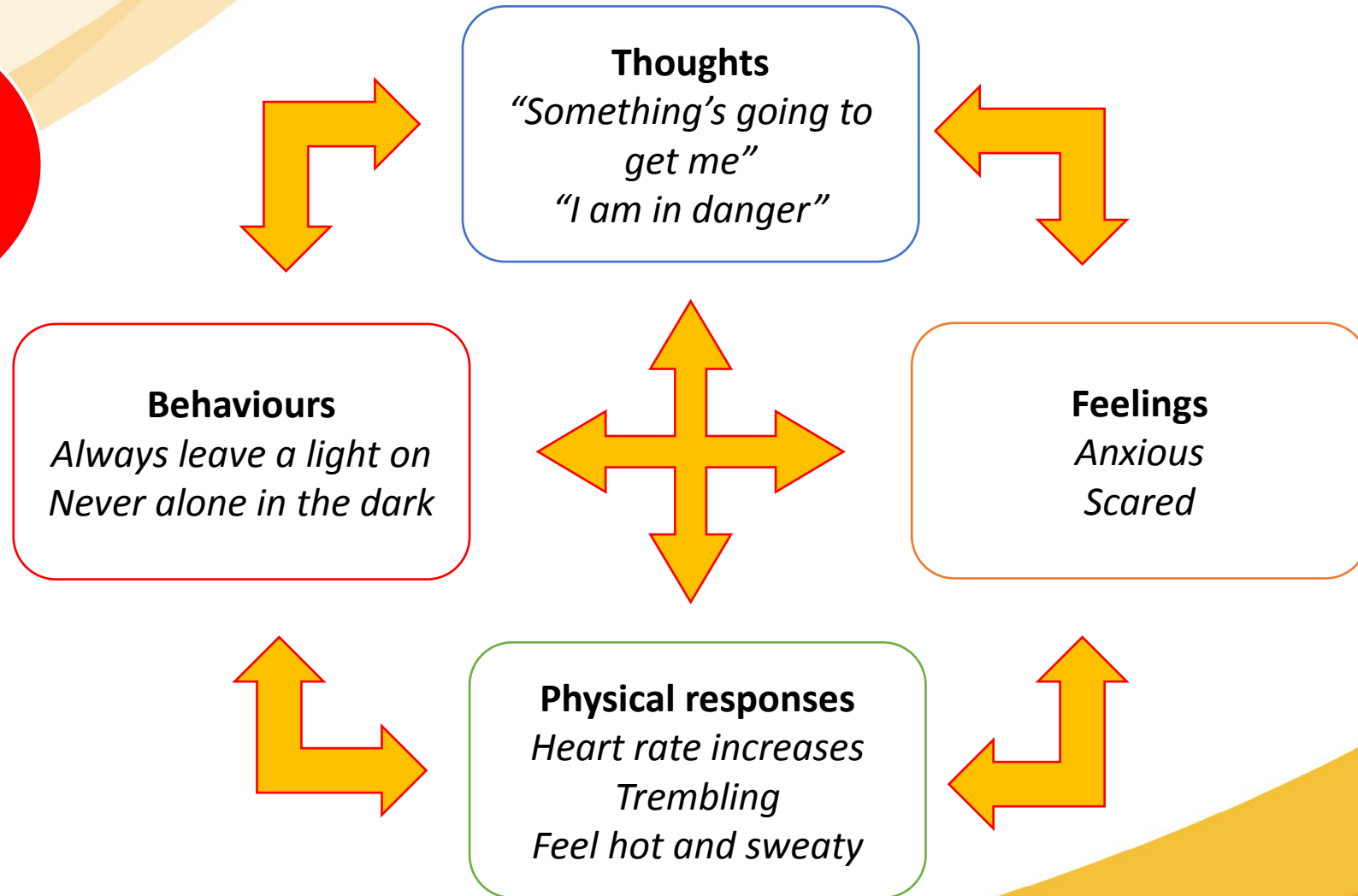
**Feelings**  
*Anxious*  
*Worried*  
*Sad*

**Physical responses**  
*Feeling nauseous*  
*Aches and pains*



# Fear of the Dark: A further example...

These responses create a vicious cycle that maintain anxiety



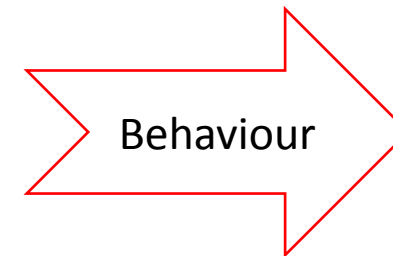
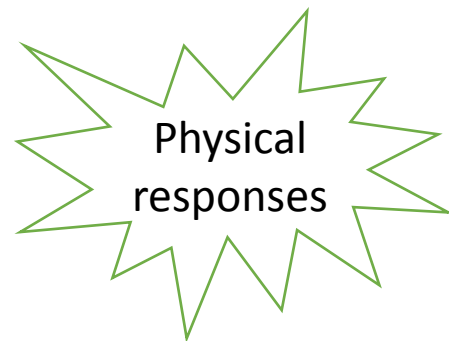
## Things to remember:

- There is no one single factor that is likely to have caused a child's anxiety, typically a number of factors play a role. However it can be more important to consider what is keeping it going.
- As parents, we are designed to protect our children- it's our job! We will step in to protect them at all costs, however this means that sometimes this can inadvertently keep the anxiety going e.g. helping to avoid
- Instead – lets help them to break this cycle



# How can we help?

We can help by intervening at all 4 levels...



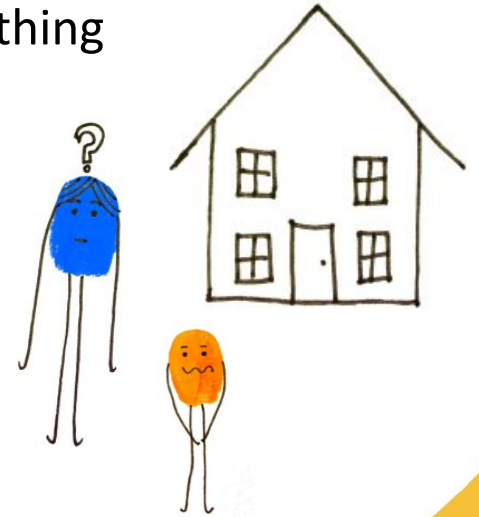
# Intervening at the level of...

Emotions

We do this through providing time and space to listen and talk about feelings.

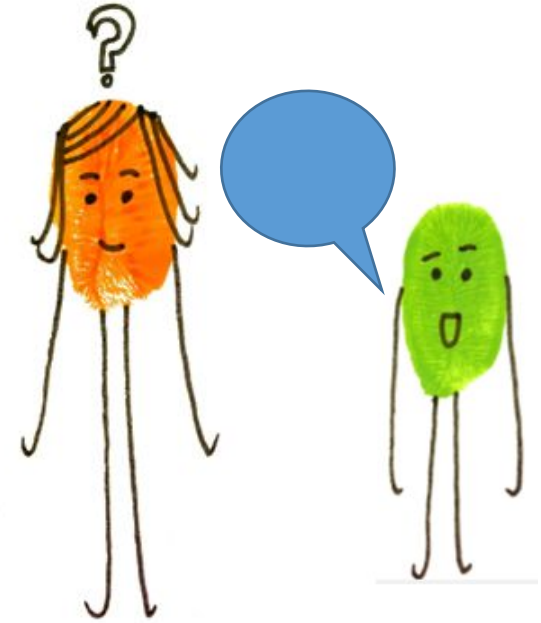
# How can you help at home?

- **Don't be afraid** to approach the child and ask if they are OK or if something is bothering them
- **Listening** is the **best support** you could offer
- **Wonder aloud** about what might be happening for the child
- **Name feelings** around events if they approach you to talk.
- Look beyond behaviour, **be curious** about what is happening for them.
- **Model emotion regulation**



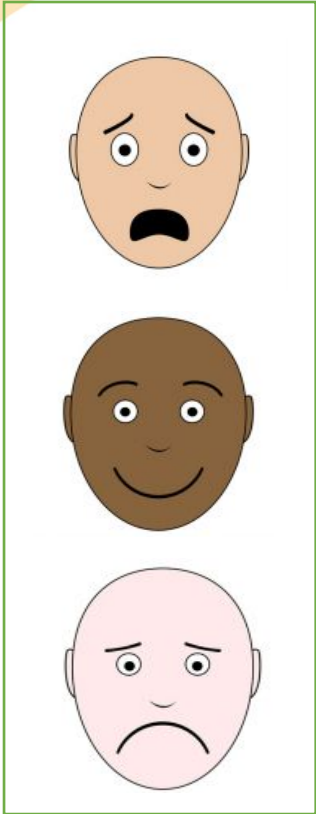
# Top tips for talking about emotions

- Seize the moment
- Start small
- Use their language and then build on it

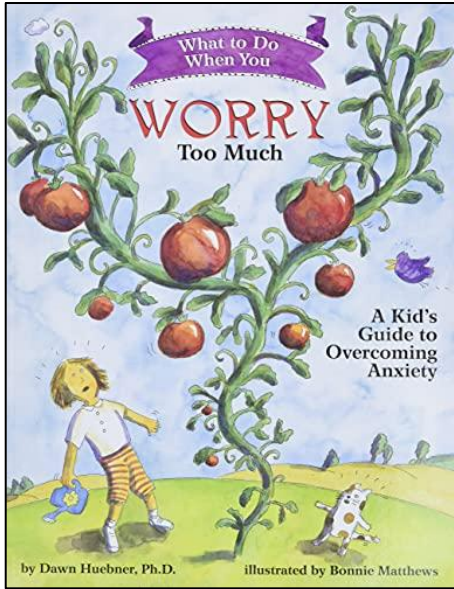
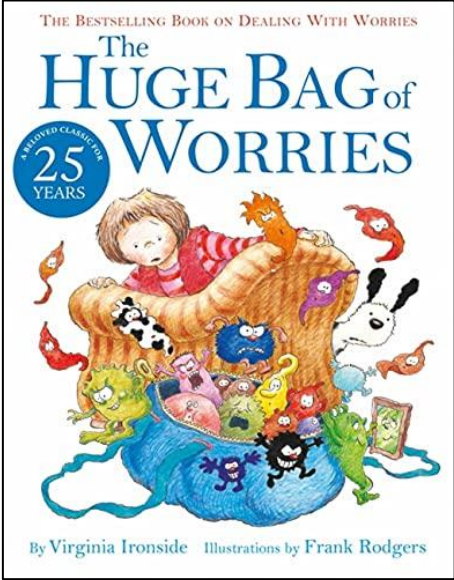
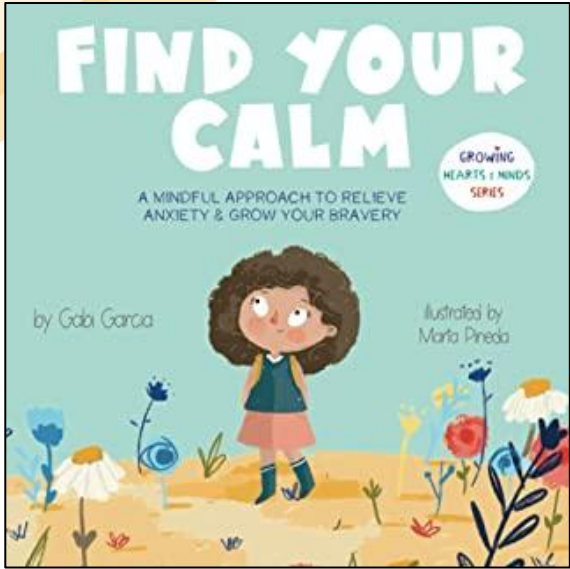




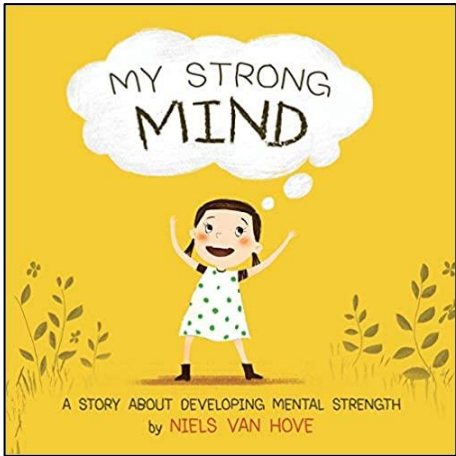
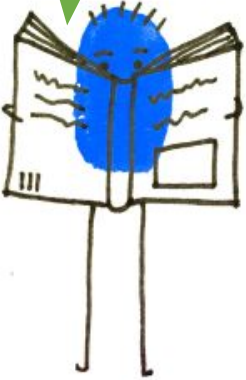
# Be creative...



# Stories



Check your local library...



# Intervening at the level of...

Thoughts

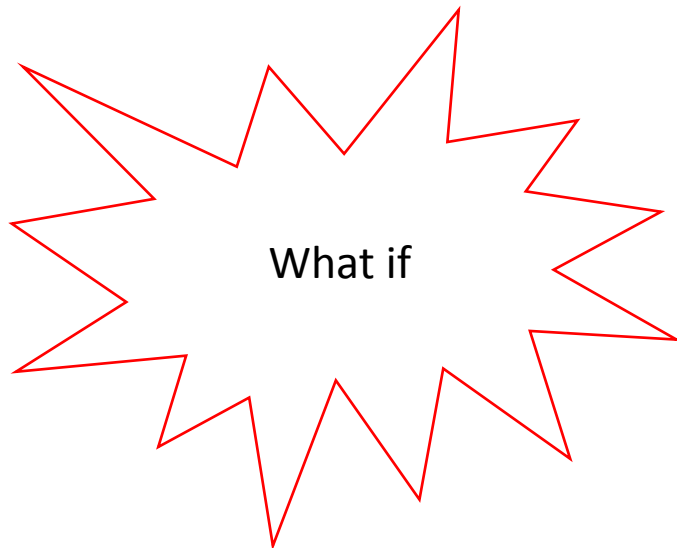
Thoughts

# What if? – Then I can!

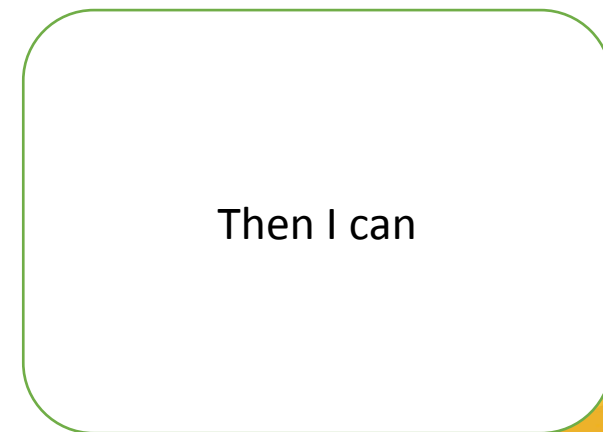
Sometimes worries start with 'what if...?' questions. These questions do not usually get answered and instead continue to spin round in our minds and end up making us feel more worried.

It can help to support children with think about some 'what if?' worries and then come up with a 'then I can...' solution. This can help children to feel more confident that even when we have worries, there is a way they can cope with the challenges they are facing.

***'What if...?' worry***



***'Then I can... ' solution***



# Intervening at the level of...

## Physical responses

As we have learned, our bodies are impacted by our feelings of anxiety.

Relaxation is important because if our bodies are calm and relaxed, this makes it easier for our minds to recognise we are safe, we are not in danger, and therefore frees us up to think more helpful thoughts!

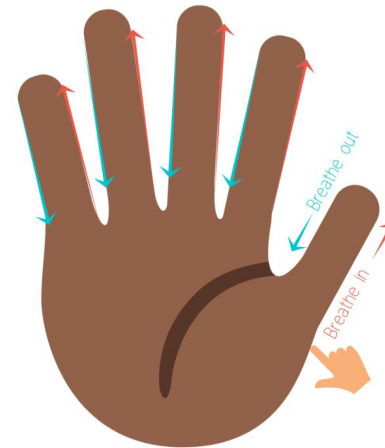
Physical  
responses

# Deep breathing

Deep breathing is another excellent way to help re-set our bodies and keep them calm when we are feeling worried. Giving children something concrete to focus on can make this easier.



5 Finger Breathing



Remember to remind them to breathe in through  
their nose and out through their mouth

Physical  
responses

# 54321 Grounding

When we are feeling worried we tend to be worrying about something that has happened in the past or jumping way in to the future. It can be helpful to reconnect to the present moment and environment. One way to do this is through our senses.

The 5 4 3 2 1 exercise is a grounding activity that invites us to notice:

**5 things we can  
see**



**4 things we can  
touch**



**3 things we can  
hear**



**2 things we can  
smell**



**1 thing we can  
taste**



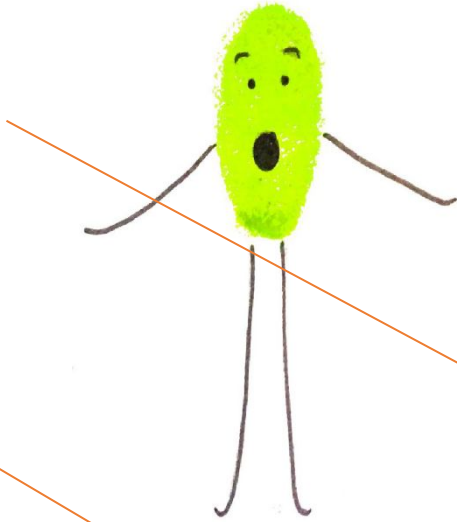
# Intervening at the level of...

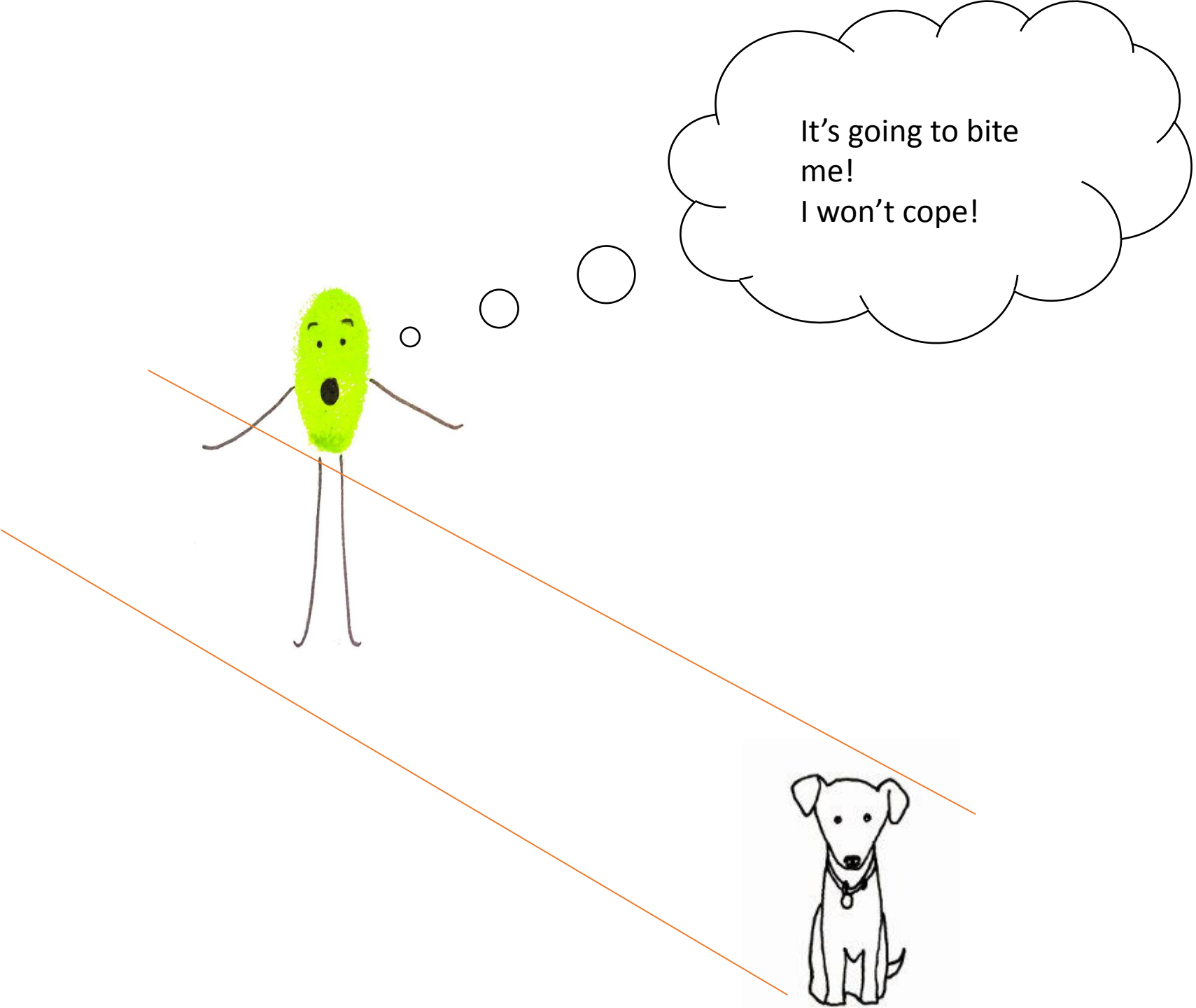
## Behaviours

- As we noticed earlier, anxiety can lead to avoidant behaviour which reinforces the worry. Therefore to challenge this unhelpful behaviour and overcome anxiety, you need to allow your child to be exposed to situations to make them anxious so they can learn that they will usually be able to cope.
- However, it is important that you do this gradually in a step by step approach to make sure they do not feel overwhelmed.
- This is called graded exposure.



Another example...





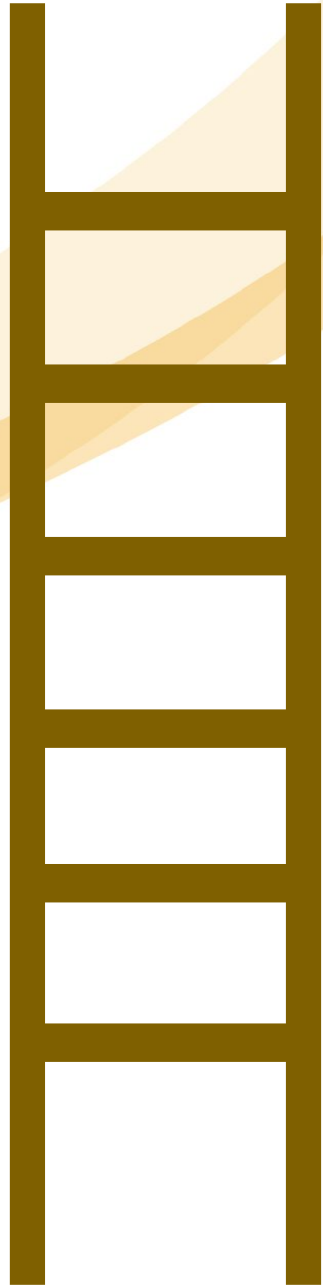
It's going to bite  
me!  
I won't cope!





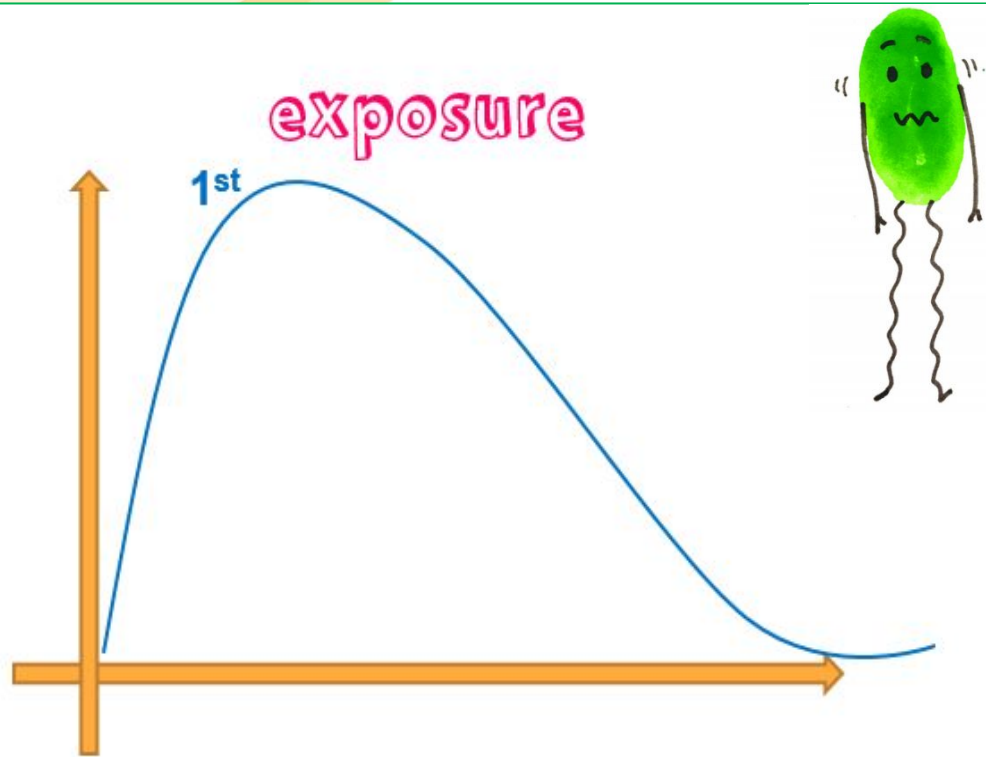

$$\text{Anxiety} = \frac{\text{Overestimation of threat}}{\text{Underestimation of ability to cope}}$$

The fear ladder...

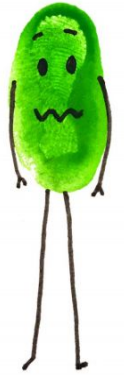
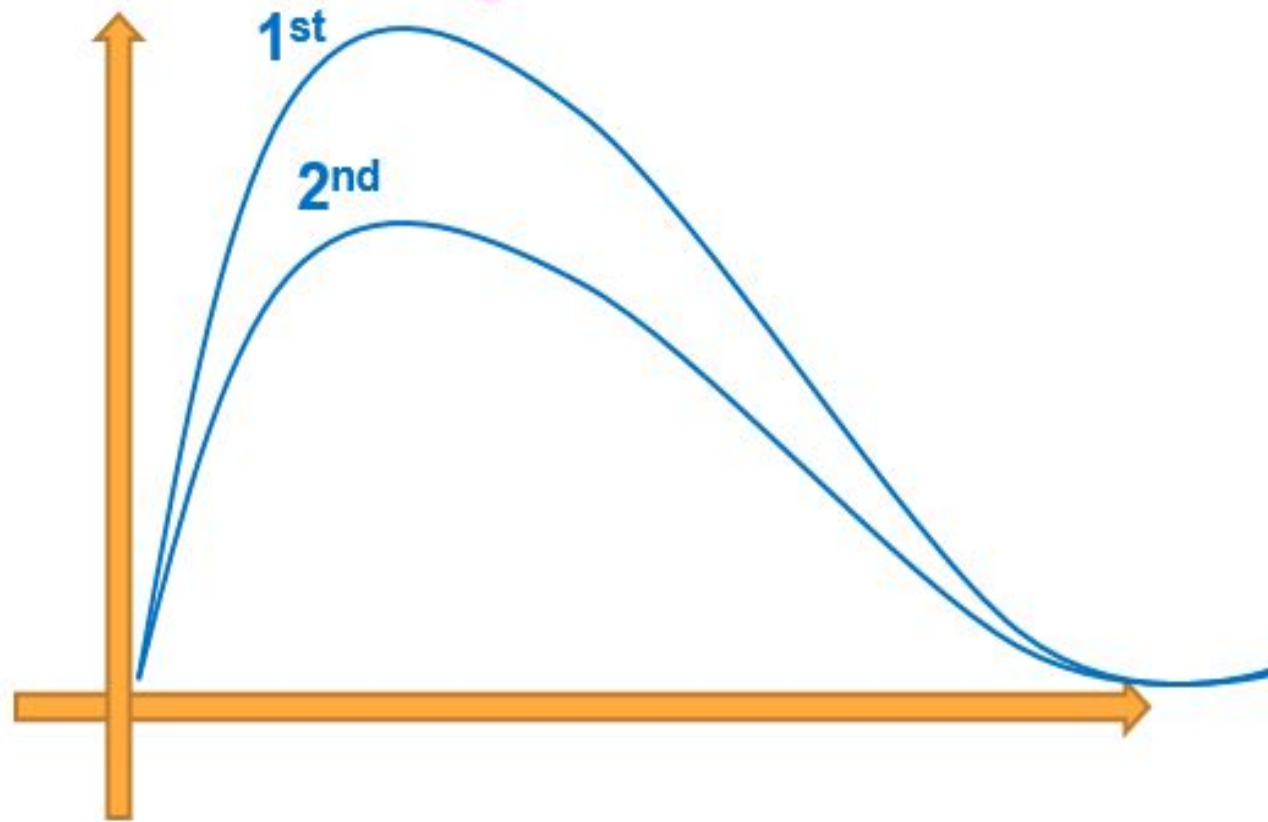


When we first encounter an anxiety provoking situation our anxiety quickly reaches an uncomfortable level and our fight/flight response kicks in. However, if we remain in the situation our anxiety begins to drop down on its own. The more we do something scary, the less anxiety-provoking it becomes, and the quickly anxiety comes down

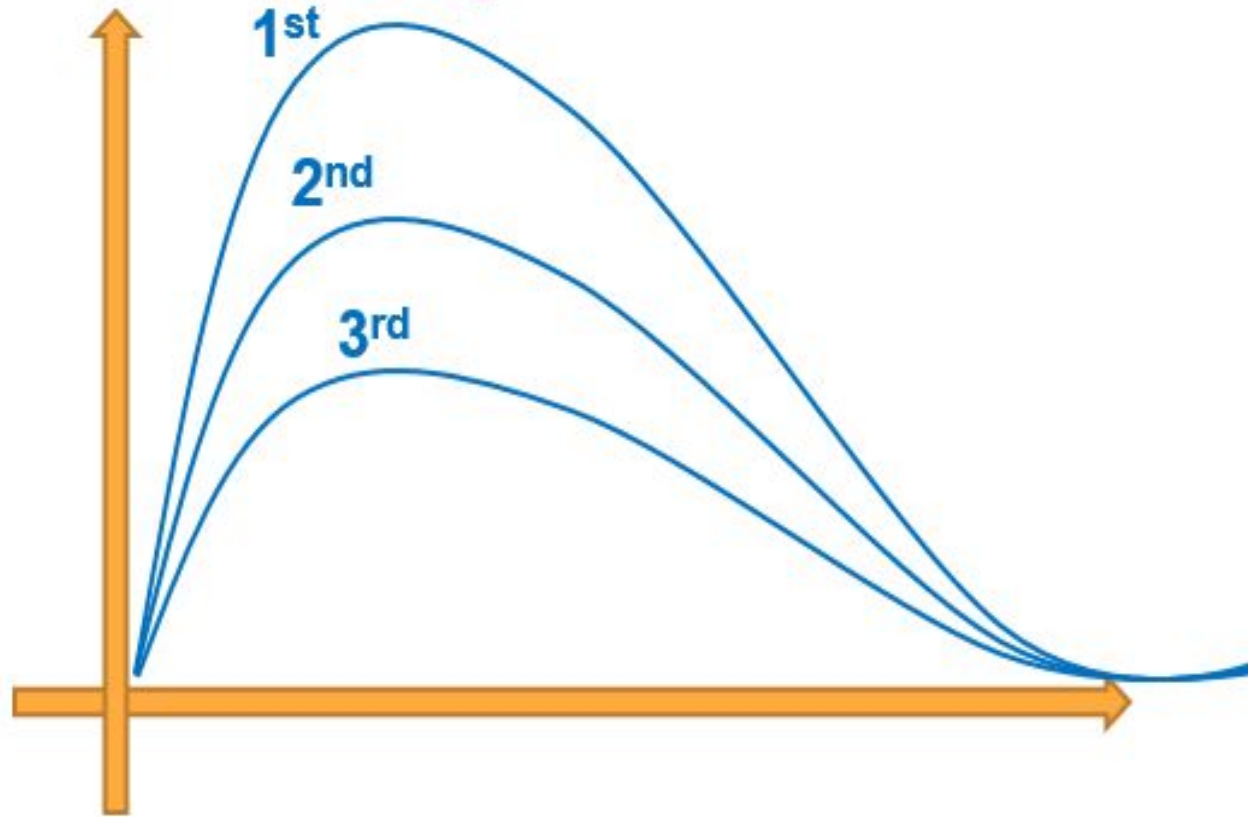
Anxiety comes down over time, all by itself, even when you **STAY** in the scary situation



# exposure

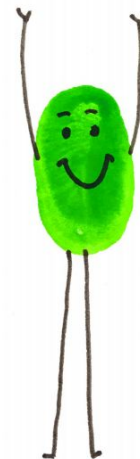
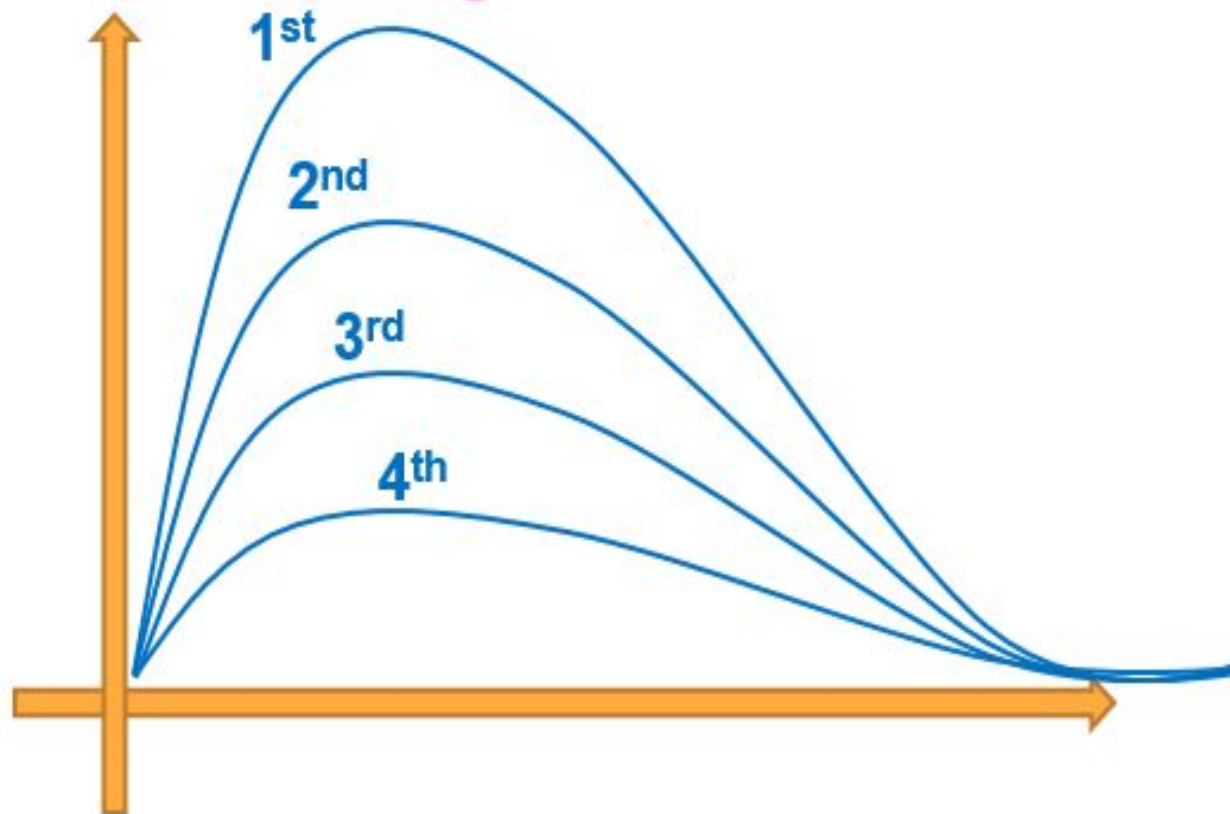


# exposure

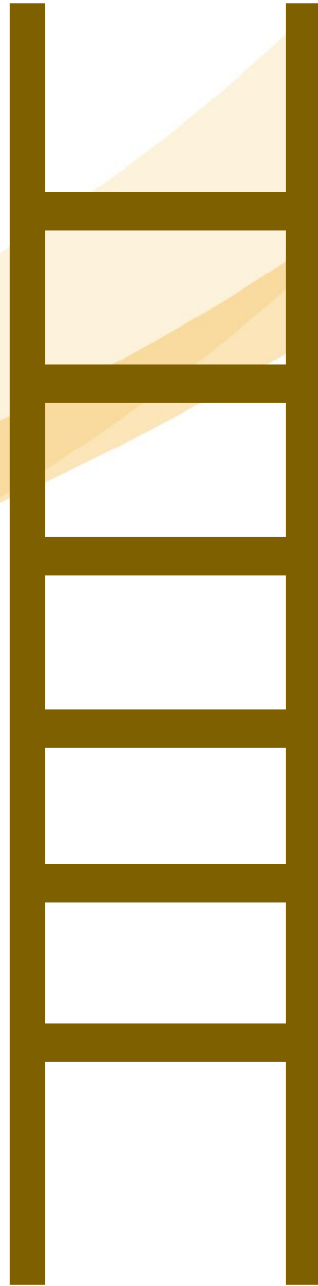




# exposure



# Ultimate goal: To pat Grandad's dog



Step	Fear Rating	Reward
Put down some food for the dog, watching him close by	8	Watch favourite TV programme
Sit in the same room as the dog	6	Pizza night with family
Watch Grandad's dog in the garden through the window on my own	5	Cycle ride with Dad
Look at a dog from a distance in the park, with mum	4	Bake a cake with Mum
Watch a video of a dog	3	Ice cream

What did I learn?

# Creating an emotional wellbeing toolbox

Play with a fidget toy

Do some colouring

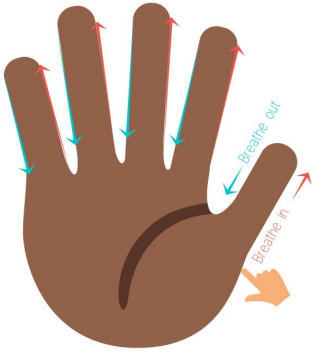


Stretching



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5 Finger Breathing



Play with playdough (aroma dough)

# Looking after yourself

Self-care is different for everyone!

**SLEEP. EAT WELL. LAUGH. READ. EXERCISE.**  
**MEDITATE.**  
**TAKE TIME OFF. GREEN SPACE.**

It is a daily and long-term process

What can you do to self-care?

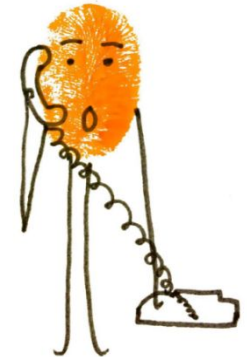


# Seeking further support

**If you are worried about your child's wellbeing make sure you ask for help.**

## **Who should I ask?**

- Speak to your GP
- Speak to your school mental health lead
- Call the Single Point of Access for advice or to make a referral



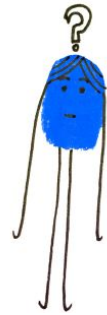
You can contact SPA to request support, or to report a concern about a child or young person.

From 8am to 5.15pm, Monday to Thursday, and 8am to 5pm on Friday call 020 8547 5008

Out of hours, phone 020 8770 5000

# Summary:

- Understanding anxiety
- Strategies to manage worries
- The importance of parent wellbeing
- Seeking further support



Questions - Ideas - Feedback



THANK YOU

