



SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD WITH ANXIETY – Q&A Summary 19/01/23

*Haringey Trailblazer Mental Health Support Team and
Haringey Educational Psychology Service*

What is Haringey doing to support schools and families when anxiety is stopping children and young people from attending school?

- The Haringey Educational Psychology service offer support with Emotional Based School Avoidance.
- The Trailblazers work with schools to help develop a *whole school approach* to emotional wellbeing.
- The Anchor Project in Haringey is an early intervention which uses trauma and attachment theory to support the emotional wellbeing of children and young people by supporting school staff to use evidence-based strategies every day.

Are ‘Safety Behaviours’ sometimes a rational response to a particular environment? Are there circumstances where repeated exposure to a stressful environment can exacerbate anxiety and/or trauma?

- One of the most common safety behaviours is avoidance of a situation. It is normal and rational to try to avoid things that make us feel anxious.
- This is where ‘graded exposure’ and taking a step-by-step approach to achieving smaller goals is important
- If we don’t help young people to develop coping skills and confidence to manage, some situations can be difficult and overwhelming.

- It is important that we expose young people at the right level, where it is just outside their comfort zone, rather than pushing them too far.

How can we support with the physical manifestations of anxiety, like teeth grinding, skin picking, nail biting, chewing and hair pulling?

- Often, these are ways of self-regulating when we are anxious.
- It is helpful to think about what is behind the anxiety causing that behaviour and try out some of the strategies discussed in the webinar.

What can we do when our child or teenager really doesn't want to talk about their anxiety, or may mask their symptoms?

- Consider the emotional state your child is in – it can be hard to talk if we are in a particularly heightened emotional state, so it can be useful to choose a moment where your child is feeling calmer where possible.
- Try encouraging other methods of communication, like writing, drawing, or journaling
- It can be easier to discuss feelings whilst doing something else, like walking, driving, or engaging in an activity
- This is a great time to use the Emotional Coaching approach, too – using a way which works for you and your child.

How can we help a child to build their own tools to cope with anxiety rather than relying on a caretaker to solve their problem when a situation arises?

- It can be helpful to try and avoid reassurance where you can, and focus more on being curious about the anxiety, validating

- the feeling and supporting your child to problem solve with your support.
- Encourage where your child to try things out for themselves so they can prove to themselves that they can face their anxiety through their brave behaviour rather than your reassurance. You can use praise to reinforce this.

Should we avoid a situation where a child might get highly anxious, like performing in an assembly?

- You could use the 'fear thermometer' to help gauge how anxiety provoking your child finds a given situation.
- Remember that support works best when we work just outside the child's comfort zone, rather than avoiding discomfort altogether or pushing them to do things which are too challenging.

What can we do when a child or young person has 'perfectionist' tendencies?

- Using an *Emotion Coaching* approach can be helpful. For example, praise which focuses on effort or approach and trying rather than accuracy, outcomes or achievement can be helpful, as well as avoiding praise which involves comparison with others.
- It can also be powerful to model positive ways of managing things going wrong or making mistakes.

Further resources:

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/communication/communication-tools/social-stories-and-comic-strip-conversations>

<https://www.littleparachutes.com/>

<https://www.selectivemutism.org/>