

Supporting Anxious Children Descriptor

Supporting Anxious Children is an online intervention based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, built in conjunction with leading clinical and subject matter experts. The programme provides psychoeducation, tools and activities to help parents support their children, delivered in a safe and confidential space.

The programme is accessible 24/7, allowing users to access the programme at a time that suits them and from the comfort of their own home.

Target audience: Parents and carers of children aged 5-11, looking to support their children in dealing with worry and anxiety, as well as learning helpful strategies to deal with their own anxiety.

Programme's objectives: Provide psychological strategies to support parents of children experiencing anxiety.

Overview: Anxiety is a normal human experience and everyone who is alive experiences some level of anxiety. When anxiety becomes so strong that it gets in the way of daily life, it is considered to be an 'anxiety disorder'. It is estimated that 1 in 8 children (12%) in England is living with a mental health problem. Alongside depression, anxiety is the most prevalent psychiatric problem experienced in childhood and adolescence. (NHS, 2017.) The My World II Survey showed a sharp increase in adolescents experiencing anxiety. A large study of young people in 2019, found that the proportion of adolescents (12-18-year-olds) in Ireland reporting severe anxiety had doubled to 22% since the same survey in 2012. (Dooley et al., 2019)

Some children are simply born more anxious and less able to cope with stress than others. Children can also pick up anxious behaviour from being around anxious people and some children develop anxiety after stressful events. Children can develop specific phobias, or they can develop more

broad-based anxiety disorders. (NHS, 2020.) Childhood anxiety has an impact on family processes as well as children's functioning with peers, school and recreation. (Rapee et al., 2009.)

Cognitive behavioural therapy is proven to be efficacious for childhood anxiety. CBT incorporates psychoeducation, relaxation and gradual exposure, with the aim of enabling children to identify their anxiety, and to apply their skills to gradually face anxiety-provoking situations. Problem solving is another important component of CBT for anxiety (Rapee et al., 2009) and is a major area of focus in this programme.

The programme also includes mindfulness exercises for both children and parents/guardians using the programme. Practicing mindfulness strategies can facilitate the recognition of anxious feelings and maladaptive thoughts, as well enhance self-monitoring and coping strategies and minimize avoidant behaviours (Roemer & Orsillo, 2002). Mindfulness practices have been evidenced as significant components in the long-term effectiveness of treatments for childhood anxiety. (Perry-Parrish et al., 2016). In addition, the programme also adopts a strengths-based approach to supporting children, whereby parents are encouraged to acknowledge and build upon their children's and their own strengths (Sharry, 2004)

There is strong evidence for the benefits of parent training with families when children and adolescents have emotional/behavioural problems. For example, a meta-analysis of seventeen evaluation studies with over 1,000 families found that the Parents Plus Programmes (group-based parent training courses) have a significant impact on child behaviour problems, goal attainment, and parental satisfaction and stress. (Carr et al., 2017).

Creswell and Cartwright-Hatton (2007) found that a substantial number of studies comparing CBT to CBT + FAM (Family Anxiety Management Therapy) indicate a beneficial effect of including parents in treatment. Good efficacy has also been shown by "non-traditional" treatment delivery i.e., self-help and computer-delivered interventions. (Creswell and Cartwright Hatton, 2007; Crouch et al., 2019.)

Table: Program Modules, Therapeutic Goals, Objectives, Content and Tools

Module name	Therapeutic Goals	Therapeutic Objectives	Content
Parenting An Anxious Child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normalise anxiety and its presentation in children. • Enhance parents' understanding of the different types of anxiety. • Empower parents to recognise and focus on the helpful sides of anxiety. • Support parents in helping their child to tune in to their body. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents learn about the different types of anxiety and their presentation in children and adolescents. • Parents reflect on how anxiety is affecting their child. • Parents learn to recognise the helpful side of anxiety, as well as the strengths it highlights in their children. • Parents help their child to become more in tune with physical feelings and practice describing them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychoeducation: anxiety in children, e.g. types, causes and the underlying strengths of anxiety. • Quiz: Anxiety in Children & Teenagers. • Activities: My Child's Anxiety, My Child's Strengths. • Relaxation: Relaxation Activities.
Parenting Positively	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support parents in acknowledging how their response impacts their child. • Encourage parents to respond more positively when their child is experiencing anxiety. • Empower parents to recognise and focus on their own 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents reflect on their own anxiety and how they react when their child is feeling anxious. • Parents learn helpful strategies to communicate with their child in relation to his/her anxiety. • Parents identify opportunities to respond differently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychoeducation: the parent-child anxiety response, how to respond positively as a parent. • Quiz: My Child's Anxiety & Me. • Activities: My Response Plan, My Strengths as a Parent. • Relaxation: Body Map exercise to identify the physical feelings of anxiety.

	<p>strengths as a parent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents recognise and draw on their own strengths.to/want to make any changes • Users are presented with available options for making changes to one's relationship with alcohol 	
Changing Anxiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance parents understanding of anxiety and how it affects their child. • Encourage parents to use key CBT skills to help their child make changes which reduce their anxiety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents learn about the physiology of anxiety and its connection with worries and behaviour. • Parents reflect on their child's anxiety cycle. • Parents learn helpful strategies for managing anxiety and how to implement these with their children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychoeducation: The cycle of anxiety and how it affects the body, thoughts and behaviours, e.g. avoidance and safety behaviours, how to change the cycle. • Activities: My Child's CBT Cycles, Changing My Child's CBT Cycles. • Relaxation: Breathing exercises, Breathing Space guided audio for parents/teens.
Problem Solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support parents in taking action to address their child's worries with effective problem solving. • Facilitate positive communication channels between parent and child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents learn the value of putting a boundary on time spent worrying. • Parents gain an understanding of how to facilitate proactive problem solving with their child. • Parents learn useful strategies for communicating with their child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychoeducation: setting up a daily problem solving time, the 3 steps to problem solving, helping your child to talk if they find it difficult opening up. • Activities: Pick The Right Time To Talk, Family Problem Solving tool. • Relaxation: 5 Senses relaxation activity.

Changing Thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the use of cognitive restructuring strategies to challenge worries and create more balanced thinking. Encourage the use of externalisation to unite parent and child against the common enemy of anxiety. Support parents in using acceptance as an alternative strategy for managing worries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents understand the importance of noticing worrying thoughts and beliefs. Parents learn how to help their child develop more helpful ways of thinking. Parents recognise the benefit of helping their child to externalise their anxiety. Parents learn about acceptance as a strategy to help their child manage things they can't control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychoeducation: identifying worrying thoughts and the beliefs that underpin them, ways of creating more helpful thinking, seeing anxiety as something separate, how to accept things you and your child can't control. Activities: Changing Your Thinking tool, Coping Cards, Naming Anxiety. Relaxation: Watching Thought-Trains mindfulness exercise, Watching Thoughts guided audio for parents/teens.
Facing Fears	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate recognition of the importance of children facing their fears, rather than avoiding them. Encourage parents to use graded exposure with their child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents learn about the role of avoidance in maintaining fears and anxiety. Parents practice using graded exposure with their child. Parents identify strategies they can use to help motivate their child in facing their fears. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychoeducation: tackling anxiety by taking small, manageable steps, motivating your child to face their fears with rewards and consequences. Activities: Facing Fears Ladder, Rewards and Consequences exercise. Relaxation: Progressive Muscle Relaxation for children, guided audio version for parents/teens.
Creating A Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support parents in ongoing anxiety management planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents develop a plan of action for how to help their child manage their anxiety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychoeducation: creating a plan for going forward in 4 steps. Activities: My Plan. Relaxation: Children's visualisation video links and

			guided audio for parents/teens.
Going Forward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance understanding of the importance of self-esteem and resilience in staying healthy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents learn preventative strategies, such as building self-esteem. Parents reflect on their child's self-esteem and how they can address it across 8 key areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychoeducation: preventing problems by building your child's self-esteem and resilience. Activities: Building Self-Esteem. Relaxation: Revisiting Relaxation Activities and the Body Map.

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