

Transcript of slide show/video narrated by Louise Jones and Michelle McFarlane, TA's for emotional wellbeing and parent support.

Welcome to Anxiety Part 2. In this session we will look at the anxiety cycle. First, let's remind ourselves of our objectives.

At the end of part one, which was an overview of anxiety, we asked you to think about a time when you were anxious. We asked you to think about how it felt? What your thoughts were at the time and what you did in relation to that anxious moment. These questions relate to the anxiety cycle.

That our thoughts, feelings and behaviour were all linked and each one has an impact on the other. Starting with the thoughts, what we think about ourselves, the situations we are in or how we think we might cope, will have a direct effect on how we feel, and how we feel both emotionally and physically, will have an effect on how we act or behave. And in turn, what we do or don't do on our actions can reinforce the thoughts we had in the first place. Now in the anxiety cycle, it is our negative or unhelpful thoughts that can increase anxious bodily symptoms and emotions. So let's look at each aspect of the anxiety cycle in detail.

First, our feelings. Feelings are both emotional and physical. Emotionally, we may feel ambitious, worried, or panicking. In our bodies, we may be aware that our heart is beating faster, our breathing doesn't feel so calm, we may blush, tremble, feel hot or cold. Anxiety often affects our stomachs. Some might describe it as butterflies in the tummy. Children, however, may complain of a tummy ache or feeling sick. It can be hard for a parent to know whether a child's tummy symptoms are part of a tummy bug, or an anxious tummy. Persistent tummy problems are worth being checked out with your doctor. But if a child complains of the tummy ache with the regular situation or event, it may indicate anxiety around that event.

Second, our thoughts. When we're anxious we may think negatively about ourselves or our situations. It can be useful to check in with our thoughts to see if they're helping or actually making our anxiety worse. There are particular thinking patterns that may increase anxiety and here are some common ones. The crystal ball, or fortune teller represents times when we have unhelpful thoughts about the future. For example, by thinking I will never get it right, I always get it wrong when we clearly don't know that. The dustbin represents times when we attach a negative or unhelpful label to ourselves in our thoughts, for example I'm rubbish at maths and hopeless at spelling. Doing this only serves to make us feel worse. The scales represent all or nothing thinking. This happens when we see things as either one thing or the other, but nothing in between. For example, I didn't get full marks in my test, therefore I failed. The magnifying glass represents times when we might blow things up out of proportion will magnify the negative, or when we only see one part of something and that is the negative part, and we may yet be dismiss anything positive. And when we say statements such as I should or I must, it tends to put pressure on us and sets up unrealistic expectations.

Third, our behaviour. Behaviour is a communication of feelings. Here are some ways that your child may behave because of their anxious feelings. We've talked about children complaining of an upset tummy where they may feel sick, be sick, or have loose bowel motion. As long as there is no underlying cause, we find it helped to tell children that this is their 'worry tummy'. Some children may cling to their parent cry, get upset or angry at

specific times, such as the school drop off. We might call this separation anxiety. It can be a difficult time for a parent who understandably does not want to leave a distressed child at school, but it's often the case that as soon as the parent leaves, the child settles quickly. Anxiety may make children constantly seek reassurance from their parents, but reassurance, although might work in the short term, does not work long term and the child tends to seek reassurance again and again. Some children may be reluctant to ask for help, or try to avoid the thing that their anxious about. Avoidance can also give us some temporary relief, but in the long run it only serves to make anxiety worse and harder to face.

Let's look at the power of thought in more detail and think about how this can affect our feelings and behaviour. For example, imagine your child has a spelling test coming up. They may already be having thoughts about this. Their internal dialogue may be saying I'm rubbish at spellings. I'm never going to get it right. This can lead to feelings of worry, anxiety, panic, maybe tummy ache or headaches. In turn we start to see the behaviour and the child may become upset, may avoid, may not want to go to school, may become clingy, angry or snappy. Sometimes as adults we may just see the behaviour, without knowing what the anxiety is underneath.

However, the good news is we can model and teach children how to take control of their thoughts. To do this, we can replace the unhelpful thoughts with the facts. For example, I've practised my spellings and I'm going to try my best. What's the worst that can happen? This in turn will hopefully lead to more confident feelings, better coping skills, resilience and feeling happier. Hopefully the end result will be that the child is able to sit the spelling test in a calm and measured way.

When thinking about coping strategies, it is worth remembering, that we are not born knowing how to manage our feelings. Like anything else in life, we have to learn how to do this. Having an understanding of anxiety can help us to develop the right coping strategies for us. We call this our anxiety toolkit and we will look more at this in our next presentation on taking control of anxiety.