

# How to Help Your Child Cope with Anxiety?

Janet Lo  
Educational Psychologist  
Surrey EPS

## Major sources of anxiety

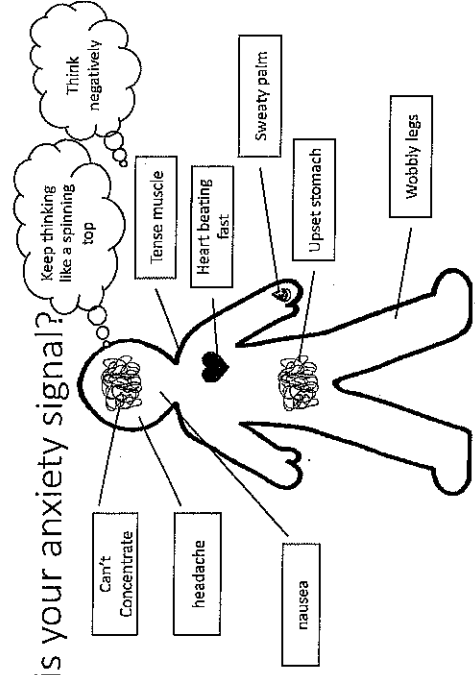
1. Sensory issues
2. Social interaction (e.g. being teased, don't know what to say)
3. Specific phobia
4. Performance-related
5. Unpredictable situations

## What is anxiety?

- **Thought:** keep thinking something bad might happen in the future, even if there's no real danger ('What if...')
- **Physical sensation:** shaky, heart beating fast, having butterflies in stomach...
- **Behaviour:** avoidance, procrastination, restlessness, keep asking the same questions
- **Emotion:** appear agitated/ angry



## What is your anxiety signal?




## Hand Model of the Brain

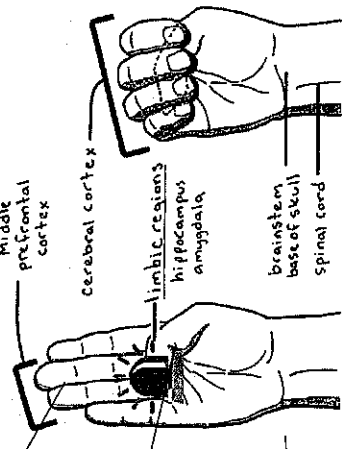
**Higher order thinking:**  
Do analysis, solve problem, make decision

**Threat detection system → fight and flight response**

**Basic functions:**  
breathing, heartbeat

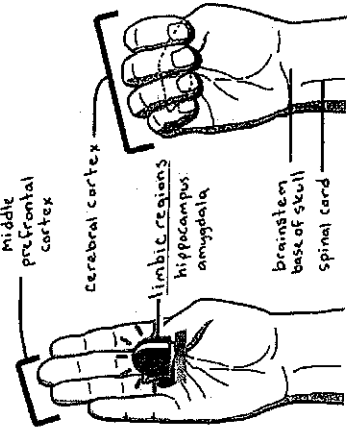
*We need this alarm system to keep us safe.*





*By Dr. Daniel Siegel*

## Deactivate the alarm system: get the lid back on!



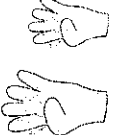
*By Dr. Daniel Siegel*

## What are your first reactions when your child is anxious?

- Anxious? (How can you live independently? How can you transition to secondary school?)
- Irritated? (why do you over-react?)
- Frustrated? (what's wrong with you?)
- Helpless?
- Hopeless?

***You are not alone***

***How does your reactions affect your child?***




## We may try to help our kids by saying ...

1. 'Stop worrying about the spelling test. It's not a big deal.'
2. 'There's no reason to be worried about a simple test.'
3. 'Let's not talk about it; Have some ice cream! Everything will be fine.'
4. 'You need to start studying more efficiently. You should have been studying every day for the past week, and you need to stay focused during your study sessions. Make a study schedule, stick to it, and break the material down into smaller chunks.'

### What's the problem?

- Our responses: giving 'comfort', solutions and distraction...
- But: minimise and invalidate their feelings
- Feeling unheard and unsupported → Communication Breakdown → Missed Opportunities for Support → not developing their coping skills
- Increased Anxiety
- 'You shouldn't feel this way.' → They are wired NOT to trust their OWN perception and feelings → don't voice out their needs when growing up

I want to feel understood.




### What will you say to your kid...

- when you are calm, and you want to extend calmness?
- when you are compassionate, and you want to extend compassion?
- Use your intuition mind, use your own words.


**How can we keep calm and compassionate?**

### Self-regulation: Connect with Ourselves

- Recognise your own emotions and internal state
  - calmness, clarity, curiosity, compassion



**Thermometer:**  
react to children's behaviours and emotions



**Thermostat:**  
Maintain consistent emotional temperature

### Self-Compassion

**If getting triggered, acknowledge and validate your own emotions**

**Connect with yourself first, be compassionate to yourself first:**


- Heart hold: put one hand on your heart, and one hand on your belly. Say to yourself, 'I notice part of me is \_\_\_\_\_ when I hear/see my kid \_\_\_\_\_. It's tough to handle this.'

**Remind yourself:**

- 'He/she is a good kid having a hard time.'

How can we connect  
with our child?

1. Recognising your child's feelings  
and understand their views

 Connect before Correct

- Recognise behaviour as communication
- View things from your child's perspective (doesn't mean agreeing with them)

2. Validating the feelings and  
labeling them



### Validating the feelings and labelling them

- Simply observe – Look for physical and verbal signs of the emotion being felt)
- Use words to reflect back child's emotion and help child to label emotion: saying what you see
- Telling your child that you understand their emotional situation and that you don't blame them helps sooth their emotional brain

*Name it to tame it*

### Example Scripts

#### Say what you see:

- 'I can see you're frowning and you're kicking the wall. It sounds like you're anxious about going to school.'
- 'I noticed you have kept erasing your answers. I think you might be feeling nervous right now about whether your work is correct. Have I got that right?'

#### Normalising the Emotion:

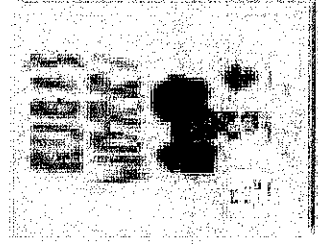
- "Feeling anxious is perfectly normal, and many people feel this way before something important, like a test."

#### Relating to the Emotion:

- 'Sometimes I feel that way too when I have something important coming up.'
- 'I would be feeling like that too if I didn't want to do something.'

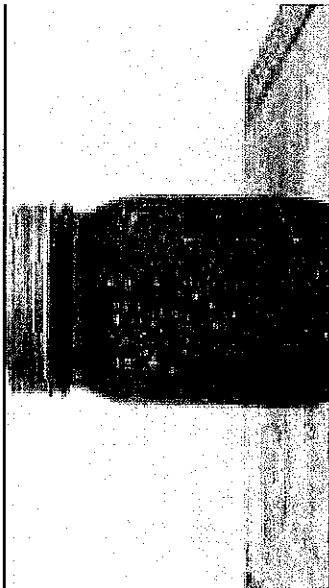
Further exploration of your child's anxiety

### Ruby's Worry (Share a Story Corner)





## Mindful Monday: Glitter Jars



25

## Connect before correct

- 'I notice you are frowning. Are you thinking about the spelling test tomorrow? It seems that your worry part is taking over. Do you notice it? How big is it now? How close is it to you now? What is it telling you? What is it worrying?'
- It's perfectly normal to feel that way sometimes.
- How about we take some deep breaths together to help you feel calmer? We can also discuss some strategies to boost your confidence, like going over your words one more time. I'll be right here to support you.'

26

## Problem solving skill: Circle of Influence (Control)

Adapted from 'The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People', written by  
Stephen Covey

27

Area of Concern:  
I have no control



Area of Influence:  
I have some control

28

