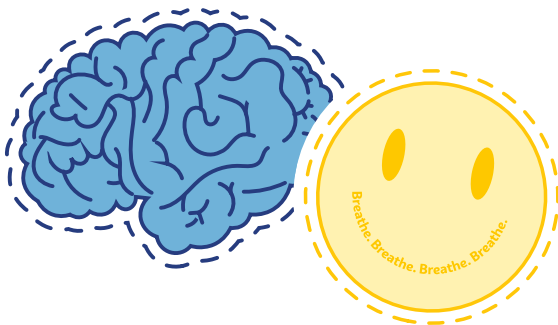


The Key Ring

Instructions :

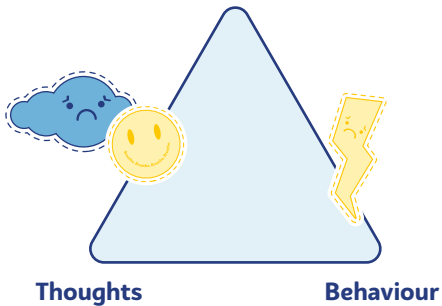
1. **Cut out all the cards, laminate them and put them in the suggested order.**
2. **Using a punch, make a small hole in the upper left corner of each card.**
3. **Use a key ring to collect all the cards.**
4. **Of course, you can customize them based on the challenges you want to deal with (depending on the interventions targeted: physical, thoughts or behavioural). Some interventions may require the support of a professional.**
5. **Bravo! You have succeeded in making a key ring that can easily accompany you and will be useful when you need to better manager your anxiety.**

Reference : Created by Stéphanie Henderson, Social Worker, health promotion and wellness consultant in the CISSS des Laurentides Public Health Department



Steps for managing my anxiety

Physical sensations



1

Step 1:

I recognize the physical sensations in my body, “what I feel”



2

What discomfort(s) do I feel in my body? What are my physical sensations?

- My heart is beating rapidly.
- I have a stomach ache.
- My mouth is dry.
- I'm trembling; my muscles are tense.
- My breathing is faster and irregular
- I feel sick to my stomach. I want to vomit.
- I'm hot; I'm sweating
- Etc.

3

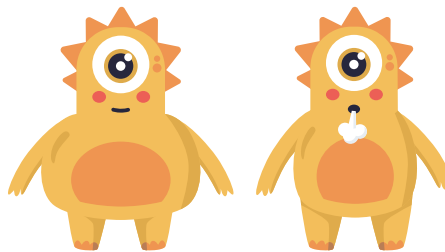
Step 2:

Use methods for relaxing and focus on the present moment

My relaxation toolbox

4

Deep breathing



Breathe in.

Breathe out.

5

Deep breathing

1. Get into a comfortable position.
2. Put one hand on your chest and the other one on your stomach.
3. Breathe in slowly and deeply (mouth closed) and inflate your belly like a balloon.
4. Hold your breath (2 to 5 seconds).
5. Breathe out very slowly through your mouth (you can count down: 5-4-3-2-1 in your head) while exhaling.
6. Repeat the exercise at least 5 times or until you feel calm.

6

Relaxation



7

Relaxation

1. Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed.
2. Close your eyes and contract your muscles one by one (face, arms, stomach, legs, feet) for about 5 seconds each while breathing in deeply. Then slowly release the tension.

** Pay attention to the relaxation when you release the tension. You can also listen to soft music during the exercise.*

8

Mindfulness



9

I do a mindfulness exercise: The 5 senses

- Describe 4 things you can see.
- Describe 3 things you hear right now.
- Describe 2 things that you feel.
- Describe 1 thing that you are touching and describe the sensation in your body.
- Describe 1 thing that you taste.

10

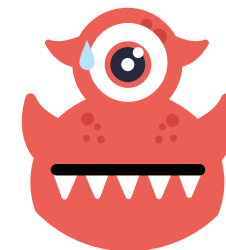
My relaxation toolbox

My methods:

11

Step 3:

I recognize my worrying thoughts,
“what I tell myself”



12

I identify the source of my worries: what I say to myself inside my head

- What exactly am I afraid of?
- What worries me?
- What are my worried thoughts in this situation?
- What would happen if my worries came true?
- And if that occurs, what will happen?

13

My bank of helpful thoughts

14

Ideas for helpful thoughts

- Anxiety is rising but it always goes down again.
- The situation is unpleasant, but it isn't dangerous
- I can overcome this situation. I know what to do to get there.
- I have confidence in myself, and I do my best.
- I can't think for other people so I will check what they are thinking before imagining scenarios.
- I am not in real danger; my brain is playing tricks on me.

15

Step 4:

I question my worries and I change my way of thinking

to be able to see the situation in a more realistic way.

I can change my way of seeing things so that I feel better.

16

I change my way of thinking

- Is it really true?
- Are you sure it will happen?
- What is the likelihood of it really happening?
- Do you have proof to support your idea?
See Appendix 1
- Do you have information that contradicts it?
- Are there other possible explanations?
- Did it already happen in the same situation in the past?
- And if my thought turns out to be correct, will I be able to get through it?

17

Behavioural interventions

I recognize my behavioural reactions "what I do"



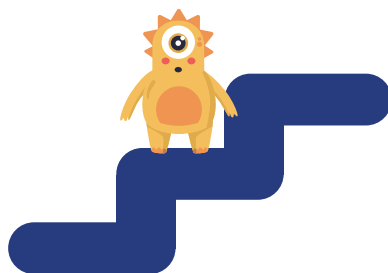
18

My behaviour: what I do when I feel anxious

- I avoid situations that make me afraid.
- I object; I find faults.
- I deny my problems and refuse to feel stress.
- I wait until the last minute.
- I want constant reassurance (excessive comforting), etc.
- I have a temper tantrum.
- I cry.
- Etc.

19

Gradual exposure: My step-by-step plan



See Appendix 2

20

Prepare a plan to gradually expose yourself to what makes you afraid (so that your fears diminish)

1. Identify goals (from the easiest to the most difficult).
2. Don't go on to the next step as long as you have not achieved an objective (until your physical sensations disappear).
3. Exposure must last long enough and be repeated until you no longer have a fear reaction to the situation.
4. Don't give up, perseverance will overcome your fear.

21

Problem-solving training



22

Problem-solving steps

1. I identify the problem
2. I make a list of all the possible solutions.
3. I choose one solution possible to accomplish.
4. I evaluate the result: what is the effect on my fear?

Think about solutions to reduce anxiety.
When I find solutions to problems, I send a message to my brain that I am in control of the situation and this relaxes it.

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Supplementary Information: Interventions to recommend

One of the first interventions to help a young person who feels anxious is to help them better understand what they are going through. They must understand that it is normal, even essential to experience worries in the face of a threat. The brain releases the alarm for a “real or perceived” threat to give itself everything it needs to ensure survival. We can explain to children that this causes physical symptoms that, although disagreeable, are in no way dangerous. Children experiencing lots of anxiety are often hypervigilant to what surrounds them and become, despite themselves, “super threat-detectors.”

Your child has to understand that their brain can sometimes be mistaken but they can also learn to re-educate it by using various strategies. That way they will become aware that they play a role in their own perceptions in those situations. You should also add that avoidance behaviour or the excessive search for comforting contribute to continued anxiety although they can provide temporary relief.



It is essential that your child learn how to take advantage of strategies to overcome anxiety. In the beginning, you play a supporting part and are a role model. Don't forget that anxiety does not resolve itself, but requires effort, time and consistency in the use of strategies. The objective of these interventions will be to take steps forward rather than to eliminate anxiety from your child's life (which would be unrealistic).

The following is a step-by-step approach that may be helpful in managing anxiety when it occurs (both physical and cognitive/thought interventions):

4 steps for managing anxiety

- 1.** I recognize the physical sensations in my body.
- 2.** I use methods to relax and to focus on the present moment.
- 3.** I identify the source of my worries: what I say inside my head.
- 4.** I question my concerns and change my way of thinking.

You can also implement more structured behavioral interventions (your child's actions in a situation that scares them). Professional support is desirable in carrying out this intervention.

- I recognize my behavioural reactions.
- I create a gradual exposure plan (small steps).

In brief,

1. Help your child recognize the physical sensations they experience when worried:

- It will be hard for some to do it precisely; others will have trouble seeing the difference between a normal and an anxious state because they are usually anxious. Strategies can be employed to support them in this exercise: use a stuffed animal or draw the outline of the child's body and ask them to point out the places where they experience physical sensations (What's happening in your tummy? Your arms? etc.).
- Then normalize the physical sensations the child feels and help them overcome the discomfort they feel so that they learn to endure it and they can see that it is not dangerous. For example, ask them to run until they can feel their heartbeat and get them to notice that although the sensation can be unpleasant it is not dangerous and can be tolerated.

- Get your child to breathe through a straw to see that they won't faint. The child can repeat helpful sentences to encourage themselves to face their fears (e.g., "anxiety makes me experience these unpleasant sensations, but they are not dangerous. I can tolerate them," remember that they will stop if the child overcomes them, etc.)

2. Learn ways to calm the body:

- Many methods can help the child: deep breathing (tips: put a stuffed animal on the child's stomach so that they can see the stuffed animal move with every breath. The child can imagine "smelling their birthday cake" when they breathe in and "blowing out the candles" when they breathe out), relaxation techniques (muscle contractions, yoga, mindfulness meditation, etc.), moving, laughing, helping someone, etc. Ensure that your child is calm so that they are available for discussion before going on to the next step.

[See the deep breathing tool](#)

3. Help the child identify worrying thoughts:

- Help the child identify their exaggerated or catastrophic ideas, those that cause feelings of anxiety. The exercise can be very difficult to do with children, particularly the youngest ones. You have to dig deeper and ask precise questions to be able to identify them (a little like being a detective). For example:
 - ♦ **What exactly are you afraid of?**
Answer : Making an oral presentation in front of the class.
 - ♦ **Okay, and what do you think could happen?**
Answer : everyone will laugh at me.
 - ♦ **And what will happen if that occurs?**
Answer : no-one will want to play with ME, and I'll lose all my friends.

4. Once the thoughts are identified, help your child challenge their worrisome thoughts.

- The idea is not to try to convince them at all costs that they are not right about something, but rather to get them to reflect on their thoughts and to sow some doubt in your child's mind. As a parent, you need to have a caring attitude. The more you support your child during the exercise, the more they will be able to reproduce it themselves and will gain autonomy to conquer their fears.

- Try not to encourage the child to avoid facing their anxiety by denying their difficulties because that will inevitably cause an increase in anxiety over the long term.
- It is better to lead your child to having realistic thoughts and to equip them to deal with them. To do so, you can ask questions to help them examine their thoughts (e.g., Do you think it is really true? Are you sure that will happen? What's the proof that it will really happen? Do you have evidence to support your thoughts? Is there another way to look at the situation? What will change in the universe if what you are worried about happens, will you be able to get through it? etc.). Practice together and play devil's advocate!
- "Magical thinking" is to be avoided (e.g., a magic powder that makes monsters disappear, etc.). Although that can work in the short term, these strategies lead the child to avoid what they fear and don't help them deal with it.

5. Recognize their behavioural reactions:

- It's normal to want to avoid situations that make us suffer. When your child acts like that, they want to calm down, which does work well in the short term. However, avoidance is not a winning strategy to be able to deal with their fears. On the contrary, it will exacerbate your child's anxiety in the long term. By avoiding situations that cause fear, the brain continues to believe

It is important to not stop at a single question to properly identify the real fear. If the child in the previous example is convinced that they will lose all their friends by making the oral presentation, it is normal for them to feel great anxiety and refuse to do it. This exercise will allow you to better help your child to change their thinking since you will have identified their real fears. To help you accomplish this task you can use role playing games or drawings, e.g., make bubbles to identify the characters' speech.

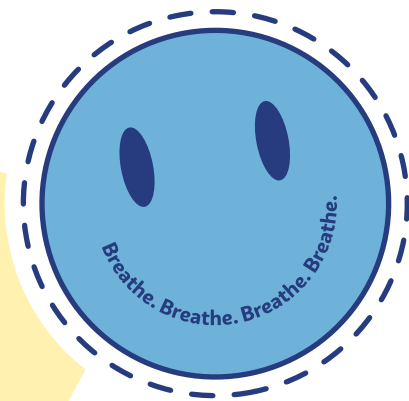
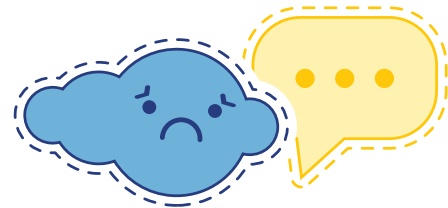
- Examples of avoidance behaviour: A child who avoids making an oral presentation and complains about a stomach ache to stay home, refuses to sleep over at a friend's, refuses to go to a friend's birthday party, refuses to touch an animal or an insect, avoids playing a sport for fear of being hurt, etc.

6. Gradual exposure:

- Exposing your child to what worries them is not an easy process. You have to be convincing in making them aware of the disadvantages of their anxiety (missing friends' birthday parties, being alone, being unhappy, etc.) and help them deal with their fears gradually so that they can experience success and gain confidence. This must be a collaborative process between you and your child.
- The goal is to lead your child to seeing the disadvantages of not being exposed this way: the more you avoid, the more scared you'll be, and the more scared you are, the more you will avoid. And the advantages: the more you face your fears, the more they will diminish because you will have succeeded in

“fooling your brain” by showing it that it often sounds an alarm for a false fear.

- To make it work, exposure must be done through a gradual structured process (have a written step-by-step plan), repeating over a long enough time so that the symptoms disappear. It is a process that goes by little steps: start with the easiest (small fear reaction) and master the situation until the physical sensations disappear. Then go on to the next step (a bigger fear reaction), and so forth. It may take as many as a dozen planned steps to get there.
- Even if your child finds it hard and wants to stop, you must continue the exposure. You can lessen the difficulty, but continue; you will see positive results.



It is important to identify behavioural reactions before working on them. To do this, you can ask the child what they tend to do when they are very worried, if they avoid situations, if someone reassures them and lets them avoid their anxiety (e.g., by doing things for them).

Example of a gradual exposure plan: Julia is afraid of bees

1st step: Julia will talk about bees with her mother for 30 minutes and will get information about bees from a beekeeper (real risks, etc.).

2nd step: Julia will watch bees on the internet for X time.

3rd step: Julia will watch a live bee in a glass jar from a distance.

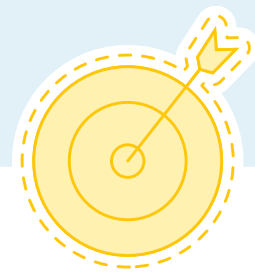
4th step: Julia will get closer to watch a live bee in a glass jar.

5th step: Julia will watch a live bee from a distance.

6th step: Julia will get closer to watch a live bee, accompanied by an adult.

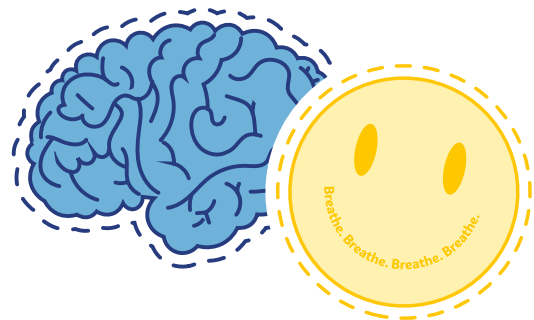
7th step: Julia will get closer to watch a live bee, by herself.

8th step: Julia will visit a beekeeper.



Reference:

Created by Stéphanie Henderson, Social Worker, health promotion and wellness consultant in the CISSS des Laurentides Public Health Department



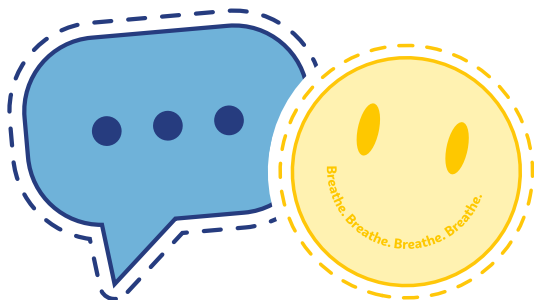
Appendix 1

My list of questions

- **Is it really true?**
- **Are you sure it will happen?**
- **What is the likelihood that it will really happen?**
- **Do you have proof to support your thoughts?**
- **Do you have contradictory information?**
- **Are there any other possible explanations?**
- **Has it happened before in the same situation?**
- **And if your thought is true, will you be able to get through it?**

Reference:

Created by Stéphanie Henderson, Social Worker, health promotion and wellness consultant in the CISSS des Laurentides Public Health Department



Appendix 2

My step-by-step plan to deal with my fear



You'll get there!
You can do it!

Challenge 10:
Reward:

Challenge 9:
Reward:

Challenge 8:
Reward:

Challenge 7:
Reward:

Challenge 6:
Reward:

Challenge 5:
Reward:

Challenge 4:
Reward:

Challenge 3:
Reward:

Challenge 2:
Reward:

Challenge 1:
Reward: