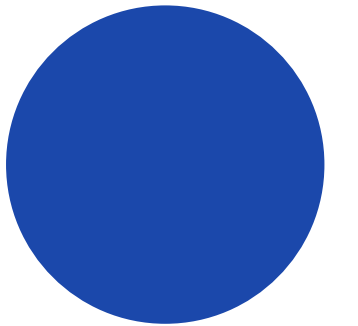
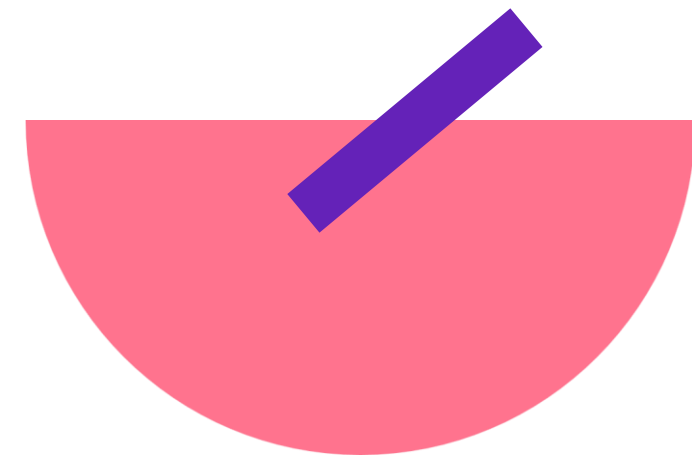


# Understanding Anxiety


Tower Hamlets Educational Wellbeing Service (THEWS)

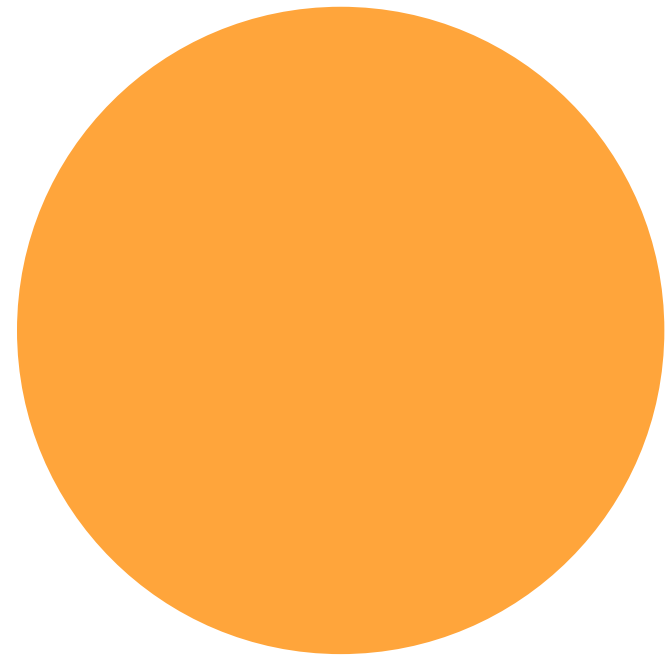




# Workshop Aims



- **To Introduce the topic of anxiety in children**
  - **Discuss different factors that lead to the development of anxiety in children**
  - **Tips and things you can do as parents to manage anxiety in your children**
- 

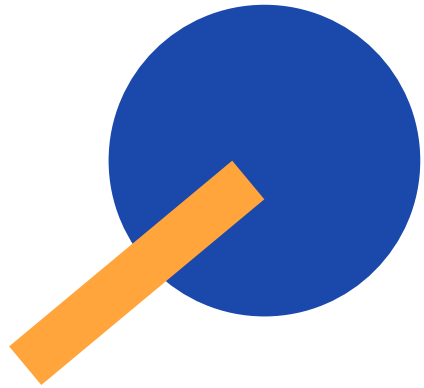


# hopes & Expectations

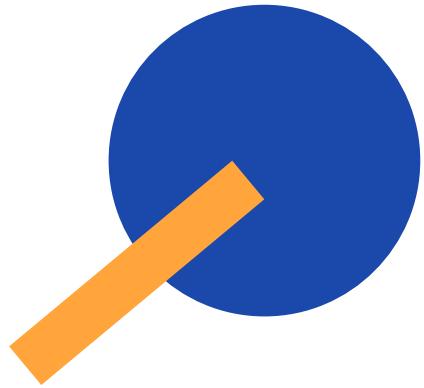
What are you hoping to get out of today's workshop?



# What is anxiety?



# Fight, Freeze or Flight Response



Everyone experiences anxiety. This is because of something in our brains called the Fight, Flight or Freeze response.

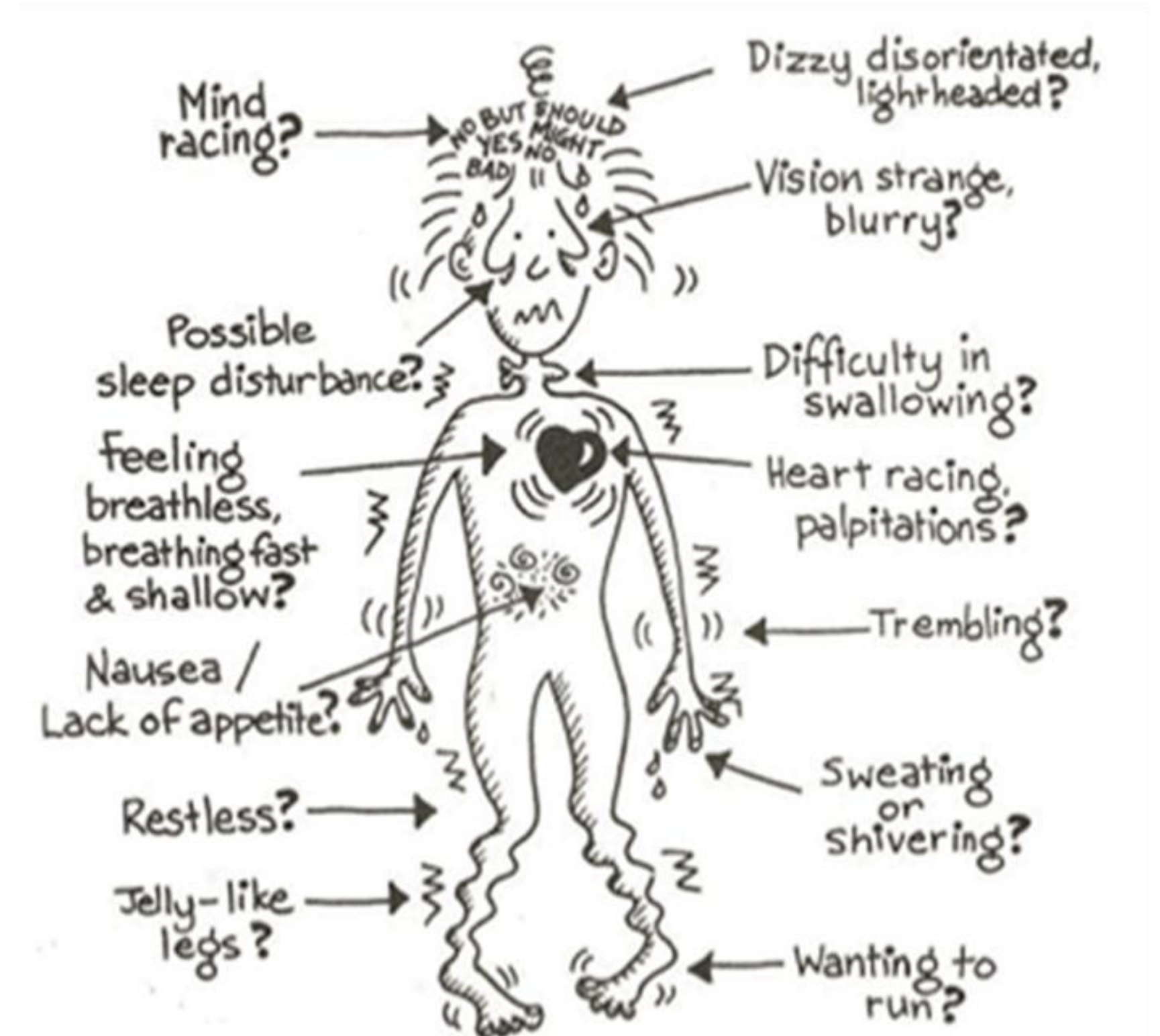
Humans developed this response because it was a much more dangerous time to live back then (think about running away from dangerous animals and hunting for food). The Fight, Flight or Freeze response meant that humans bodies went into survival mode whenever their brains sensed danger. This meant their heart rate and blood pressure would increase so they had a better chance of running away (flight), fighting the danger (fight) or hiding (freeze).

However, today in modern times, feeling anxious after the situation or “danger” has passed or even when any real “danger” is not present, can be problematic.

# FFF Response

It's like a smoke alarm

Imagine you have a smoke alarm that is overly sensitive and goes off all the time, even when there isn't a real fire. When you have a problem with anxiety, your Fight, Flight, and Freeze response is just like this – it goes off and causes the symptoms of anxiety, even if there isn't any real anger.



# FFF Response – what do you notice in your child?

## My Body Clues



Ready to explode



Tight throat



Smiling



Full of energy



Crying



Ready to run



Racing heart



Tight muscles



Headache



Dry or thirsty mouth



Trembling or shaking



Cold or shivering



Butterflies in tummy



Clenched teeth



Balanced and relaxed



Light or airy



Slow and heavy



Mind is blank



Sweating



Feeling dizzy



Stomping feet



Numb or flat



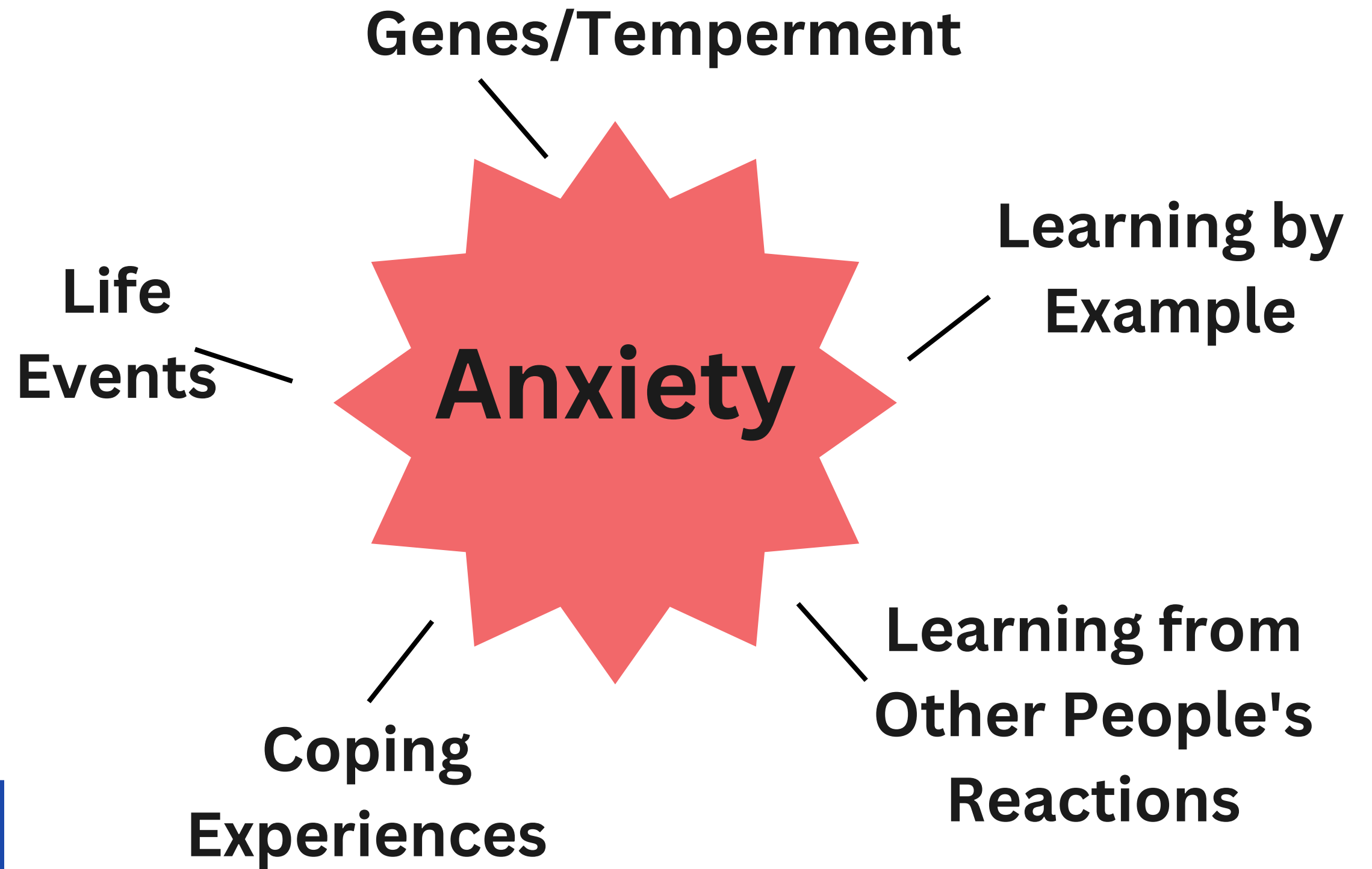
Clenched fists



Feeling sick



**Things That  
Might Cause a  
Child to Develop  
Anxiety:**





# Different Types of Anxiety

**Generalised anxiety – “a bit of a worrier”**

**Social Anxiety**

**Separation Anxiety**

**Phobias (fear of specific things)**

**Panic attacks**

**Obsessive thoughts and behaviours**

**Post traumatic stress disorder**



# Common fears & worries (triggers)

## Younger Children

- General anxiety: everyday worries (school, climate change, friendships, etc).
- Separation anxiety (finding it hard to be away from parent/carer).
- Specific phobias (spiders, insects, injections, dogs, dentists etc).
- Social anxiety (worried about what other people think about them, social/public spaces, doing something embarrassing).

## Older children and teenagers

- School and performance: Concerns about grades, exams, and doing well in school are common.
- Social fears: Anxiety about fitting in, being judged by peers, or being embarrassed are frequent worries. This can manifest as a fear of social situations, presentations, or public spaces.
- Real-world dangers: Older children and teens can become fearful of things they hear about in the news, such as violence, natural disasters, or climate change.
- Specific phobias: Phobias of heights, needles, or flying can also persist or develop during adolescence.
- Health and the future: Health-related worries and general concerns about the future are common for this age group.
- Family issues: Worries about family separation or the health of loved ones can be a source of anxiety.

# Common behaviours (in response to anxiety)

## Fight



- Hot and bothered
- Angry and aggressive
- Controlling
- Lie or blaming
- Shouty and argumentative
- Pushing away friends
- Lonely
- Demanding
- Inflexible
- Unable to follow rules
- Disrespectful

## Flight



- Running away
- Keeping SUPER busy
- Not coping in free time
- Need to be first or at the front
- Bumping into people
- Avoiding tasks and activities
- Baby talk/ silly voices
- Hiding under tables

## Freeze





- Not interested/ looks bored
- Confused
- Forgetful
- Talking about something else
- Hard to move through a task
- Not listening
- Staring into space
- Day dreaming
- Distracted



# Is it a "Problem?"

Ask yourself the following question...

**Is the anxiety stopping your child from doing what they want to/should be doing?**

- In their social life (causing problems with friendships / others)
  - Academically (stopping them from doing as well as they should be)
    - Impacting their mood (are they miserable/low as a result?)
  - Causing them to avoid things (avoiding situations, people, or places because of fear)
- 
- 

# What keeps anxiety going (maintenance)

- *Over-estimating “danger”, so will underestimate ability to cope.*

- *Avoidance: will avoid the thing is that causing them to feel anxious.*

- *Seeking reassurance: seeking emotional reassurance that everything will be ok.*

- *Safety-seeking behaviours (short-term relief): doing things that make them feel safe in anxious situations (e.g., not making eye contact, going out only at quiet times of the day, rehearsing what to say before speaking to someone).*



**SAYING:** I’m not walking to school, I won’t get ready

**THINKING:** The neighbour’s dog is scary, I feel scared



**SAYING:** I can’t go to school, tell me I’m going to be ok

**THINKING:** I can’t cope, I can’t do it alone



**SAYING:** I have a tummy ache, my head hurts

**THINKING:** I’m going to be sick, I’m nervous

# What keeps anxiety going (maintenance)

*Things other people do to try and help/protect them*



**SAYING: "It's ok mummy's here"**

**Unintentional impact: can lead to greater dependence on needing more reassurance in the future.**



**SAYING: "It will be fine, don't worry!"**

**Unintentional impact: Reduces them getting used to there being some uncertainty (not everything can be quickly sorted or what is causing them to feel anxious is out of their control).**



**SAYING: "You don't have to do it if you don't want to".**

**Unintentional impact: Encourages avoidant behaviour.**

# The "Anxiety Cycle"

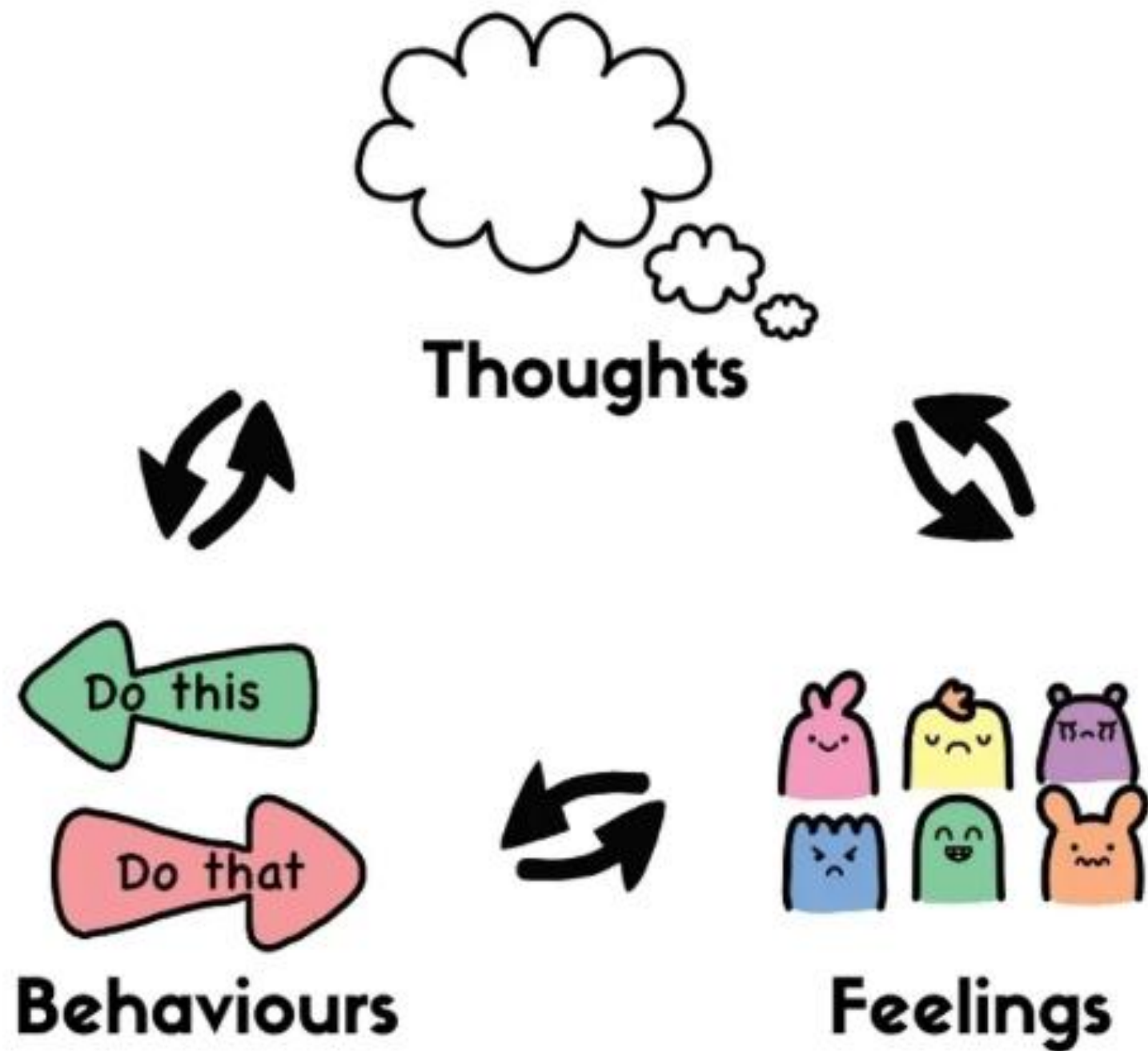
This can help us understand how a problem might have started.

○ Situation (something happens)

○ Thought (how you interpret the situation)

○ Emotion (your interpretation leads to a feeling)

○ Behaviour (your feeling leads to a response / action)



# Example

Situation: Sarah missed her bus on the way to school.

What could you do to help Sarah overcome her anxiety?



## Thoughts:

I'm going to be late and get into trouble  
I'm going to get excluded from school



## Feelings/Emotions:

Feeling nervous and worried  
Physical sensations: heart racing, feels hot and sweaty



## What did she do?

Started crying and worrying  
Phoned mum and got her to take her to school

# What Can Parents Do?

Be aware of your own anxiety responses, and those of others around your child.

Children may mimic their caregivers' reactions to something that they feel anxious about.

# What Can Parents Do?

## Provide reassurance which promotes new opportunities for learning

Like avoidance, getting reassurance from someone else (usually an adult) may make a child feel better right at that moment. It often provides a short-term relief.

At times, providing children with reassurance can be helpful, and indeed an important part of being a parent and encouraging and supporting your child to do something they haven't tried before.

A helpful way to think about this is to ask yourself whether your reassurance-giving is helping your child to have a go at new things that allow them to test out fears, OR whether it is encouraging avoidance, acting as a safety-seeking behaviour, or restricting independence.

# What Can Parents Do?

Provide reassurance which promotes new opportunities for learning  
(examples)

**“Go on, have a go, you’ve done it before and it went really well”** (*tests fears & worries, encourages independence and being brave*).

**“I think you should see how it goes. I feel confident but even if it doesn’t go well, we will have an idea of what to work on next”** (*encourages opportunity to problem-solve*).

**“I really think you can do this. I was so proud when you asked a question in class last week”** (*builds on confidence, acts on previous point of reference to refer back to*).

# What Can Parents Do?

Alternative ways to respond to my child's anxiety:  
Questions to ask (always remain curious)

- What is making you feel worried?
- What do you think will happen?
- What is it about the situation that is making you worried/anxious/scared?
- What is frightening you?

# What Can Parents Do?

Alternative ways to respond to my child's anxiety: Empathise

*"I can see you are feeling worried / frightened, that must be really difficult"*

This conveys the message that you understand that your child is anxious and that you know it is not nice feeling anxious.

# What Can Parents Do?

Alternative ways to respond to my child's anxiety: Normalise feelings

*"I remember when I got anxious about ....."*

*"I know that your friend x get anxious about  
....."*

*"Lots of children get scared and anxious  
about different things. It's hard, isn't it?"*

Children with anxiety often say that they feel different, and they think they are the only one with problems with anxiety. Using 'normalising' statements helps them to realise that other people get anxious too.

# What Can Parents Do?

Alternative ways to respond to my child's anxiety: Make suggestions

*"Do you think you are worried that x might happen?"*

*"Some children worry that x is going to happen, do you think you are worried about that too?"*

Sometimes a child will say they don't know. It is important to present suggestions as a question rather than a statement, to minimise assumptions.

Always remain curious: What might my child be thinking? Could it be something else? Have I missed anything? Is there another way of thinking about this?

# What Can Parents Do?

Alternative ways to respond to my child's anxiety: Check your understanding

*"Just to make sure that I understand or I have got it right....." [repeat for word what your child has said to you].*

To make sure you have understood what is worrying your child, you need to give them the chance to tell you if you have got it wrong. Children may respond stating you are either correct or incorrect.

# What Can Parents Do?

## Alternative ways to respond to my child's anxiety: Pick your moment

The time when you ask about your child's anxious expectations may make a big difference to your chances of success.

Sitting down with your child to talk about their thoughts works well for some children. However, for others, this can be difficult, and they may try to avoid talking or just refuse to talk to you. If this is the case, try to talk to them about their worries at other times when they feel that the focus is less on them – when you are in the car, doing the washing-up or cooking, etc.

Ask a question here, a question there. Stop if you feel that your child is losing concentration or getting angry or frustrated. Try again another time or another day.

# What Can Parents Do?

## Alternative ways to respond to my child's anxiety: Rewards (encouraging "having a go" behaviour)

Talking about anxious expectations can be hard work, scary or even boring.

It is important to try and make it a bit more appealing for your child or even fun if you can.

For older children, perhaps combine it with a trip to their favourite location and talk there. Maybe suggest your child can do something nice once you have talked a bit about their worries – watch a favourite film, have a favourite dinner, play a game together.

It's important that your child gets used to talking about anxious thoughts, and that it doesn't become a chore for them, but rather a first step to feeling less anxious.

# What Can Parents Do?

## Getting the best results

Place a focus on asking questions and not just giving answers / solutions

- This helps children to think for themselves
  - Puts them in control
- Prevents them from feeling silly/wrong

# What Can Parents Do?

Teach and model ways coping strategies in response to everyday worries/worries out of your child's control

## 5 FINGER BREATHING

Run one finger along the fingers of your other hand. Breathe in through your nose every time your finger goes up. Breathe out through your mouth every time it goes down.



## POSITIVE TALK

Tell your amygdala to stay calm!

Use positive talk like "I can do this!", "This isn't really dangerous.", "I can be calm.", or any other statements you like.



## THE COLOUR GAME

Choose any colour. Look around you. In your head, name all of the things you can see with that colour.



## HOT CHOCOLATE BREATHING

Imagine you are holding a nice, hot cup of hot chocolate. Breathe in reaaaaally deeply through your nose and smell the hot chocolate. Breathe out reaaaaally deeply through your mouth and blow on your hot chocolate to cool it down. Repeat until you feel calmer.



## CLOUDS IN THE SKY

Imagine lots of clouds drifting by in the sky. If your amygdala is making you feel anxiety, imagine the anxiety on a cloud, and watch it float away!



## PALM PUSH

Put your palms together. PUSH really hard for about 10 seconds (don't hurt yourself). Then, LET GO. Repeat until you feel calmer.

# What Can Parents Do?

Problem-solve situations that really might be difficult:  
How will they cope? Who else can help them out?

Problem	All possible solutions	Is this realistic yes / no Pros & cons	Have a go, do it!
---------	------------------------	---	-------------------

## MY BACK-UP TEAM



# What Can Parents Do?

## Get support

- You can speak to school to refer to the Tower Hamlets Education Wellbeing Service. For more information you can visit our website: <https://www.elft.nhs.uk/thews>
- You can speak to your GP for support with physical or mental health concerns.
- You can call the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) on 020 7426 2375 (Monday –Friday 9am-5pm)
- You can call the Parents Advice Helpline on 0808 802 5544 (Monday – Friday 9:30 – 4pm). They offer friendly advice for parents and carers worried about a child or young person under 25

# Useful Reading

Overcoming your child's fears and worries: A guide for parents using cognitive behavioural techniques to address fears & worries. London: Constable and Robinson Ltd.





# Thank you



Tower Hamlets Educational  
Wellbeing Service (THEWS)

