



STOP –Anxiety Awareness Session

This is an optional session.

This session has been designed by Jacy Thomas who is the Director of BRAINS Wellbeing CiC and is an independent STOP trainer.

We would like to thank Jacy for her generosity and kindness in consenting for this session to be shared with other STOP group leaders.

STOP –Anxiety Awareness Session

Aim of the session

To build some basic knowledge of anxiety to build empathy for the young people. To show a couple of basic strategies that parents could use to help to support their children and then reference options for them to look at independently.

Welcome parents

Feedback on their last week and home challenge

Get parents to feedback on their hour with their teenager. Highlight again here that when we are making changes in the way that we support our children, it can make them feel unsettled. The time spent in the hour is an important underpinning to help them manage these changes.

The power of the mind

There are two options for introducing this topic. Both are to highlight the power of the mind. There is a poem to give to the parents and ask them to read it to themselves and feedback their thoughts (Attached at the end). The second is to ask 3 questions one at a time:

1. Who would you really wish to win the lottery today? It can't be you and they must be really deserving.
2. Who would you nominate to take on a dream holiday with you? Again, they must be really deserving.
3. Who do you hope gets very seriously hurt today? They must be deserving.
The parents will not want to do the last one, end it quickly rather than leaving them feeling uncomfortable but, bring up the power of the mind. It is made up, it is not really so, why do we find it hard to say it?

The aim of either activity is to build understanding and empathy for young people experiencing anxiety. While it may be all in their mind, that doesn't make it easy to overcome.

Open discussion on anxiety

What is anxiety?

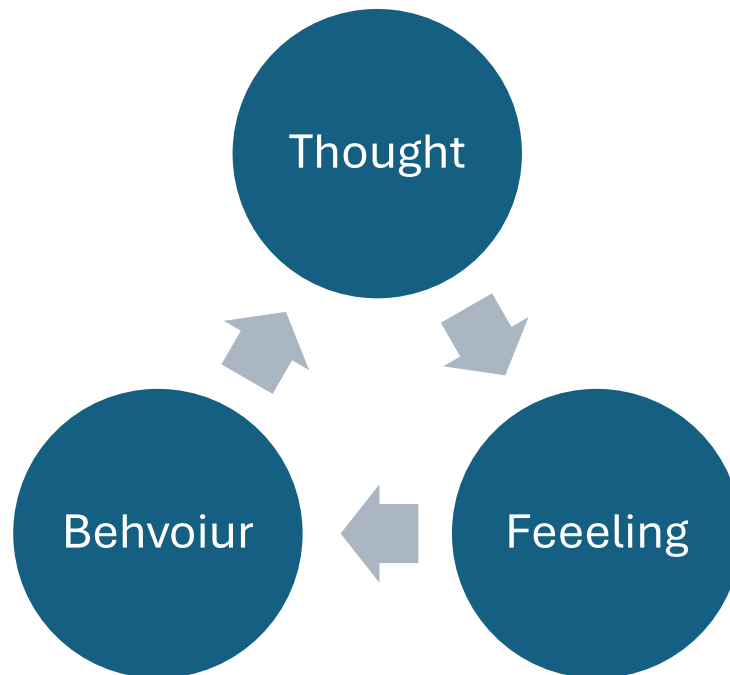
Why is it different from stress?

What makes it so problematic?

Clear up any misconception on anxiety, you could use this video or your own explanation: [https://youtu.be/jEHwB1PG -Q](https://youtu.be/jEHwB1PG-Q)

CBT - Cognitive Behaviour Therapy - cycle

Draw out the CBT cycle:



Thought: Everything we do starts with a thought e.g. when someone sees a spider, thinking 'Oh my god, there is a spider'

Feeling: What we think leads to the way that we feel e.g. 'Scared' (be sure that this is just feeling words and not more thoughts)

Behaviour: How we feel leads to how we behave e.g. Run away and scream

Cycle: How we behave leads to how we think next time e.g. "Spiders are scary, I need to run" then how we feel 'Terrified' and how we behave etc. We need to interrupt the cycle but, often anxious people's thoughts are overly negative e.g. 'I can't go to class because everyone will stare at me'. When people try to help, they give an overly positive response "no-one will look at you, it will be fine'. We actually need a small believable adjustment to interrupt that is a balanced thought e.g. 'Everyone might look up, probably just for a second and they will look away again'.

Balance thoughts

Give some examples of overly negative thoughts and as a whole group, come up with the alternative overly positive.

Overly Negative	Overly positive	Balanced
I will have a panic attack if I go out		
Everyone will laugh at me if I go into assembly		
I will be sick if I get on the bus		

Separate the parents into small groups and get them to come up with some balanced thoughts.

Encourage that they can do this with their children to teach them the skill of balancing their own thoughts.

The importance of breathing

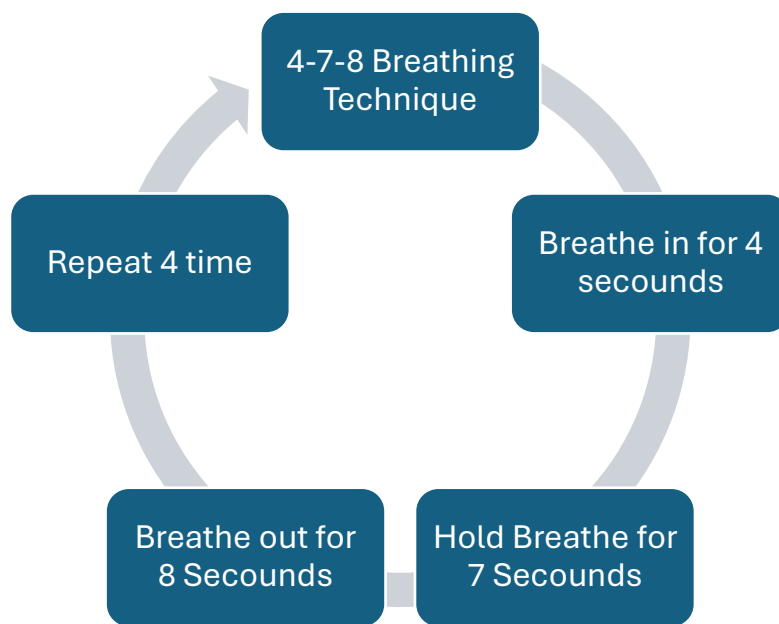
Teenagers are often fed up with being told to take a deep breath to solve all when they are anxious to do something that feels terrifying to them. If we can give some psychoeducation of why this is effective, it can help them to accept and use it.

Draw a tree with two branches, one branch is labelled sympathetic, and the other is labelled parasympathetic. This is to demonstrate the nervous system.

1. Get parents to take a deep breath in and say what they notice. E.g. Shoulders raise, neck tenses, heart rate rises etc. this is because the parasympathetic nervous system is activated on the in breath
2. Now get them to blow a long slow breath out and say what they notice. E.g. Shoulders relax, neck relaxes, feel relaxed. This is because an out breath activates the sympathetic nervous system.

When we take a deep breath, it tells our body that we are not safe, and we need to prepare to fight or flight. When we take a long breath out, it tells our body that we are safe and can relax. This is why it is so important that we learn to take a calming breath.

Go over the 4-7-8 breathing technique, this is a calming breath and should be practised when calm to use when anxious.



Home challenge

- Time with teenager - impress importance again
- Practice breathing technique

Look at different apps and websites that may be useful for teenager - warn that there are many of these that have varying degrees of usefulness, these may be good ones to start:

- <https://www.kooth.com/>
- [https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.moodtools.cbtassistant.ap](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.moodtools.cbtassistant.app&hl=en_GB&pli=1)
[p&hl=en_GB&pli=1 https://feartools.com/](https://feartools.com/)
<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-person/>

Poem for welcome:

Magic

Read this to yourself. Read it silently.

Don't move your lips. Don't make a sound.

Listen to yourself. Listen without hearing anything.

What a wonderfully weird thing, huh?

NOW MAKE THIS PART LOUD!

SCREAM IT IN YOUR MIND!

DROWN EVERYTHING OUT.

Now, hear a whisper. A tiny whisper.

Now, read this next line in your best crotchety-old man voice:

"Hello there, sonny. Does your town have a post office?" Awesome! Who was that? Whose voice was that? wasn't yours!

How do you do that?

How?!

It must've been magic."

—Bo Burnham