



Emotionally Based School Avoidance Parent Workbook

Staffordshire Emotional Wellbeing Service



Anxiety



Anxiety is when we feel intense feelings of being nervous, afraid, tense, worried. Experiencing anxiety can often be a normal response to situations e.g. if we are feeling anxious about an upcoming interview. Anxiety is how our brain keeps us safe in dangerous situations. However, these feelings can be intense and get in the way of us living our life.

These feelings can become too strong for the situation we are in. If these feelings occur in situations where there is no dangers or concern – this is when it becomes a problem.

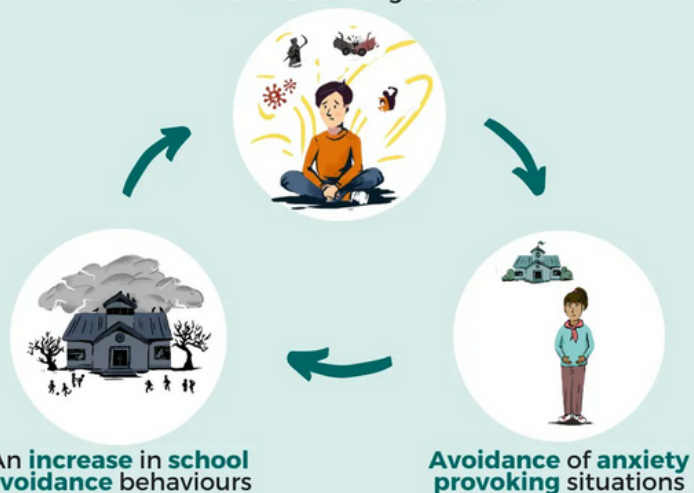


What are your child's physical symptoms?

Emotionally Based School Avoidance: The Anxiety Cycle

EdPsychEd

Anxious thoughts, feelings and bodily sensations around attending school



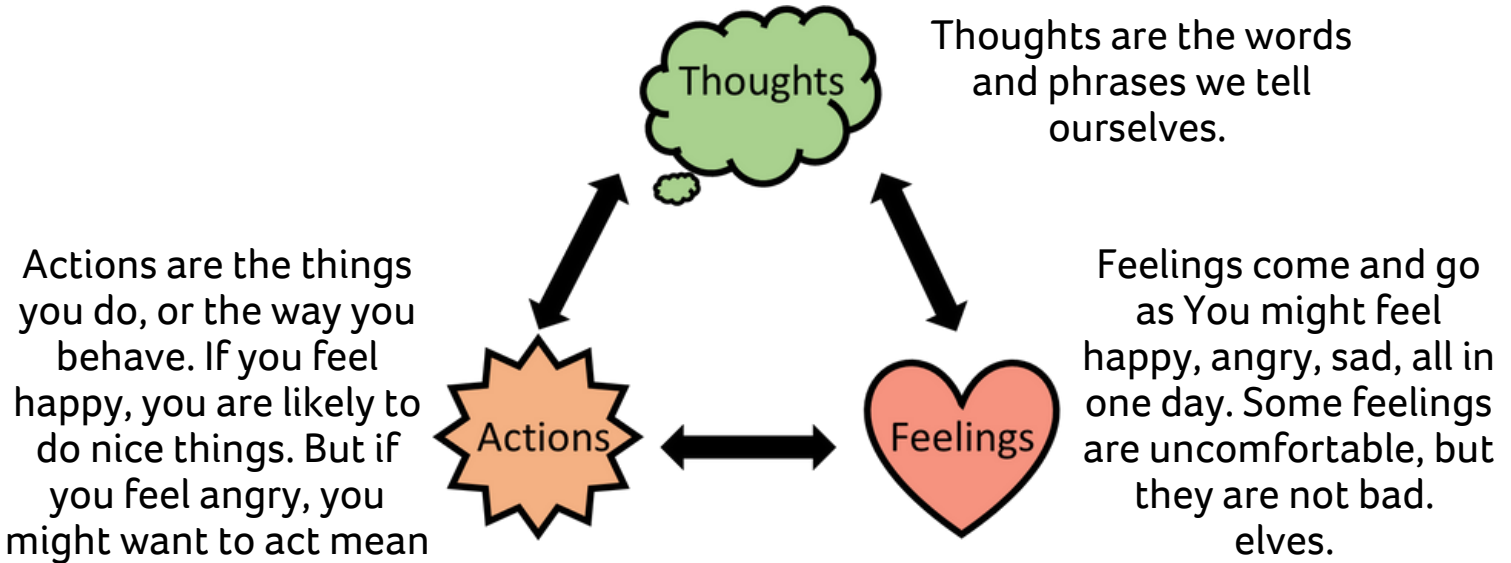
Maintenance factors such as loss of friends and falling behind in school work also **feed in to this anxiety**

CBT Cycle



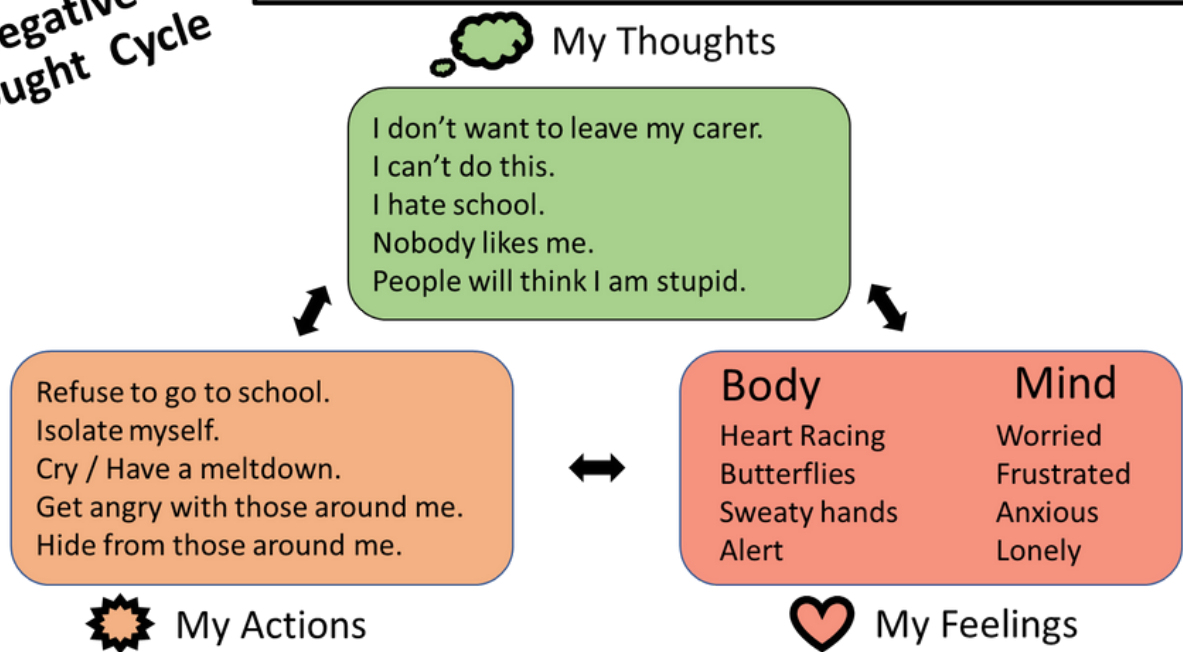
Think, Feel, Do

Everyone has problems, both big and small. To better solve your big problems, it helps to learn how your thoughts, feelings and actions are connected. We all have worries but we don't have to let them control us



What happened?
Avoiding going to school.

Negative Thought Cycle

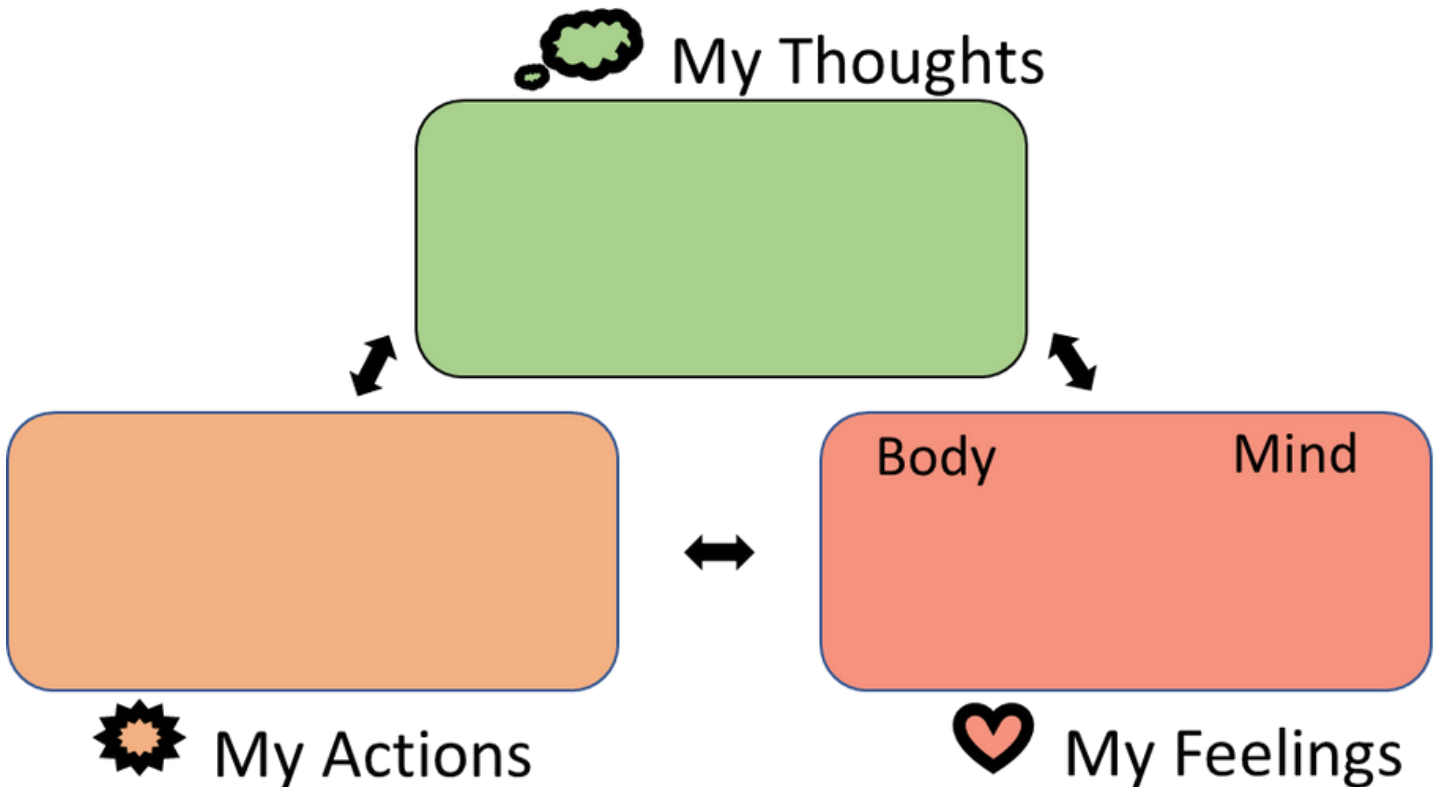
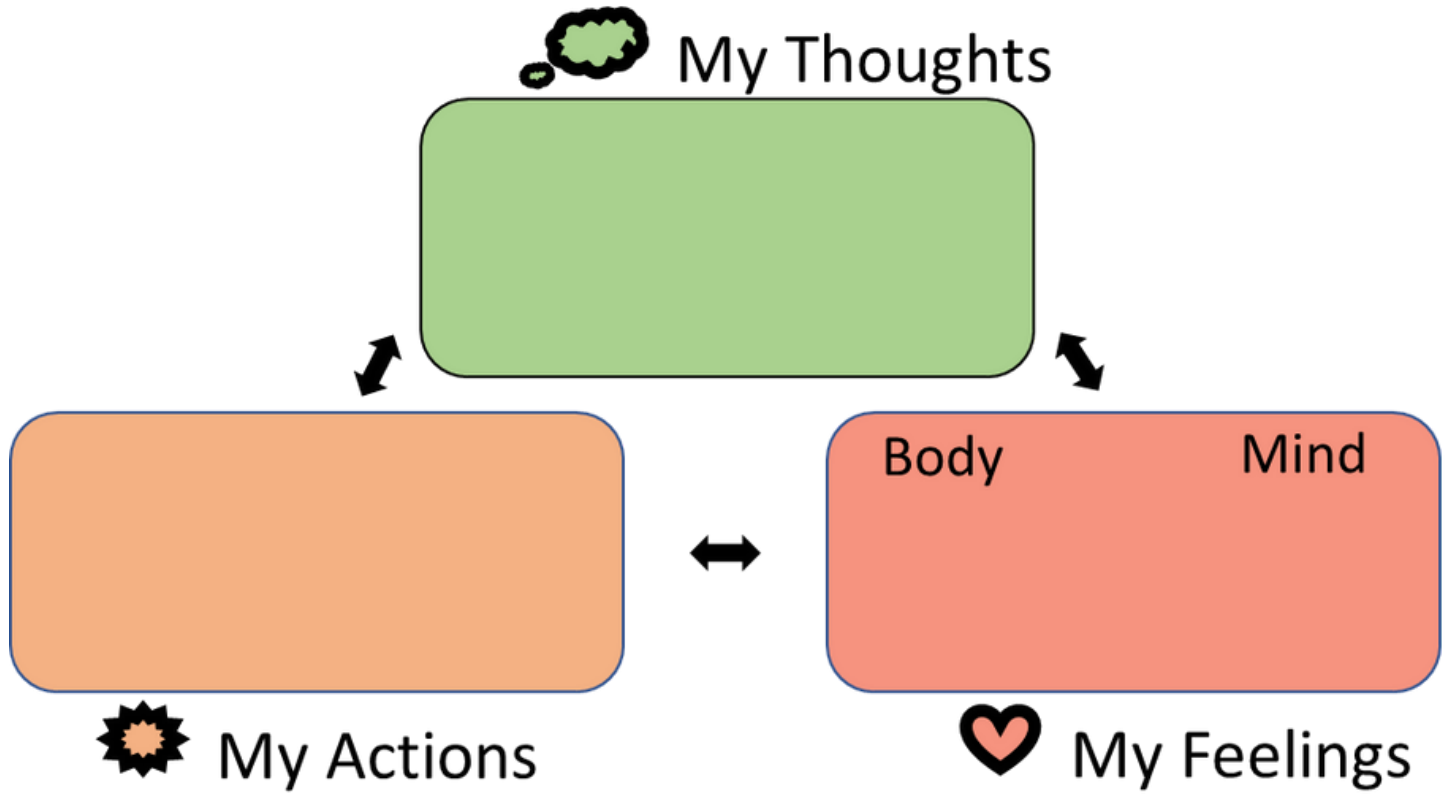


CBT Cycle



Think, Feel, Do

Below are some blank cycles that you can complete with your child to consider your child's current Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviours.



CBT Cycle

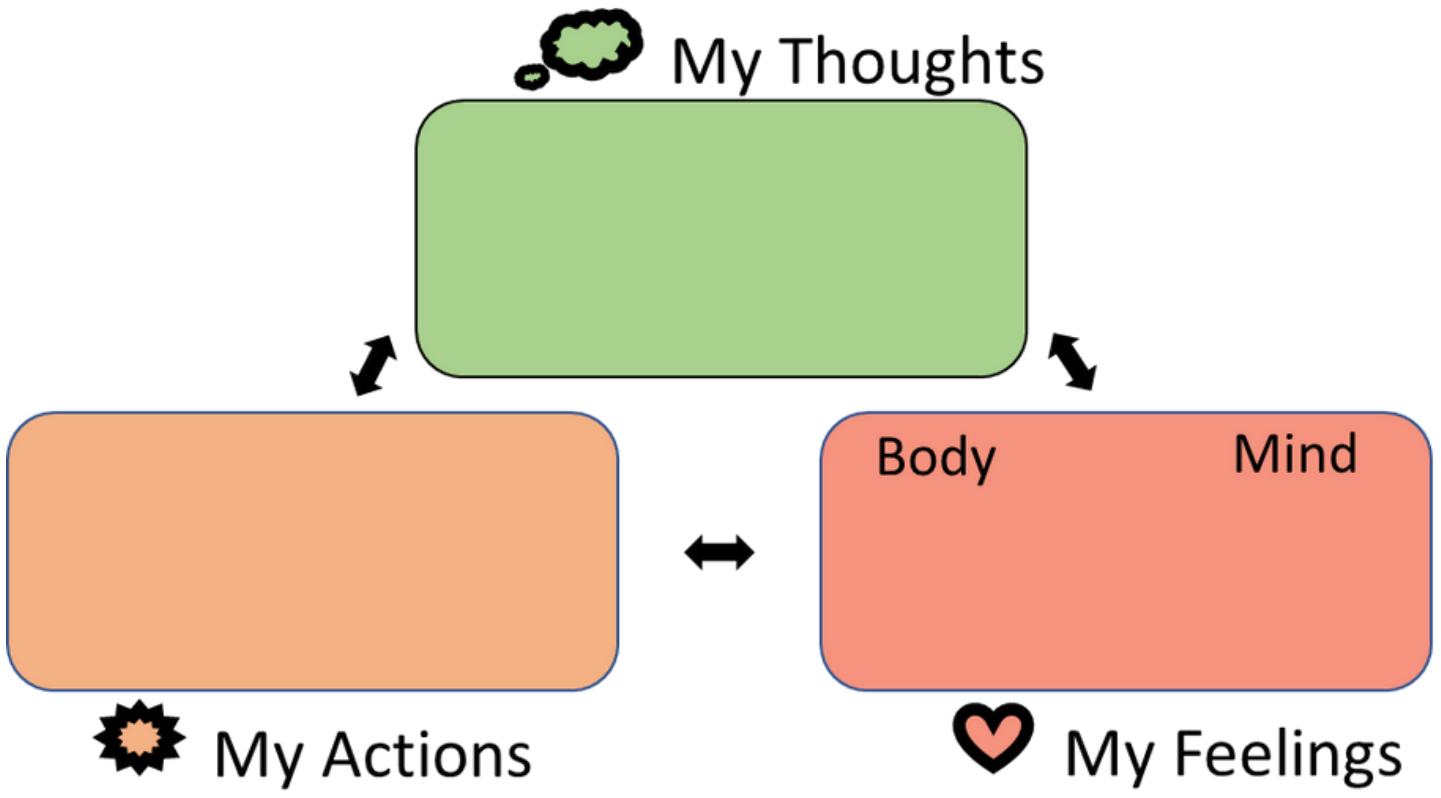
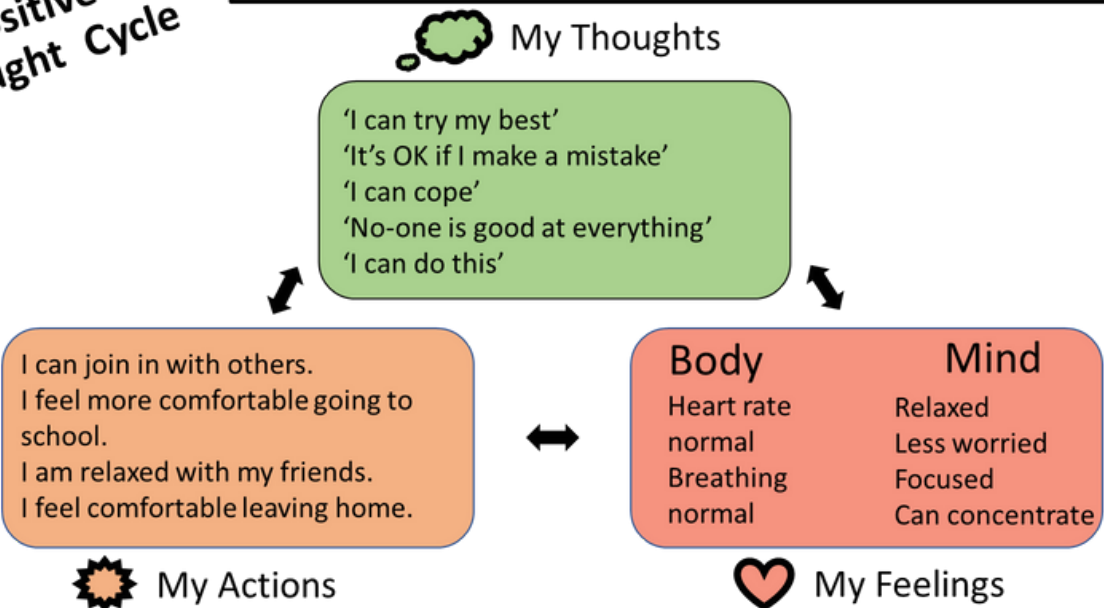


Think, Feel, Do

Have a look at the positive cycle and work with your child to consider how they can create their own positive cycle

Example
Positive Thought Cycle

What happened?
Avoiding going to school.

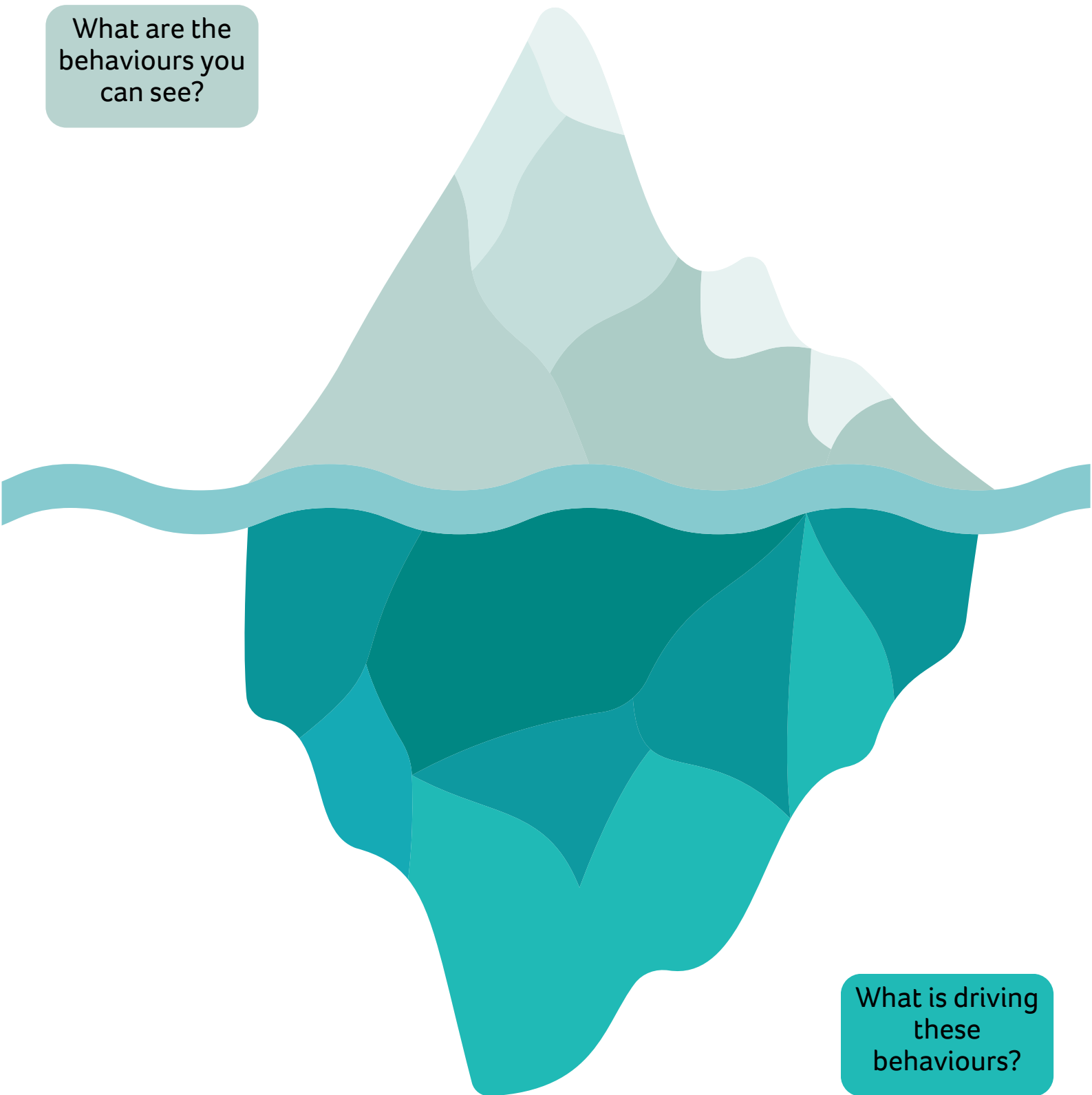


Behaviour Iceberg



Work with your child to consider what their Behaviour Iceberg may look like

What are the behaviours you can see?



What is driving these behaviours?

Push and Pull Factors



Discuss with your child to consider what their push from school and pull to home factors are



Listening and Validating



Listen to your child

Ask questions, try to understand how they are feeling

- Show them you are actively listening through your body language, facial expressions, eye contact and saying things such as 'hmmm' and 'yeah';
- Give your child time to say what they want to say in their own words
- Some children may not openly say that they feel anxious about school, but they may show it in their behaviour.

If this is your child, it may be helpful for you to start the conversation with them, for example:

- It sounds like you're feeling worried about going into school today. Am I right?
- You're upset thinking that you might meet Joe in the playground. Tell me a bit more about that.
- You're feeling scared about me dropping you off at school and leaving you. Am I right?

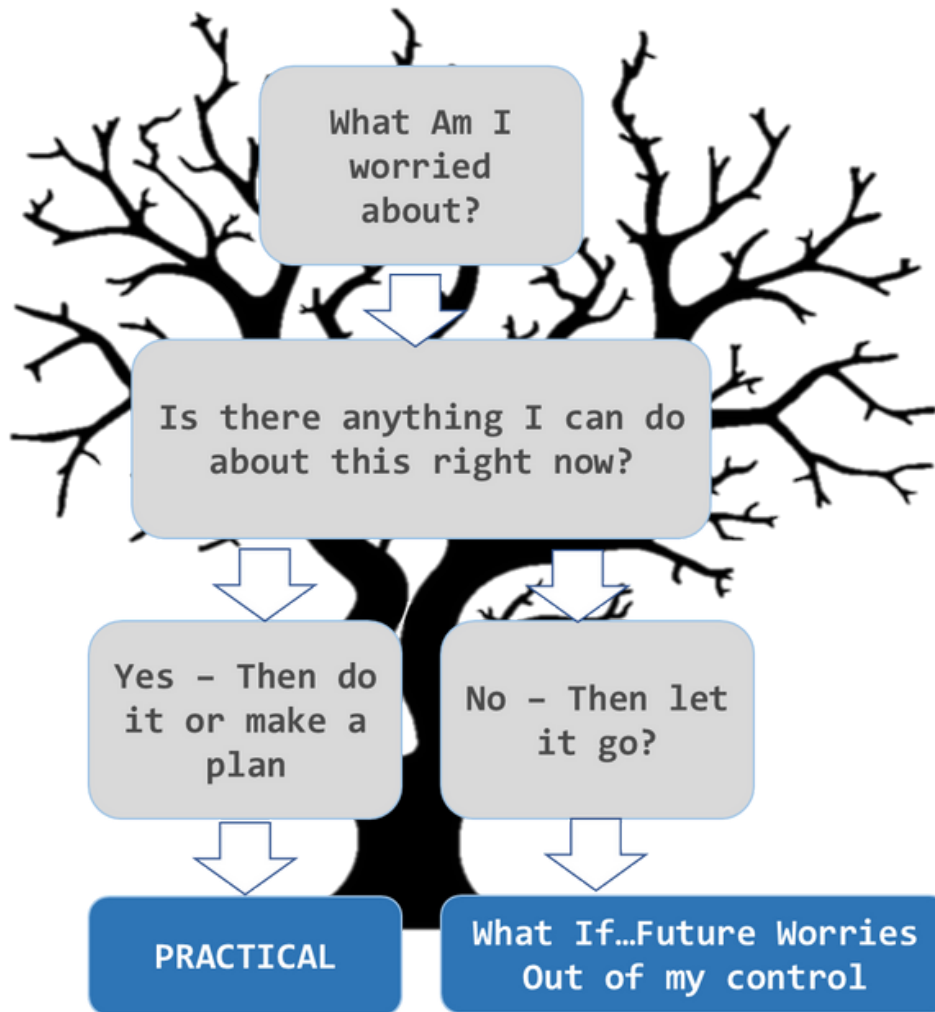
You could use alternative communication methods such as:

- Support your child to draw how they are feeling, what situations are making them feel worried,
 - Support your child to write how they are feeling,
 - Support your child in acting out situations that are making them feel worried.
- Most importantly - validate your child's experiences.

Validating statement

- I can see that you are very (upset, sad, frightened, scared).
- Here's what I'm hearing you say. (summarize with fact checking)
- I guess that must have been hard for you.
- I can see you are making an effort / I can see how hard you are working.
- Wow, that/she/he must have made you feel really angry/sad.
- I can see this is important to you.
- What a frustrating situation to be in!
- That's got to be so (difficult, upsetting, frustrating, etc.) for you.
- Yeah, I can see how that might make you feel really sad.
- It makes sense you would be so upset about that.
- What a horrible feeling that must be.
- What a tough spot.
- It sounds like you feel that's really unfair and you shouldn't be asked to do that.
- That must be really discouraging.
- I can see you are feeling disappointed.
- That's a shame, I know how much that meant to you.
- Tell me more. (shows interest)
- I would be (upset, nervous, sad, scared, frightened) too!!

Worry Tree



- So the first thing we are going to do is listen to the worry. Focus on the feelings and validate the child, that this must be difficult, like we spoke about earlier! We are going to be kind and sympathetic and normalise the worry – so saying things like. ‘The doesn’t sound like it felt very nice, i would feel upset in that situation’.
- We are going to ask as many questions as we need to be able to sort the worry into one of two categories
- Practical (or can-do) worries are real life problems (things that we can do something about). Its not something in the child's imagination. For this type of worry the solution is problem solving it. It is practical and therefore we can take action.
- For the what if worries we would encourage the child to let the thought go e.g. by writing it down and then using a distraction

Coping Strategies



SQUARE BREATHING

Start at the bottom right of the square

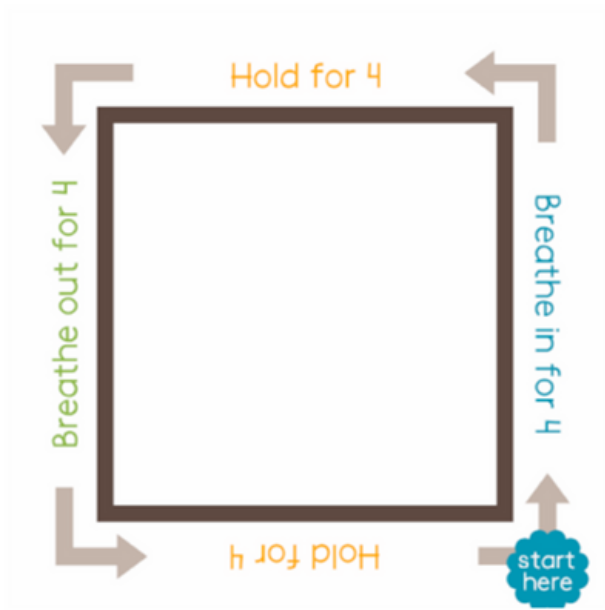
Breathe in for four counts as you trace the first side of the square

Hold your breath for four counts as you trace the second side of the square

Breathe out for four counts as you trace the third side of the square

Hold your breath for four counts as you trace the final side of the square

You just completed one deep breath!



CALM DOWN WITH TAKE 5 BREATHING

1. Stretch your hand out like a star.
2. Get your pointer finger ready to trace your fingers up and down.
3. Slide up each finger slowly ~ slide down the other side.
4. Breathe in through your nose ~ out through your mouth.
5. Put it together and breathe in as you slide up and breathe out as you slide down. Keep going until you have finished tracing your hand.



Smell

- Scented candles
- Pre-scented tissues
- Item of clothing with parents perfume

Touch

- Stress ball
- Fidget toys
- Play-doh
- Feathers / brushes
- Rubber band on wrist
- Bubble wrap

Taste

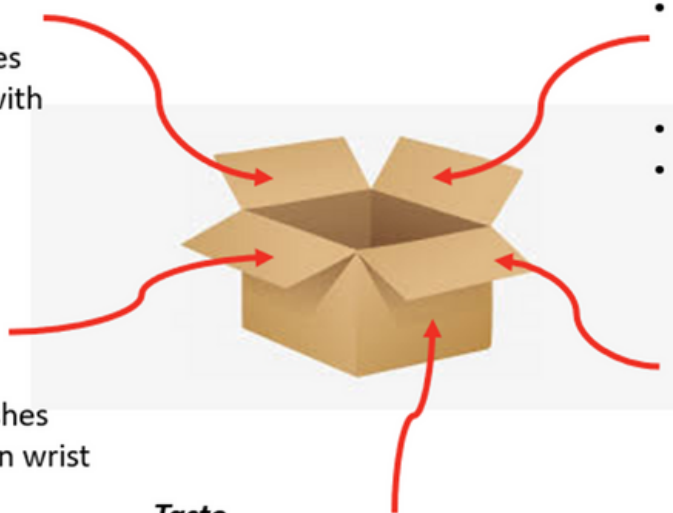
- Chewing gum
- Specific taste sensations (popping candy / sour sweets / chewy sweets)

Visual

- Photos of positive memories / people you care about
- Mindful colouring
- Funny pictures

Sound

- Meditation recordings
- Animal or nature sounds
- Uplifting music
- Positive message recorded by a loved one



Practical Steps



Establishing routines and maintaining structure

You could use strategies such as:

- Using visual timetables
- Encouraging your child to get dressed in school uniform
- Encouraging your child to do school work during school hours
- Encouraging your child to ensure that they are getting enough sleep and exercise, as well as having a healthy diet to support their physical and emotional wellbeing
- Having a clear routine of saying goodbye to your child before school drop-offs

Encouraging Coping skills

Some of the ways you can have a conversation about coping skills may include:

- What could you do to help you handle these feelings?
- Which one of the calming strategies you've been learning about could you have a go at?
- Have you thought about trying....?
- It may be helpful for you to talk about times when you have been anxious and how you coped with those feelings.

Get in contact with school

Let them know that your child is struggling so they are aware of the situation. You could do this by getting in contact with your child's Form tutor, Pastoral support, Key stage leader, Deputy head, Head of year or SENCO.

Work Collaboratively with school

Work together with your child's school to consider a plan that can be put in place to support your child. Working collaboratively with school to offer a firm and consistent approach is really helpful to address your child's anxiety. You may want to consider some strategies that could be put in place at school:

- Having a go-to member of staff is possible and a safe space
- Using the Traffic light system in school e.g. green - I am okay, orange - I am starting to struggle, and red - I need some help.
- Adapting morning routine e.g. breakfast club or later starts
- Having a student passport
- Having role and responsibilities in school to encourage independence
- Individual support plans e.g. reduced timetable
- Having a Worry notebook and Praise book

Further Resources



[Parents/ Carers EBSA Guidance | Support Services for Education](#)

[School Anxiety and Refusal | Parents' Guide to Support | YoungMinds](#)

[Not Fine in School - School Refusal, School Attendance](#)

[Resources for families | Children's Commissioner for England
\(\[childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\]\(http://childrenscommissioner.gov.uk\)\)](#)

[What is school refusal and what can I do about it?
\(\[actionforchildren.org.uk\]\(http://actionforchildren.org.uk\)\)](#)

[SENDIASS SEND IASS - Staffordshire Family Partnership \(\[staffs-iass.org\]\(http://staffs-iass.org\)\)](#)

[Parent Talk - Support for Parents from Action For Children](#)

<https://actionforchildren.silvercloudhealth.com/signup/>