



# Anxiety and performance Pressure

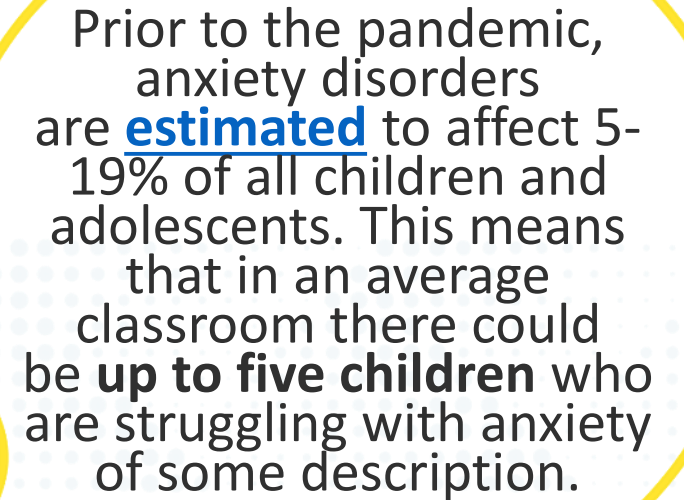
Tess SPM

# What is Anxiety?

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Anxiety is a normal, human response to stressful situations. It is part of our fight or flight response; it triggers our brain's in-built alarm bell system, which tells us something isn't right, and that we need to deal with it.

All children will most likely experience short-lived anxiety when faced with isolated stressful times, such as during exam time.



Prior to the pandemic, anxiety disorders are **estimated** to affect 5-19% of all children and adolescents. This means that in an average classroom there could be **up to five children** who are struggling with anxiety of some description.



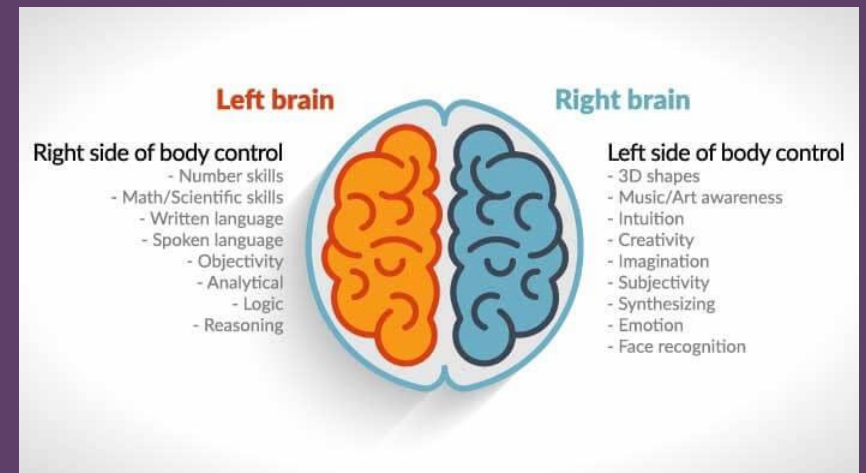
# The science behind Anxiety..

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As humans the right and left side of our brains are responsible for different things, and develop at different times in our lives. Usually the left side begins to emerge around the age of 3. The Amygdala is responsible for processing and expressing emotion and can often 'hijack' our responses, leading to anxiety or stress.

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**Our role in managing the feelings of anxiety and stress is to help the child engage the left side of the brain with the overwhelming feelings of the right, validating but also introducing logic to those feelings.**



# Signs of Anxiety in children..

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- Becoming socially withdrawn.
- Isolating themselves and avoiding spending time with their friends.
- Becoming clingy with caregivers and supporting adults.
- Seemingly nervous or 'on edge' a lot of the time.
- Lacking concentration in class.
- Lacking confidence.
- Suffering panic attacks or feeling overwhelmed.
- Being irritable, tearful, upset or angry.
- Reporting trouble sleeping, including having nightmares or bedwetting.
- Experiencing changes in appetite.
- Regularly complaining of stomach ache or nausea.
- Feeling faint, trembling or experiencing wobbly legs.
- Feeling hot or sweating more than usual.
- Having attendance issues.
- Challenging behaviour

# Causes of Anxiety in children..

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- frequently moving house or school
- Parental conflict - fighting or arguing
- the death of a close relative or friend
- becoming seriously ill or getting injured in an accident
- Separation anxiety
- Abuse or neglect
- Transitions (school, new sibling)
- school-related issues like exams or bullying

According to the NHS Children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autistic spectrum disorders are more likely to have problems with anxiety.

# Performance related Anxiety..

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Performance anxiety is a specific type of anxiety, or strong, excessive feeling of fear or worry, that is related to being able to accomplish something, or a fear of consequences of not being able to perform well.

In children this can often been seen around exam season, school plays/performances, and sporting events among many other occasions.



# What can you do as a parent?

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“Name it, to tame it”- Noticing and naming emotions gives you child the chance to take a step back and make choices about what to do with them. Emotions are just a form of energy, forever seeking expression. By doing this you are also supporting your child to recognise the signs of anxiety in future and tackling them independently.

It is important to be mindful when naming your child's anxiety that you do not reinforce it. You can do this by acknowledging this feeling exists, respecting its validity and working alongside your child calmly to come to a more positive management strategy.

The goal is not to Eliminate anxiety but to Manage it.



# How to help your child manage their own Anxiety..

Create a work diary so your child has a set plan to work and prepare for exams.

Using fidget spinners and other tactile resources when revising.

Introduce journaling as a way to name and tame feelings from the day.

Using a "Breathing card" as a technique to calm down in moments of stress.

Introduce the 5 senses rule: when feeling overwhelmed ask your child to name one thing they can: touch, smell, taste, feel and hear.

Go outside in nature. Encouraging your child to get some form of exercise each day can manage anxiety.

Introducing some form of yoga or meditation to your child's day.

Speak to school or your GP about your worries for your child.

Create a "Self soothe box", a box of calming affirmations or tactile objects allowing your child to calm those feelings and refocus.



# Challenging The Inner Critic



## THE INNER CRITIC SOUNDS LIKE

- Never satisfied with what we do or achieve
- Blame Ourselves for everything that goes wrong
- Focus on our imperfections and failures
- Never acknowledge our strengths or celebrate successes

## FINDING THINKING TRAPS – STOP thoughts

- Negative filter
- Blowing things up
- Predicting Failure
- Being Down on yourself
- Setting yourself up to fail



What you **THINK** affects how you **FEEL** and what you **DO**

## GROWING SKILLS FOR LIFE – Healthy habits aim to challenge this critical focus – A KINDER INNER VOICE

- **Accept that things will go wrong**
- **We are not perfect**
- **We will make mistakes**
- **Unkind things will happen.**

## BUILDING HEALTHY HABITS – GO thoughts

- **Don't beat yourself up when you are down** – if you had a cold you would treat it and take care of yourself
- **Treat yourself like you would treat a friend** Comfort them, say kind things, try to cheer them up.
- **Forgive yourself** – give yourself permission to make mistakes
- **Celebrate achievements** –eg: being a kind friend, reward effort not success.
- **Accept who you are** – your qualities, relationship skills, appearance, values.
- **Be kind to others** – can help us feel good. Smile, listen to them , compliment others
- **Focus on here and now.** – what are we grateful for now. Notice when we are reliving negative events.

# More ways to get support..

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## For you

- [Mental Health Foundation: The Anxious Child – a booklet for parents and carers](#)
- [Royal College of Psychiatrists: worries and anxieties – helping children to cope](#)
- YoungMinds Parents Helpline – call 0808 802 5544 (Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4pm, free for mobiles and landlines)
- Place2Be top tips: <https://www.place2be.org.uk/our-services/services-for-schools/navigating-exam-season-free-resources/>

## For your child

- [YoungMinds: anxiety](#)
- [Childline: managing your anxiety](#)
- GP



