



Southern
Community
Welfare Inc.

Anxiety Support Fact Sheet

Understanding Anxious Moments

Growing up brings countless opportunities for discovery. Children are born curious and seek to understand the world around them and the relationships with the many people they come across along the way. For many this is a fairly smooth process and although challenges arise, many children can rely on what they have already learned and on the people in their lives to help them through such challenges. For others, this is not such an easy process. For these children, anxiety becomes a greater struggle and has a negative impact on the child, their schooling and their family life.

Anxiety is a normal and natural response to threat or danger. For the very young, it typically begins as fear of things such as spiders, the dark or a barking dog. In older children it can become a problem in the anticipation of trying



something new or being afraid of failure. Left unchallenged, anxiety can begin to be triggered by imagination alone.

Much of this process occurs in the brain. An efficient system of protection dwells between the ears and its job is to ensure safety from any sort of harm, physical or emotional.

Thankfully, the brain is not limited to being anxious! It is also equipped to seek creative ways

to challenge unhelpful thoughts, learn strategies and develop resilience against future anxieties as they arise.

This fact sheet is designed to help parents and children to work together to find strategies that are useful to overcome anxious moments. These can be used as a guide and parents and children should not limit themselves to these suggestions alone but get creative in fighting the battle with anxiety.

Southern Community Welfare Resources

After working with children and families for many years, anxiety seemed to be a common problem to many. It was with this in mind that we developed our three story books for different ages and stages.

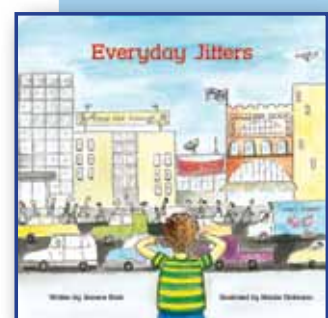
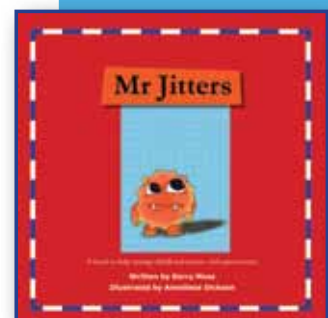
Mr Jitters, released in 2008 is written for children aged 4-9 and is designed to be read by parents (and/or professionals) to children. The story is about a young girl's first bike ride and how her dad helps her to overcome her anxiety to enjoy the experience.

Our second book, released in 2009 is written for children aged 2-6. Titled Everyday Jitters, it helps young children to overcome everyday fears, e.g. the dark. With help from parents and others, children learn to retrain their brain about scary things by learning a maxim of "Bigger, Stronger, I think I can".

Our third book, Speech Day Jitters, released in 2010, is written for children aged 8-13. Targeting the area of performance anxiety, it has a story that helps children to seek support and use

previous success to face anxiety. It also provides tips to encourage them to be the best they can be.

All 3 books are available from our service and sell for \$14.95 each.



Special points of interest:

- Understanding anxious moments
- Southern Community Welfare Resources
- How to help your child with anxious moments
- R.E.A.D. strategy
- Calm, Breathing and Relaxation

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One supportive adult is usually all that is needed to overcome anxious moments



RECOGNISE EMPATHISE ANSWER DO

Just as children learn to **READ** a book, they can learn to **READ** their anxious moments



How to help your child with anxious moments

Recent brain research is revealing that human beings are able to develop problem solving, resilience and positive models for living only through relationships with others. Few of us would deny that overcoming life's hurdles is easier when we are supported not just by someone who happens to be there but someone who can tune into the problem, be responsive to our feelings and allow us time to process. Therefore children are unlikely to be effective at overcoming anxious moments on their own. The next four sections provide some practical strategies to help resolve

anxious moments and anxious thinking.

When responding to anxiety in children, you can develop and pass on the following helpful acronym:

Recognise. Empathise. Answer. Do (R.E.A.D.); these four techniques will assist children with anxiety. Just as children learn to READ a book, they can learn to READ their anxious moments. These strategies are designed to help you and your child to work together to challenge and overcome anxious moments.

The final section is aimed at calming, relaxing and breathing

strategies to help with the physical symptoms of anxiety.

When anxiety is triggered in the brain, it sets the body into action. The major motivator is to solve the anxiety-provoking problem, typically by fight or flight. When freedom is limited to act out on either of these options, the resultant behaviour can be quite confusing to others trying to deal with the issue. It is important to remember to support the child to firstly calm, and get control of their breathing, rather than seek to understand the behaviour. It is only in calm that the path will be open to problem solving.

Practical Strategies – Recognise

This first strategy takes some amount of mastering since individuals experience and express anxiety differently. Some children may show obvious signs of anxiety with worry talk, anxious facial expressions and avoidance of certain activities. For others, this is not always the case. Some might become angry or aggressive, particularly if they are ridiculed for feeling anxious or are pushed to overcome anxious moments too quickly. Others might become sulky or withdrawn and begin to complain of illness, e.g. sore

stomach. This might happen because they are ashamed of their anxieties and fears.

It will take you some time to listen to and observe the information surrounding such behaviours. The trick for many parents is to maintain calmness in their own mind and body in order to be fully available for their children in these moments. It is therefore helpful to recognise your own anxious behaviour.

Just as many human emotions, such as joy, are contagious, anxiety also becomes a shared

experience. From the point of view of childhood anxieties, however, you are the best assistant to help them to identify their anxiety and calm the situation.

Empathy is an important skill that helps to develop other strengths

Practical Strategies – Empathise

Healthy human relationships rely on the ability to empathise. This skill is developed only through interaction and connection with others. Unlike reading or writing or other learned skills, few adults would be able to pinpoint a time in life where they learned to empathise. It evolves, for better or worse, over time and experience.

Parents can enhance this skill in their children particularly during the tougher times of life such as anxious moments or challenges. It is important for parents to remember that their child's anxiety may seem petty or ridiculous in the face of adult worries and concerns. However, when anxiety is recognised in a child, the best gift they can get is

the sense that someone else hears the problem, validates it and thereby offers the chance to develop a buffer against negative thought patterns and low self confidence. Take a moment to understand how your child is feeling, verbally reflect it and this will provide positive energy to move on.

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Practical Strategies – Answer

Anxious moments typically lead children to ask a lot of questions! Curiosity is another essential and enriching part of human relationships. It is what helps us to understand another person's world, our own world and how this all goes together.

Depending on the age of the child, this can be a time of exploration together where a problem is solved by the child offering ideas and you giving feedback. This can usually be done with school-aged children.

Younger children will require the information to be simple, short and given directly to them. Remember, the more calmly the information is given, the more likely the child will learn from it and use it when another challenge arises. Therefore, it is important to make time for this process to happen. If there is no time or the circumstances don't allow you to listen and respond well, promise your child that you will make the time for them later to answer their questions.

You can offer your children the best chance for learning during this process. Their brains will soon develop a more effective response to anxious moments.



Southern Community Welfare
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Practical Strategies – DO

The whole issue of anxiety typically relates to completing a task of some sort or confronting some fear but it is essential to overcome and DO. This strategy is not effective on its own. The previous strategies are essential vehicles for finding the motivation and the capacity to DO whatever is required. DO is also important for the feeling of success and this provides resilience for overcoming future anxiety-provoking tasks.

It can be tempting for some parents to rescue their children from situations, particularly when they are highly emotional.

It can also be tempting to leave them to work it out on their own when emotions become confronting and overwhelming. However, it is highly recommended that children are supported to learn to solve their problems for the future as their independence will increase and coping strategies developed in childhood may not be as effective for adolescence or adulthood.

The brain will become quite clever in finding ways to escape anxious situations. Many times it is not the actual situation that causes the anxiety but the

anticipation. It is the belief that there is some danger, a chance of failing or making a mistake or of being ridiculed that drives the anxious thoughts leading to anxious actions.

Therefore with good support, the brain can be taught to problem solve. With the physical symptoms of anxiety soothed by empathy and calming techniques and the thought processes soothed by answers, children can learn to confront anxiety and create solutions to their problems and enjoy the success that comes from completing the task.

*I was scared, but
I did it anyway!*

Calm, Breathing and Relaxation

In an anxious moment, silence is many times golden. Mere touch and soothing is a great gift to a child who is highly agitated. Many parents report that as their children become anxious, they find themselves feeling anxious as well and start to over-talk the situation in an effort to bring calm.

The brain really does its best work when calm. When anxiety is triggered there are two roads—the high road (thoughtful processing of threat)

and the low road (instant panic, overwhelmed, survival instinct). Both are useful but where there is little or no real threat, the job is nearly always to find calm. This gives more opportunity to develop the high road and if the same threat arises again, better access to "high road" processing.

One of the best ways to reach calm is **controlling breathing**. Helping your child to slow down their breathing helps them to think more clearly. Take 3 deep breaths together in through

your nose and out through your mouth. Use the balloon in the pack or any balloon to help do this effectively. Perhaps you can let the balloon go and laugh as it flies around the room!

Relaxation is the best preventative approach to anxiety. Helping your child to have quiet, restful periods is helpful when they need to find calm in the challenging times.

There are a wide variety of relaxation and meditation tools available in stores and online.



Who are we?



*Caring, Equipping,
Empowering, Hope*

Southern Community Welfare (SCW) is a community based, non-profit, harm prevention organisation. Since our inception in 1995 we have offered professional, innovative, therapeutic services to families and individuals.

SCW has a particular focus on serving the community in the areas of risk, resilience and early intervention.

SCW was built on and continues to operate within the values of the Christian faith.

SCW provides programs that address the areas of suicide prevention, deliberate self injury, anxiety, eating disorders, depression, child abuse, loss and grief, family breakdown and parenting skills. It is our commitment to care, equip, empower and offer hope to those in the community who are struggling in these areas.

SCW offers General and Specialist Counselling; Community education; Support Groups and Family support.

For more information on our service, please visit our website

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Thank you to Kareela Golf Club for their financial assistance towards this fact sheet and our anxiety pack.



Our Services

General Counselling:

Depression; Anxiety; Relationship; Marriage; Child and Family; Parenting; Childhood Abuse; Grief and Trauma; Self Esteem; Deliberate Self Injury; Eating Disorders; Personality Disorders; ADHD; Asperger's Syndrome; Men's issues.

Groups:

Rock and Water social strengthening program for boys aged 9-12 years

Support after Suicide Group for people who have lost a loved one to suicide

Breakthrough—Divorce and Separation Workshop

Rainbows—Children's grief and loss peer support groups.

S.A.F.E. (Self abuse Finally Ends)—Support group for women who use unsafe coping mechanisms such as deliberate self injury, drugs, alcohol or eating disorders.

Can Do Kids—Anxiety support groups for children.

Community initiatives:

Parent Education Evenings

Deliberate Self Injury education for professionals and families.

Rock and Water in schools

Anxiety Resources

Support Us

We require ongoing support to continue our work in the community. We are not government funded and we rely on donations and grants to survive. Our team is committed to offering hope to those in the community who struggle—with your help we can achieve our goals.

To give financial support to our work in the community please call our office on 9545 0299 for more information.

Thank you



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