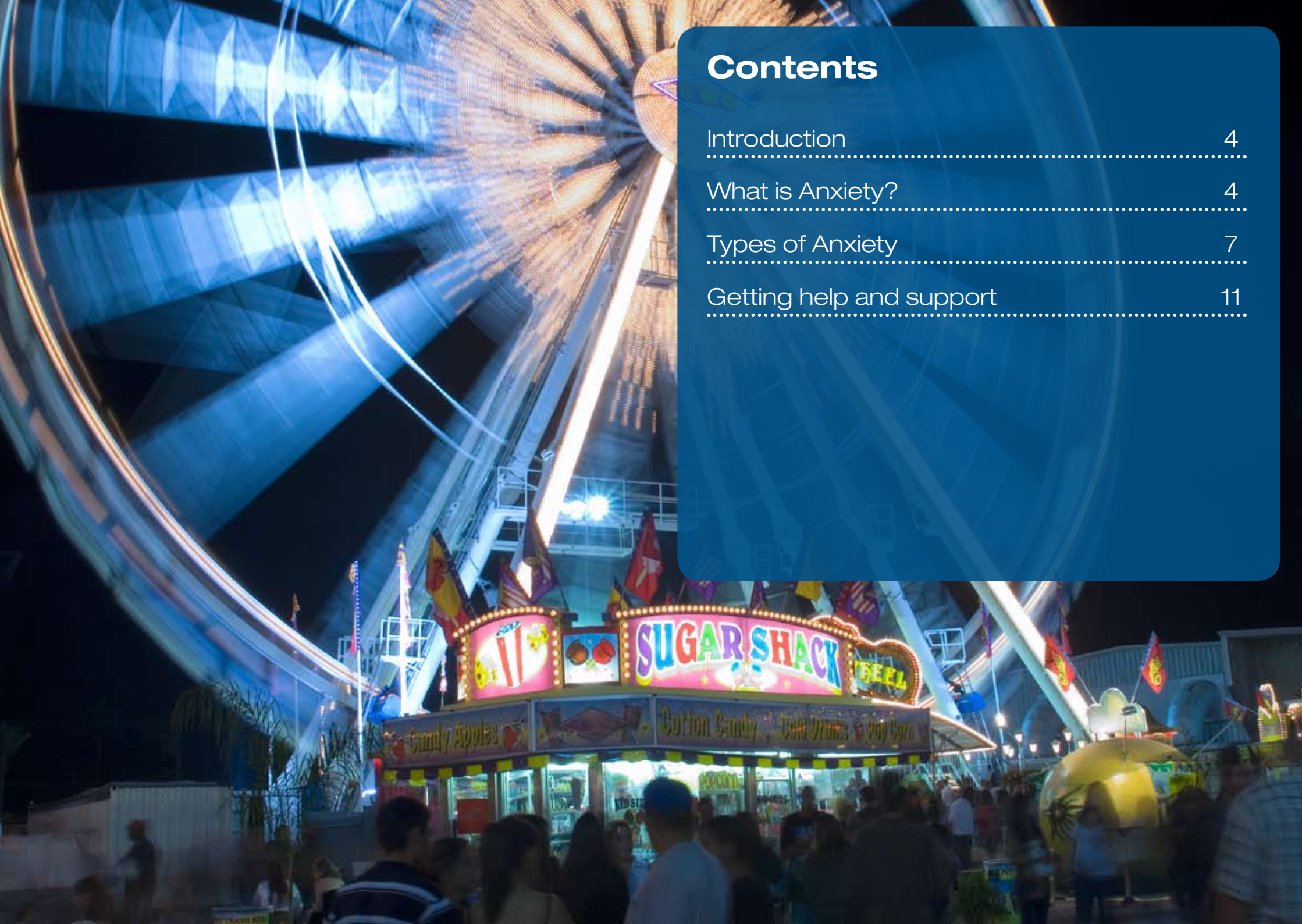


# Children and Young People with Anxiety

## Young Person's Guide



# Contents

Introduction	4
What is Anxiety?	4
Types of Anxiety	7
Getting help and support	11

# Introduction

It can often be difficult to discuss how you feel with other people, especially if you think that no one else feels the same, or that they won't understand. You may feel that you don't fully understand what is happening to you, which can make it very hard to explain to others exactly what you are going through. Often, experiencing anxiety can leave you feeling tired, upset and frustrated. This can make you feel that you are unable to cope or that there is nothing that you can do to improve your situation.

Anxiety can affect us all in very different ways. Experiences of anxiety can vary greatly from person to person and no two people are the same. If you feel that any of the experiences or symptoms described on these pages apply to you, then we may be able to help.

Something you should remember - anxiety is extremely common; we all experience it at times (perhaps when we have a deadline at work, or a test), in fact a recent study has suggested that 15% of young people have an episode of anxiety at some point. That means in the average class there will be 5 people who have experienced anxiety!

## What is anxiety?

First of all, anxiety is completely normal! It is something that we all experience to some degree. Anxiety is useful to us as it tells us that something is dangerous and that we need to be careful. However, if anxiety gets out of control or stops you from doing everyday things, then this can lead to us feeling unhappy, upset and frustrated.

Here are some examples of how you might feel if you are anxious:

- Worried
- Upset
- Feeling sick
- Feeling shaky / dizzy
- Feeling like you might faint / pass out
- Thinking unpleasant thoughts
- Thinking that you might 'go crazy'

When anxiety gets really strong, you might experience what we call a 'panic attack'. This is when your body is getting ready to fight, freeze or to run away from the situation that we are viewing as dangerous. This is known as the fight, flight or freeze response. Again, it can be quite scary to experience, although we know that it will not hurt you.

One of the ways to reduce the anxiety that you are feeling is to understand it better. By understanding how anxiety works, you can then understand why you feel that way (so that it is not so scary!) The picture below can help to explain what happens when we get anxious. What it is saying is that with anxiety you can get into a vicious circle; your thoughts go round and round in your head- these impact on how you act and the things you do (for example if you are feeling socially anxious you may avoid being around groups of people because you think they may judge you).

### Feelings (Physical)

E.g. fast heart beat, feeling shaky, feeling like you might faint

### Thoughts (Negative Thinking)

E.g. I might die, I might have something seriously wrong with me, I'm not normal, I can't cope, I can't manage this feeling, I will only get worse, other people think I'm strange

### Fear

The first time either the feelings or the bad thoughts occur, you may feel scared or worried. If you then worry that you will have the bad thoughts or feelings again, it can lead to them re-occurring. Eventually, you feel fearful of the feelings or thoughts happening again.

This is known as the "fear of the fear"

The 'fear of the fear' often makes us feel worse as we are literally on edge waiting for bad feelings to happen; we stop doing things that we link with the negative (bad) feelings or thoughts. This is called avoidance. The more that we avoid the thing that we link with feeling bad, the more we think of it as being dangerous.

This means that the next time we have to face the situation or event, our body tells us that it is dangerous and the fight, flight or freeze response kicks in. We feel that we either need to run away from the 'dangerous' thing, fight it or we feel that our body is frozen to the spot.

Either way, our body is not happy when we feel all of these horrible feelings and think horrible things. By understanding why we feel this way, we can then take away the 'scared' feeling because we know that it is just our body reacting to something that it thinks is scary, even though it is actually harmless. No-one ever died from having anxiety!

## Case study - One girl's experience of anxiety

I have had agoraphobia since I was 8 years old. No one noticed there was anything wrong until it got so bad that I couldn't go to school. I have been unable to attend school for about 7 months and I have only just started getting the help I need. I want to go back to school to see my friends but I worry that everyone will ask me loads of questions. My friend has been telling people at school that I'm dead. She has also been making up lies about me and telling my two best friends that I hate them and that I keep saying things about them behind their backs. My mum said she is not going to send me back to school until next year (the end of year 11) so that I can do my exams, however, because I have missed a year, I now have to stay on to sixth form. I am worrying about so many things at the moment and I have so much homework to do. I am also very worried about what people are saying about me at school. My agoraphobia has got so bad that I'm not even going outside now; most of the time I can't even leave my room. I want to be able to go out to places and to go back to school. I want to see my friends again and I would like to do the dance class that I started, however, at the moment I can't even leave the house without feeling that I will faint. My dad keeps saying there is nothing wrong with me and that I should be in school. My agoraphobia got really bad over Christmas as we had to go to my Nan's on Boxing Day. I nearly fainted when I walked into the house. Not many people believe that I have agoraphobia and not a lot of people understand what agoraphobia is so I don't really have anyone to talk to.

## Types of Anxiety

There are many different types of anxiety; you may find that you experience any one of the following conditions, or all of them together! Nobody's experience of anxiety is the same as the next person's. Don't worry if you think that what you are feeling isn't exactly the same as what is described, there are many more types of anxiety and you can be certain that other people are feeling the same way.

Here are a few different types of anxiety that you may feel:

### Exam Stress

Everyone feels stressed during exams. This usually means that you feel tired, under pressure, confused, worried that you won't do well etc. This is normal and often encourages us to do that extra bit of revision, listen a little more to the information in a lesson and work a bit harder. This is good.

However, too much pressure and anxiety can make you feel really bad. This may mean that you are unable to concentrate on your work and may find that you are overly worrying about how you will do in your exam(s).

People often deal with exam stress in many unhelpful ways, such as ignoring the problem, not revising because they think that they will do badly anyway and missing exams due to the anxiety that they are feeling. It can also be really easy to think that if you don't try and then you fail, you won't feel as bad as if you fail after trying really hard! This is an unhelpful way of thinking as it means that you will be limiting your chances of doing really well.

Exam anxiety can also make you worry during the exam, for example you may feel that other people are managing the exam better than you or that they will be finding it really easy whereas you are struggling. This can cause you to feel that your mind has 'gone blank' on information that you know that you have revised or that you know well.

## School Phobia

School is often not the place that you want to be spending your time anyway. However, many people experience a complete sense of dread when it comes to going to school. This is very different to simply not wanting to go to school. Going into school when you have school phobia can make you feel very anxious and panicky. You may feel that you are going to pass out or that something bad may happen if you go. This can often make you feel that you would be better off not going to school (this is actually not the best idea as gives you more problems) and can lead to truancy.

Truancy is the term used for unauthorised absence from school. This means time off where your parents/ guardians and teachers have not given you permission to be out of school. This can be an unhelpful way of dealing with anxiety as it means that you are avoiding the situation, rather than dealing with it head on. Many people (such as your teachers and parents) now recognise that truancy can be a result of a pupil feeling anxious and stressed, rather than behaving badly, and can consequently help you if you explain what you are feeling.

## Separation Anxiety

Separation anxiety is a term used to explain a feeling of anxiety or stress when you are away from your parents/family/guardians, for example when you are at school. You may find that you worry a lot when your parents or guardians are not with you or when you are away from your home. This will affect how you act towards other people when you are in certain places such as school. You may only feel comfortable and stop worrying when you are at home or with your parents/ guardians. You may also feel afraid of going to sleep alone and when you do get to sleep, you may have nightmares about being apart from your parents/ guardian. You could sometimes have a tummy ache or headaches when you are away from your parents and you may also create stories such as saying that you don't feel well to avoid being away from your parents or your home. Sometimes, you might worry about what could happen to your parents when they are away from you. This might involve having horrible thoughts such as them being in an accident. It is important to remember that although these thoughts are horrible, it doesn't make them true and that you are not on your own in feeling this way - many other people experience these types of feelings too!

## Selective Mutism

Selective Mutism is usually first recognised in people aged between 3 to 8 years old. This is when you cannot speak in certain places such as school or when you have to meet people that you don't know. It is not something that you have decided to do because you just don't want to speak or because you don't understand what they are saying but more that you feel so anxious or stressed that you can't respond. You will

probably find that you are able to talk normally when you are at home or in other places where you feel comfortable and safe. You may also feel really comfortable talking with people that you know well or who you feel safe around.

As well as finding it hard to talk, you might also find it hard to make eye contact or feel frozen and unable to move when people are talking to you or when you are expected to talk to others. This could be something that you have always had trouble with or it could have started to happen recently. Either way, it is your body's way of saying 'I am not happy and I feel uncomfortable'. You may also have begun to notice that your behaviour is different to that of the other people in your class. Don't worry, many young people feel this way and you may find that things get better with time.

## Specific Phobias

One of the most common ways that young people experience anxiety is through having a specific phobia. This is usually a feeling of intense fear towards an object or situation. This fear is often not logical. This means that although your head tells you that there is nothing to be scared of your body tells you that you need to run away as the object or situation is dangerous.

People can have a phobia around pretty much anything and you can guarantee that if you are feeling scared about something; someone else will be feeling that way too! Some of the most common things that people will fear are:

- Animals and insects
- Storms
- The dark
- Injections and going to the doctor/dentist

If your particular fear is not on this list - don't worry, there are many more than what we have listed here.

## Social Phobia

This can include many types of phobias and anxieties. People who are affected by social phobia may worry about entering into social situations and what people may think of them. For example, you may worry about eating in the school canteen, getting up to speak in front of the class or speaking in groups or individual situations. Social phobia can often make those affected feel that they are being judged by other people. You may feel that you would rather avoid the situation than go through the experience of feeling anxious.

## Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)

This is the feeling of being anxious about almost everything and anything!! Often, people affected by GAD will feel overly worried about a wide range of things including:

- Your performance at school
- Arriving on time for appointments
- Things that are happening at school or at home
- Worrying about worrying!

## Food Phobia

The fear of eating new foods is quite usual. Everyone has a food or two that they cannot put into their mouth. For some people, though, this fear means that they can only eat a very few foods. Any other foods make them feel sick and disgusted, even just at the sight of the food. This fear comes from early childhood, when all children are frightened of trying new foods.

If you have difficulty trying, or eating, new foods then you may feel that you are different from other children, and rather ashamed of the way that you eat. You may also feel guilty if you like to eat lots of chocolate or crisps, because you have been told that these foods are unhealthy. You may worry that you will be sick if you eat new foods, because you have been in the past. You may be worried that you are going to have an 'eating disorder' when you get older. This is unlikely. As you get older you will be able to more able to cope with trying new foods, perhaps with some help.



## Getting help and support

The good news is that anxiety is treatable! This means that there are things that can be done to reduce feelings of anxiety. The first step is to speak to someone that you trust about how you are feeling. This could be a teacher, a parent, a relative or another adult or friend that you trust. Talking to someone will reduce the pressure of anxiety and stress, it may also help you to realise that you are not alone in how you are feeling. Talking to others

Often, because the anxious feelings and thoughts are so bad, we don't want to tell anyone how we feel as we believe that they might not understand or they might laugh at us. However, this is the best way to get help to change how you feel. By looking at this booklet, you are already aware that you are not happy with how things are. Talking to someone about how you feel can help.

- Choose someone that you trust for example, a parent/ family member/ teacher etc.
- Tell them how you have been feeling and try to give them an example so that they understand clearly how your problem is affecting you.
- If you are finding it hard to talk about your anxiety, try writing your problem down or showing someone this booklet.
- Remember: It is OK to be upset and it is OK to ask for help

Once you have spoken to someone, they will be able to get help for you. You can also call Anxiety UK Helpline number: 08444 775 774 to talk to someone in complete confidence. We have included a list of telephone numbers of organisations that work with young people at the end of this booklet.

## Email support/ instant messaging

Many people want support to help them decide what information they need to manage their anxiety. If you are affected by an anxiety condition and want to email

for information or to allow us to point you in the best direction to get some help, please email us at [support@phobics-society.org.uk](mailto:support@phobics-society.org.uk). The service is free and we will not tell anyone about the information that you put into the email. This service is not a counselling service but we can point you in the direction of further help and support. Don't be worried about anything that you write in the email - all of the volunteers who answer the emails are trained to deal with anxiety and also have personal experience of anxiety so they understand what you are feeling. We also have a new instant messaging service where you can get access to information instantly; this is also free and can be accessed via the 'live help' button on our website (<http://www.phobics-society.org.uk/youngpeople.php>).

## Professionals

Sometimes, although we are trying to reduce our anxiety by undertaking certain activities on our own initiative, this might not be enough to help us cope with the anxiety and we may need to gain the help of a professional. A professional is someone who can discuss how you are feeling and can help you to put things into place to make your problems manageable. All of the professionals you may encounter have to make sure that they keep all of the information that you tell them private so don't worry about anyone finding out that you have anxiety.

The following professionals are ones which you may come into contact with when trying to access help:

### Your Doctor/ GP

Don't worry about talking to your doctor about anxiety, it is one of the most common problems that people go to see them about! Your GP can also help you access different sources of support as they have lots of contacts in your area.

### School nurse

Most schools have a school nurse who should know about anxiety. They can be a good person to talk to as they are quite often independent from the school and your family and can help you to get any help and support you ask for.

### Counsellors

A counsellor is someone who you are able to talk to about how you are feeling with your anxiety. They will provide you with a safe place to talk about your experiences. Most counsellors will help you to look at where these feelings have come from and why you may be feeling the way that you do. Going to see a counsellor does not mean

that you are 'mad' or that you will 'go crazy'! Lots of people see counsellors to help them with all sorts of problems. Friends finding out that you are seeing a counsellor is often a very big worry for many young people. What will they say? Will they think that I am weird? Will they tease me? Will they understand?

The best thing about seeing a counsellor is that it is completely confidential. This means that the counsellor is not allowed to talk about what you say to them to anyone. Therefore, the only person who can tell the people at school that you are seeing a counsellor is you.

## Cognitive Behaviour Therapists (CBT)

This sounds like a very complicated therapy but actually it is very simple! 'Cognitive' just means our thoughts and the things that we are thinking, whereas 'Behaviour' means exactly what it says on the tin, that is the acts that we carry out and the things that we do. This type of therapist will look at how you are feeling in the 'here and now' and how the problem can be managed more effectively. They will look at getting you to practice certain behaviours and thoughts to try to improve what you are feeling. Often the things that you are asked to practice are the opposite to what the anxiety wants you to do. This makes it a bit harder but it is like riding a bike- the more that you practice, the less you fall off!

## Clinical Hypnotherapists

Hypnotherapy is not about getting you up on a stage where you will be made to do all sorts of silly things in front of an audience! It is completely different to stage hypnotism and clinical hypnotherapists will aim to make you feel relaxed and safe whilst they use visualisation techniques (e.g. asking you to picture events going well and places that you feel safe) to improve your anxiety.

Remember: Anxiety is treatable and it doesn't have to keep making you feel unhappy. Things can change and you can control your stress and anxiety.



## Other places where you can get help and support

### Childline

ChildLine is the UK's free, 24-hour helpline for children in distress. Trained volunteer counsellors comfort, advise and protect children and young people who may feel they have nowhere else to turn.

Website: [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)

Helpline: 0800 1111 (Freephone)

### NSPCC

NSPCC works to support children and young people across the UK. They have a helpline (in conjunction with Childline) and a range of websites that offer interactive advice and support.

Websites: [www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)

[www.there4me.com](http://www.there4me.com)

Helpline: (as above) 0800 1111 (Freephone)

### CALM (Campaign Against Living Miserably)

CALM works with young men and provide information advice and support via a free helpline and website. They also offer free downloads and chat rooms for those that need support.

Websites: [www.thecalmzone.net](http://www.thecalmzone.net)

Helpline: 0800 585858

### Youngminds

Youngminds focus on the mental health issues of children, recognising that many children have troublesome worries and fears.

Website: [www.youngminds.org.uk/young-people](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/young-people)

### Kooth

Kooth is a free, anonymous, safe, secure and confidential online counselling and advice service. It is available to 15-25 year olds who live in Stockport, St Helens, Wirral, Halton, Warrington, Wigan, Knowsley and Warwickshire.

Website: [www.kooth.com](http://www.kooth.com)

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