

Stockham Primary School

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Supporting the Emotional Well-Being and Mental Health of Our School Community

This mental health and well-being newsletter focuses on Anxiety.

What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as worry or fear, that can be mild or severe. Everyone has feelings of anxiety at some point in their life e.g. you may feel worried and anxious about sitting a test, going to a new year group, having an injection, a job interview etc.

In school for example, we have seen a larger number of children who are experiencing increased anxiety and struggling to understand how they are feeling.

Below is an explanation for children as to why we become anxious and how it makes our bodies feel.

1) Why do we get anxious?

Our bodies have a built-in survival instinct from over 50, 000 years ago, when we might have been living in the wild. Imagine you are walking through the jungle and a tiger jumps out at you. Your life is in danger, so you need to run.



when you're in danger

2) What happens when we get anxious?

When we see something scary, we tell our brains that something frightening is about to happen. Our brain then gives our body instructions so that it is ready to run fast.

3) These changes are useful

These changes can save our lives as they help us to react quickly. In the case of a tiger chasing us, it would help us to run away!

4) When do you feel anxious?

You may be seeing 'tigers' where they don't exist. However, these feelings are very real to you. For example, do you get these anxious feelings at the thought of starting the school day, attending a



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birthday party, or going to swimming lessons? You might get anxious about the thought of getting lost, leaving your parents/carers for a short while, or going somewhere you've never been before? When you get these feelings, you may want to try and stay away from the place that makes you feel like this, because you believe that something scary will happen.



5) Do you feel anxious at night?



You may get these feelings at night, and struggle with nightmares or night terrors. Anxiety can leave you lying awake at night, worrying about what you could have done differently that day and what frightening things might happen the next day. You may also worry about the future and possible frightening things that could happen.

6) It is important to let someone know

Encourage your child to talk about how they are feeling so that you know how and when to provide support. If you have any worries or concerns about your child's anxiety, then please let school know. There will be things we can do to help further and support you.



Explaining anxiety to children

When we're faced with a threat, our body prepares to react by doing the following:

- Pumping blood to important parts of our body - more blood moves to our heart and lungs. This causes our heart to beat faster and our breathing to quicken so that more oxygen can get to our muscles, meaning that we are ready to run fast
- 'Brain fog' - we aren't able to think clearly as blood moves away from the areas of the brain we use to think, as we need to focus on getting away
- Nausea and/or butterflies - we stop digesting food, as we don't need to during that moment. We might get butterflies as a result, feel slightly sick or even be sick
- Perspiration - we start to sweat due to all these changes



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Strategies to help...

Improve your sleep Feelings of uncertainty and anxiety may mean your child, you and members of your family have more difficulty sleeping. There is a lot you can do to improve your sleep. Aim to go to bed and get up at the same time each day and try and get some natural sunlight by opening curtains, etc. This helps regulate your body and can help you sleep better. Also, wind down before bed by avoiding tablets, phones and computers an hour before bedtime.

Move more every day

Being active reduces stress, increases energy levels and can make us more alert and help us sleep better, so have fun getting active!

Take time to reflect (celebrating resilience)

Make time each day for your child and the rest of your family to reflect on the positives. What went well? How were obstacles overcome? What has your child achieved that they should be proud of?

It is important to recognise your successes and the things you are grateful for, no matter how small. You can ask your child to start a diary where they write two or three things they have been proud about or are grateful for that day.

Mindful techniques can also help you focus on the present rather than dwelling on negative thoughts.

Places to go for help and support

This website from the NHS offers expert advice and practical tips to help you look after your child's mental health and wellbeing as well as the rest of the family. <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/>



The NSPCC are offering support and advice if you feel your child is struggling with their mental health and anxiety. More information and advice can be found on their website:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk>

Young Minds <https://youngminds.org.uk/>

NSPCC

YOUNGMINDS
fighting for young people's mental health



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