

JUNIOR AND SENIOR INFANTS

Parent Support Sheets

Lesson 4: Big Feelings – Fear

Lesson Summary:

In class today, the children focused on the feeling of fear, which appears twice in the story “Along Came a Cloud”. The children were asked to draw the mouse Orion was scared of, or something they are scared of themselves. They were then introduced to two strategies for helping with fear, including “I’m the boss of my worries” and “Making your fear look silly”.

Try It At Home Activity: “Worry Box”

Today you were asked to create a “worry box” with your child/the child in your care. Explain to your child/the child in your care that everyone experiences worry or anxiety at times, and it’s normal to have these feelings. Worries overwhelm us when too many of them get jumbled up in our minds. Asking your child/the child in your care to make a “worry box” gives them an opportunity to share their worries with you in a safe and contained way, which works to calm their minds from unnecessary worries.

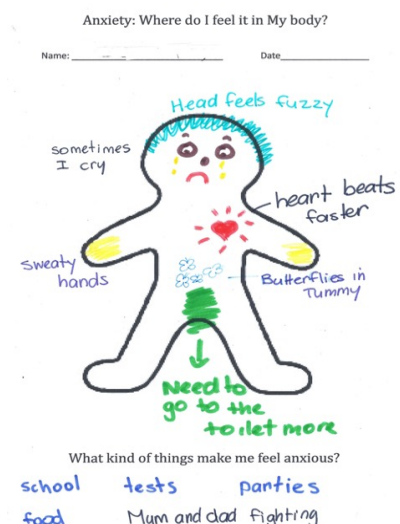
Dr. Malie and Linsey’s Top Tips: (From “Love in, Love Out: A compassionate approach to parenting your anxious child” (Harper Collins Ireland, 2020).

Anxiety becomes a problem when it affects a child’s sense of **who they are, their relationships and their engagement** with school and other activities.

Distinguishing anxiety from normal fears is important. Throughout childhood, we all naturally experience transient fears related to our ability to detect potential dangers in our environment. Children are expected to “grow out of” many of these fears as they develop. This is more difficult for 15% of children who have a more anxious temperament.

Talking to your child about anxiety will not make them more anxious. **No worry is a silly worry!** If it’s causing your child/the child in your care distress, then it’s a big deal to them.

Helping your child/the child in your care to understand **what’s happening inside their bodies** helps them feel less alone and more empowered. Ask your child/the child in your care to **draw themselves** and tell you where they feel worries in their body, and **what kinds of things make them feel worried**, something like this:



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Anxiety is an **overestimation of threat**, and an **underestimation of our ability to cope** with the threat. In times of stress, not only do children release adrenaline and cortisol, but they release oxytocin, our bonding hormone, **driving them to seek our support and connection**.

How caregivers respond to children has a significant impact on how they cope. Seeing your child's anxiety as an **opportunity to nurture your connection** builds on their resilience.

To find the balance between helping anxious children feel safe and empowering them to face their fears, Malie developed the four steps of the **S.A.F.E. Chain of Resilience**:



Click into this link to see how the S.A.F.E. approach can help a child who is fearful of school:
<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:3ff7bcf3-2ccb-4374-ab02-41e006f53257>

And here are a few more playful suggestions you may find helpful:

Play loosens fear. Some children like to think of a worry as a little pest that pops up just to annoy them, like a “worry monster” talking into their ear. As practised in class today, this **“I’m the Boss of my Worries”** exercise works really well to externalise and “boss back” their worries.

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:21737207-bcc6-425d-994a-12efa52811ec>

In times of stress, try to remain calm and use **“anchoring strategies”** to bring your child/the child in your care back to feeling safe, as you are your child/the child in your care’s anchor. Releasing stress hormones through physical activity helps to ground them, shift fearful thoughts and improve their sense of control:

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:de4bcc86-1404-4611-81dc-16068494caf3>

Create a **“soothing box”** of toys to engage your your child/the child in your care’s senses (e.g., squishies, kaleidoscope, shaker). You can’t be scared and playful at the same time! Create a **“calm box”** to soothe their senses (e.g., comfort blanket, stuffed animal, favourite book or music, stress ball).

Resources:

- Sparkle Appeal Toolkit Supporting Children With Anxiety and Worry:
<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:EU:af2ebea7-225d-47f0-98ce-4c5b4348a28c>
- Dr. Malie Coyne’s Webinar on “Compassionate Support for Parenting Anxious Children”:
<https://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/compassionate-support-for-parenting-anxious-children-and-teens/>