

Understanding Teen Anxiety and Anger

www.mindinwestessex.org.uk



What is anxiety?

- Anxiety is the Fight / Flight / Freeze and Flop response
- Feeling safe and secure is our biggest need
- “An overestimation of a threat – an underestimation of our ability to cope”

Fight / Flight / Freeze / Flop

Event



Thoughts



Physical Symptoms

Behaviour



Anxiety and anger

Anxiety is maintained by:

- Unhelpful thinking patterns (worry, catastrophising, fear of failure / embarrassment, mind reading etc).
- Safety behaviours (avoidance, rituals, reassurance seeking etc).

Anxiety may be displayed as anger:

Anxiety and anger can feel very similar, but sometimes it's more acceptable to show anger than anxiety.

Anxiety and anger

Anxiety becomes a habit:

- Anxiety usually starts from one incident but grows.
- If the worry is about school, commonly the anxiety will grow so that the young person fears going to school.
- Often the anxiety will start Sunday afternoon or towards the end of holidays.
- Usually the young person will 'complain' of a physical illness, such as stomach ache / headache (but anxiety is also felt in our bodies).

Common causes of anxiety/anger

- Separation from parents / caregivers
- Worried about getting lost around school + getting told off
- Worries about doing homework on time / not doing it well enough / remembering to hand it in on time
- Being judged by other students
- Being judged by anyone
- Making new friends

- Problems with friendship groups + social media
- Realising that they are getting closer to GCSEs and that they are responsible for their future
- Worrying that not doing well in GCSEs will ruin their future
- Managing expectations of self and others

Common causes of anxiety/anger

- Worries about looks
- Awareness of sexuality and perhaps questioning
- Worries about relationships – with peers + family

- Managing self with more freedom
- Worrying about social boundaries
- Expectations about A level choices and results
- Worries about what to do after leaving school – right choice?
- Worries about moving into the 'adult' world
- Separations
- Starting again!

Common causes of anger

- Feeling not listened to
- Having little or no control over events
- Annoyed at self for not coping /doing better
- Not having 'emotional regulation' to react more calmly
- Habit
- Teenagers have many constraints: School, family rules, expectations
- Nature wants them to break away – naturally that will cause frustration

How to help...

Two key ways:

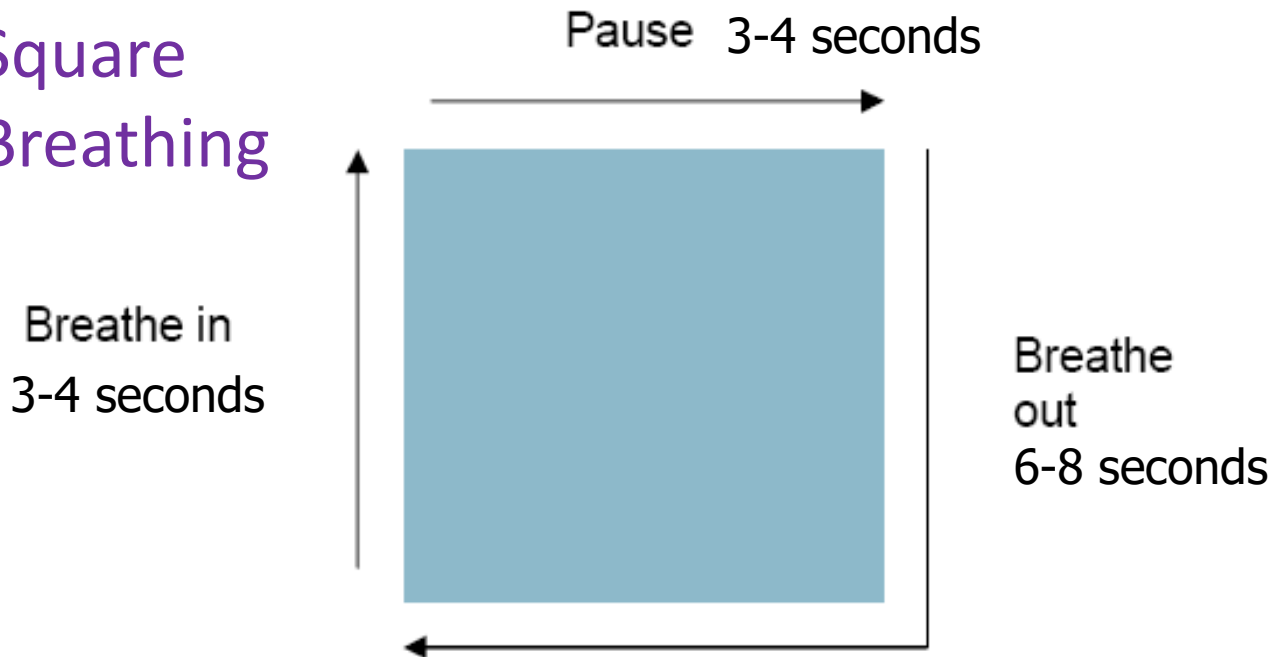
- Physical control
- Talking

How to help...Breathe!

Breathing control:

- Take a couple of deep breaths and lower shoulders to reduce tension.
- Erratic breathing is one of the first responses to stress and noticing this can make you feel more panicky.

Square Breathing



How to help...Breathe!

Breathing control:

- Breathe from stomach not chest
- Breathe in for a count of 4
- Breathe out for a count of 6
- Breathe out for longer than in, but not deep breaths

How to help...Visualise!

Visualisation:

- Imagine an environment that is a happy / calming.
- What can you see?
- What can you hear?
- What can you smell?
- What can you touch?
- Spend a few minutes in this place, enjoy the relaxation.
- Combine with calming breathing.

How to help...Relax!

Progressive Muscle Relaxation:

- Tense muscles for 10-20 seconds, focus on how it feels.
- Relax muscles, notice how it feels.
- Start at toes, then move up through muscle groups in turn.
- Combine with breathing.

How to help...Talking!

- When a person is angry / highly upset / having a panic attack, the most helpful thing at that time is to help them calm down first.
- A combination of taking them away from the scene and helping them to calm by slowing breathing.
- Remain calm yourself, talk in a soft low voice – we have 'mirror' neurons in our brains to help empathise.

How to help...Talking!

- When a person is highly emotional (especially angry) they will be unlikely to think clearly (the thinking part of the brain switches off and the survival mode is in charge).
- Apart from remaining calm yourself, stay close by to support the young person – the adrenalin will run out and they will calm down.
- When they are calm, discuss with the young person how come they were anxious / angry – what caused that and what did they want to happen?
- If they know – they may not.
- **IMPORTANT** – Validate that it's ok to feel anxious / angry / upset.

How to help...Talking!

- Talk about ways in the future to manage differently -
- What do they notice are the first signs they are getting 'upset' such as:
 - Getting hot / shaking
 - Heart / breathing changes
 - Racing thoughts
 - Tension / energy

How to help...Talking!

- Discuss ways they can self soothe so that as soon as they notice any changes they can take action.
- Encourage them to practice so that whatever works for them becomes 'auto pilot'.
- The best way to managetalk!

More info...

- For more information about children and young people please visit our website and our online academy for:
- Early Years Parenting
- Supporting Teenager's Emotional Wellbeing
- Services and information from Mind in West Essex
- www.mindinwestessex.org.uk