

## ANXIETY

### REMEMBER TO:

- Support your child to overcome anxiety. It is useful to encourage using small rewards!
- The rewards are more about doing things rather than having things (movie, nails, park, swimming)
- A final reward can be a toy or game that motivates them!
- Remember to always tie the rewards to practising steps, praise and encouragement from you, the parent.

Sleep issues are often linked to anxiety in young children. It is highly common for children to be very anxious or frightened to sleep alone.

This leaflet aims to provide understanding and information around anxiety and some top tips to help.



## SIGNS OF ANXIETY

Anxiety is a normal and common emotion. Children are not always aware of how and why they feel this way. Anxiety can then become an issue at bedtime and lead to frustration falling to sleep. This unease will then impact on their ability to feel safe falling to sleep in their own bed.

Anxiety can be triggered when your child hears, thinks or sees something scary. Their body then reacts and produces chemicals called adrenaline and cortisol (the 'stress hormone'). When this happens the following occurs:

- Heart beats faster



- Tummy goes round and round—feel nauseous



- Headache



- Legs tremble or shake



- Palms are sweaty



## EVIDENCE

EVENT - Noise outside at night



THOUGHT - What is your child thinking?



burglar



cat



wind



rat



tree

FEELING - Tired, safe and sleepy!



## PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!

- Set aside time each day for your child for worry time.
- Together with your child, decide when this should be (this should not be before or during bedtime routine). Some children like to choose 15 minutes before tea.
- Your child may choose to worry alone and use other ways to express their fears/worries.
- During worry time, your child can think, write or tell you about any or all fears/worries. You can then both spend time problem solving and analysing these to create a safer rational alternative.
- If worries are raised at any other time especially near sleep time, give a reminder that this worry will need to wait for the next worry time.

## FEAR/WORRY

EVENT - Noise outside at night



THOUGHT - What is your child thinking?



alien      burglar      monster

FEELING - Scared and awake



## BALANCE THE THOUGHT

It is important to balance a child's thoughts and feelings. For a child to sleep, they need to feel safe. The key is to challenge and affirm that there is another explanation for their fear / worries which is more balanced and may lead to a different safer feeling.

The following are some top tips to help:

- Help your child to be analytical
- What else could have made the noise?
- Ask friends siblings, grandparents - make a long list
- Look for clues to decide what has made the noise
- Look for an alternative explanation for and against original fear
- It is then important for your child to rate the original fear—the goal is to reduce the fear

## FEAR

All children feel scared from time to time. For some children it can be scary to go to bed alone. There are ways to feel brave and less scared when you are in a dark room alone.

The key to lowering the effect of anxiety is to be able to identify the worrying thought. This is so hard in a younger child as they are not always able to converse the thoughts and this can result in the fear being displayed in behaviours of restlessness, anger, irritability, frequent toilet stops and getting upset.

## COMMON CHILDHOOD ANXIETIES

Here is a list of some common child anxieties that can cause a disruption to initiating and maintaining sleep.

- Friendships
- Being ill
- Bullying at school
- Hospitalisation/accident
- Watching a scary movie
- Parental separation
- Death of a relative



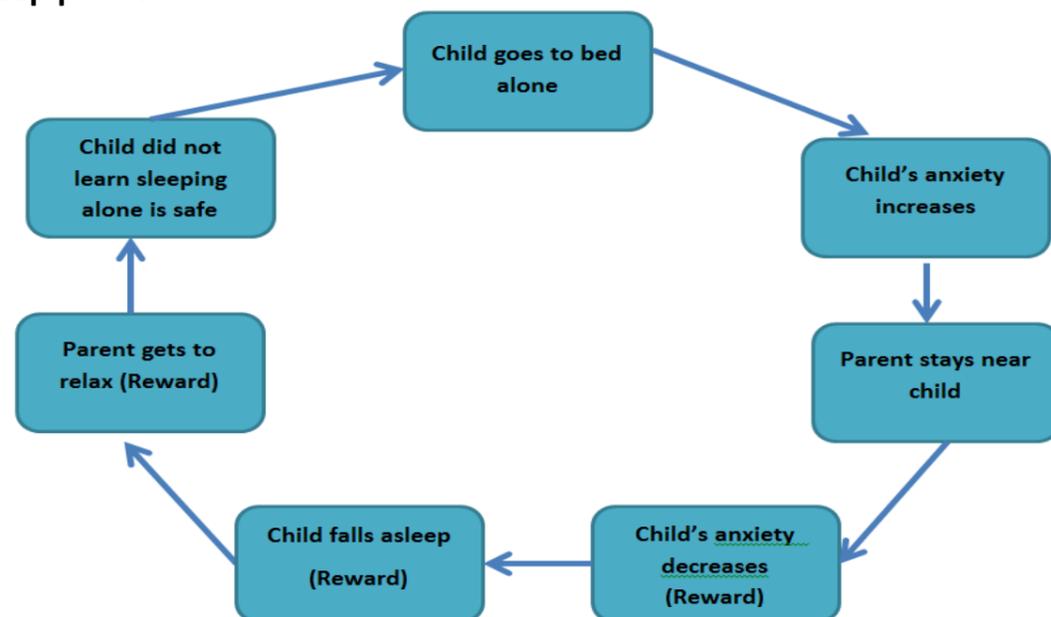
## TRIGGERS OF FEARS

It is important to face your child's fears. A good routine will give your child reassurance, safety and security. The key is to be able to change a negative into a positive and help your child be calm and brave!

When a child has anxiety, sleep time magnifies the problems. The problem can feel more intense or overwhelming. This can lead to bedtime conversations of reassurance from parents with bedtime stalls (hug, one more book, let me tell you this). Then this over reassurance becomes a reward of parental presence and affirms that they cannot settle to sleep alone.

## SLEEP ANXIETY SCALE

In an attempt to ease the anxiety, it actually reinforces and consolidates the sleep problem.



## FACING FEARS

Relaxation before bed will help to empty the mind and set a restful state. Breathing exercises and positive reinforcement "I am brave" can all support a positive secure relaxed mind set. These are things that can be done to help your child become calm and brave. These include positive communication and breathing exercises below:

**For deep breathing, remember these steps:**

Take in a big, slow breath through your nose.

Slowly counting to 5 while you breathe in.

Feel the breath fill up your belly like a balloon.

Slowly blow out your breath through your mouth like you are blowing out a candle.

Count slowly to 5 while you breathe out.

Repeat at least 10 times.

## FEAR SCALE

Exposing the fear through the day and rationalising it through the scale below, can help your child to be brave and face their fears.

Anxiety Level	None	Mild	Mild-Moderate	Moderate	Moderate-High	Highest
Faces						

A novel visual facial anxiety scale  
plos one | doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0171233 february 14, 2017

Teaching your child to face fears helps them become independent and do things on their own even if scary. Between you, you can do it!