



# Learning to Beat Anxiety

## A parent's guide to anxiety and cognitive behavioural therapy

### What is anxiety?

- Anxiety is a **NORMAL EMOTION** – it helps us cope with difficult, challenging or dangerous situations.
- Anxiety is **COMMON** – there are times when we all feel worried, anxious, uptight or stressed.
- But anxiety becomes a **PROBLEM WHEN IT STOPS YOUR** child from enjoying normal life by affecting their school, work, family relationships, friendships or social life.
- This is when **ANXIETY TAKES OVER** and your child has lost control.

### Anxious feelings

When we become anxious our body prepares itself for some form of physical action, often called the "**FLIGHT-FIGHT**" reaction. As the body prepares itself we may notice a number of physical changes such as:

- shortness of breath
- tight chest
- dizziness or light-headedness
- palpitations
- muscle pain, especially head and neck pain
- wanting to go to the toilet
- shakiness
- sweating
- dry mouth
- difficulty swallowing
- blurred vision
- butterflies or feeling sick.

Often there is a reason for feeling anxious such as:

- facing a difficult exam
- saying something to someone they may not like
- having to go somewhere new or do something scary.

Once the unpleasant event is over our bodies return to normal and we usually end up feeling better.

Teaching children to understand their thoughts is important. Children with anxiety tend to:

- think in negative and critical ways
- overestimate the likelihood of bad things happening
- focus on things that go wrong.
- underestimate their ability to cope
- expect to be unsuccessful.

CBT is a practical and fun way of helping children to:

- identify these negative ways of thinking
- discover the link between what they think, how they feel and what they do
- check out the evidence for their thoughts
- develop new skills to cope with their anxiety.

## **SUPPORT your child**

During CBT it is important that you **SUPPORT** your child.

### **S – Show your child how to be successful**

Show your child how to successfully approach and cope with anxious situations. Model success.

### **U – Understand that your child has a problem**

Remember that your child is not being wilfully naughty or difficult. They have a problem and need your help.

### **P – Patient approach**

Don't expect things to change quickly. Be patient and encourage your child to keep trying.

### **P – Prompt new skills**

Encourage and remind your child to practise and use their new skills.

### **O – Observe your child**

Watch your child and highlight the positive or successful things they do.

### **R – Reward and praise their efforts**

Remember to praise and reward your child for using their new skills and for trying to face and overcome their problems.

### **T – Talk about it**

Talking with your child shows them that you care and will help them feel supported,

**SUPPORT** your child and help them to overcome their problems.