

Understanding and managing anxiety in children under 12

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The logo for Charlie Waller, featuring a stylized blue 'C' with an orange speech bubble inside, above the name 'Charlie Waller' in blue and orange text.

Charlie
Waller

The logo for Brighter Futures Together, with 'BRIGHTER' in white on a blue background and 'FUTURES TOGETHER' in pink and green on a white background, accompanied by a sun icon.

BRIGHTER
FUTURES TOGETHER

The logo for PPEP care, featuring the text 'PPEP care' in blue and black, with an icon of a hand holding three stylized figures.

PPEP
care

Evidence based training to
support healthy young minds



Supporting Young People's Mental Health

Our vision

A world in which young people, and families, have the support, the skills and the resilience to be mentally well for life.

Introductions

Lisa Thomson

Clinical Lead
Charlie Waller Trust



With thanks to our Lived Experience Partners and
Youth Ambassador at the Charlie Waller Trust



The Charlie Waller Trust

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Schools



Colleges



Universities




Parents and Carers



Workplace

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The PLACE network

Our network of parent and carer peer support support groups

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Parent Carer Peer Support

Want to know more about parent and carer peer support?

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Before we begin

- **Timings:** The webinar will be approximately 60 minutes. We do not have any scheduled comfort breaks but please feel free to step away from your screen if needed.
- **Recording:** Please note that this webinar will be recorded and published on our website for others to watch on-demand.
- **Safety and openness:** Sensitive topics may be discussed during this webinar, please feel free to step away if needed. We want to foster a sense of safety and openness during this webinar where everyone listens to one another and supports each other's perspectives. At the end of the session, we will sign post to organisations to access further support.



Evidence based training



Positive

We take a positive approach to mental health. We focus on prevention and early intervention and recognise the importance of offering hope.



Proven

Our consultancy, training and resources are all based on sound clinical evidence.



Practical

We give people practical strategies and tools to care for their mental health, and to support others in doing so.

One donation, twice the impact

Together Through the Wait

23–30 June

Right now, too many young people are waiting for mental health support. For their parents and carers, that wait can feel frightening and lonely. Charlie Waller Trust provide free workshops, webinars and resources for families whose children are waiting for mental health services. With the right guidance, parents and carers can feel more confident, better equipped as they support a young person through hard times.

Donate between 23 and 30 June and your gift will be doubled, up to £8,000. Give today and help families get the support they need while they wait.



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Charlie
Waller

Make an impact





Objectives for the session



Define

What is anxiety and how do we notice it in children.



Discuss

Parent led Cognitive Behaviour Therapy.



Do

Introduction to practical strategies to support children with managing anxiety .



What is anxiety and how do we notice it in children

Anxiety in Children Under 12

What are we seeing



How common is it?



5–10% have an anxiety disorder



15–20% have significant anxiety symptoms



Most common mental health issue in primary-aged children

Common Types of Anxiety



Separation Anxiety



Specific Phobias



Generalised Anxiety



Social Anxiety

What's Changing?



500+ children a day referred for anxiety support

Sharp rise from age 11+, especially for girls



Why It Matters



Behaviour changes, not just “worry talk”



Early support makes a big difference in the longer term

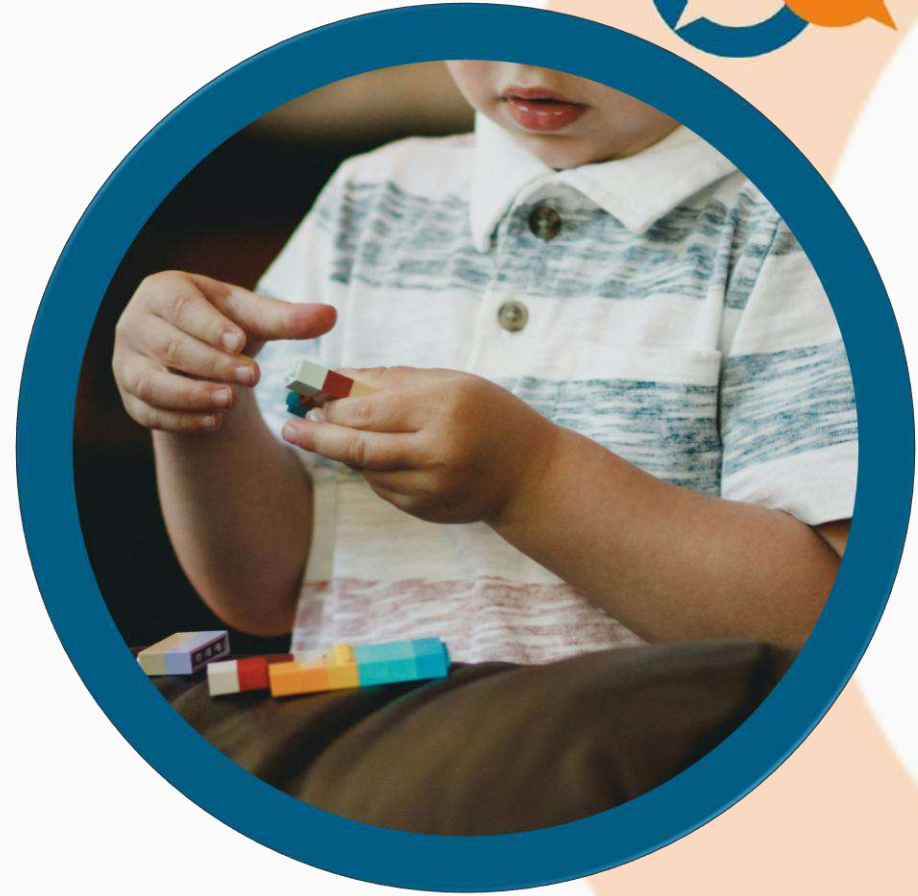


Adults are key to spotting the signs and supporting the child in managing anxiety



Autism

Autism is a neurodevelopmental condition - but **as many as 71% of autistic children have diagnosable mental health problems**, such as anxiety disorders, depression, and obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), and 40% have two or more ([Simonoff et al 2008](#), [Kerns et al 2020](#))





There are some features which may be common across different types of anxiety

Overestimation
of threat and danger

Underestimation
of our ability to cope

It prevents children from enjoying life experiences:
impacting on school,
friendships, family life.

Sharing personal experience:



"I have seen the benefits of using parent-led CBT both from taking part in the programme to better understand and support my own child when they were experiencing anxiety, but also then as a facilitator of the programme, working with and supporting other parents and carers to use it as a tool with their own children when they were awaiting to access services or if their child is unable to engage with an external clinician. The outcomes for the children were very encouraging."

Parent Carer Lived Experience Partner



Spotting the signs of anxiety and worry

Signs of anxiety

What might you notice?

- Physical symptoms
- Behaviour?
- Thinking patterns?
- Emotions



Remember

- All children and young people (and adults) have changes in their levels of worry, and ups and downs
- Being fearful is very common during childhood





Some anxiety might be developmentally appropriate.
To help you decide, consider the following questions:



CONTEXT
MATTERS



Some anxiety might be developmentally appropriate. To help you decide, consider the following questions:

Is the fear completely out of proportion to the actual level of threat?

Is there fear in the absence of actual threat?

Is it difficult to settle the child or young person back to a normal state?



For Autistic children with anxiety there needs to be a balance between:

- Making environment more attuned to child's needs and less anxiety provoking
- Helping child to develop skills to manage their anxiety using adapted Cognitive Behaviour therapy

Exploring anxieties and worries in children



Questions for you to consider



- Do you need to reassure the child excessively and about the same things over and over?
- Does the child have difficulty separating from you to go to school or over to a friend's house?
- What does your child worry about?
- Does worry/anxiety ever stop the child from doing something new or an activity they would usually enjoy?

Questions for you to consider



- Does your child get a lot of stomach aches and headaches? Have physical explanations been ruled out?
- Are there any events/activities/people/places that your child avoids because of fear or anxiety?
- Describe your child's sleep routine (where, when, quality, night routine)?
- Has your child missed school or had to come home from school early due to anxiety?

Questions to ask children



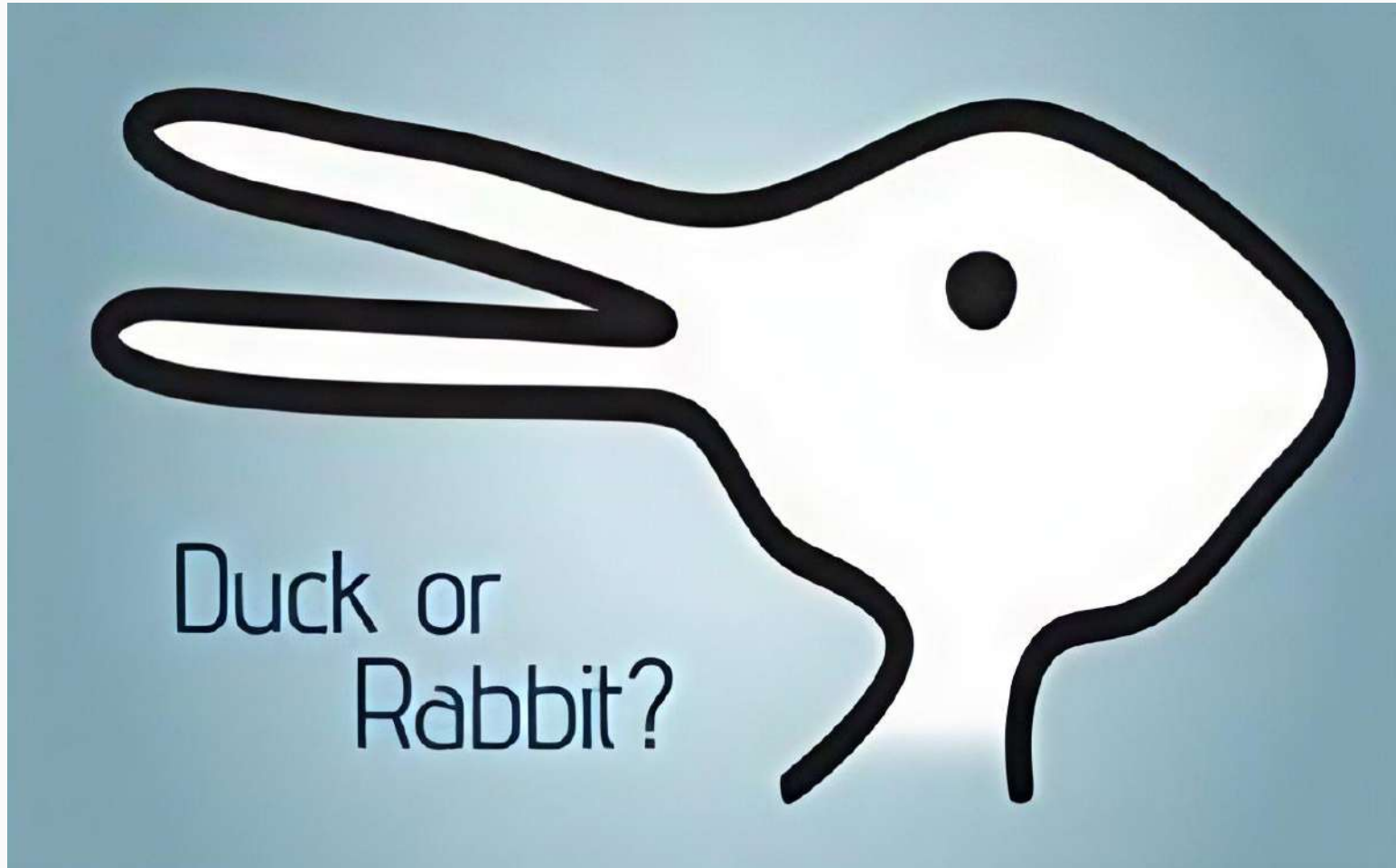
- Over the past few weeks, when have you been feeling anxious, worried, or very upset?
- What happens when you start to worry about things?
- Do your worries ever stop you from having fun or doing things you would like to be doing?
- When are you at your most relaxed?
- Do you get these feelings when you are relaxed?
- Are there times when you notice these feelings more?
- What do you think will happen?
- What is the worst thing that might happen?
- What is it about [this situation] that is making you worried?

Introduction to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)



Basic premise of CBT

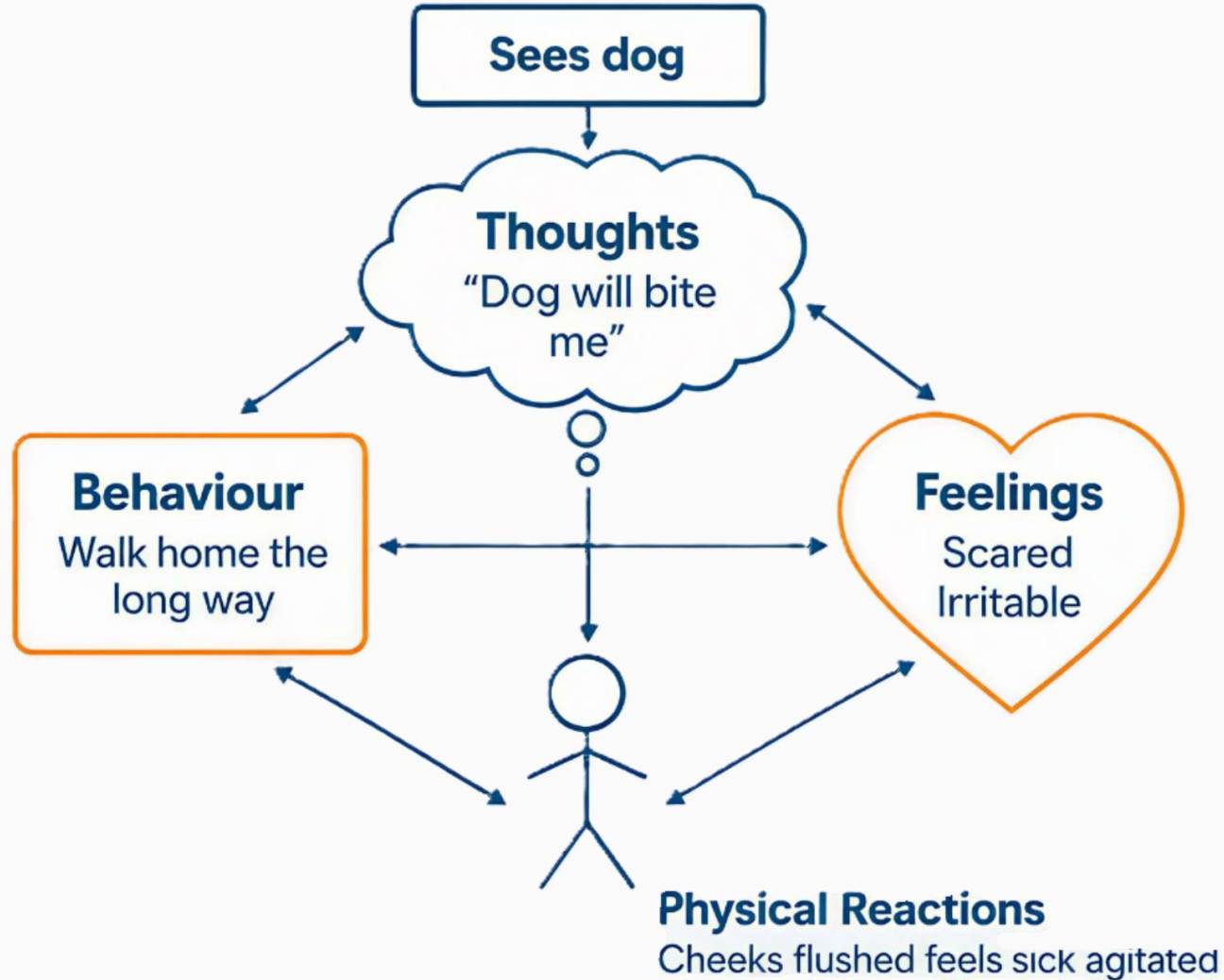
What do you see?



A bang in the night



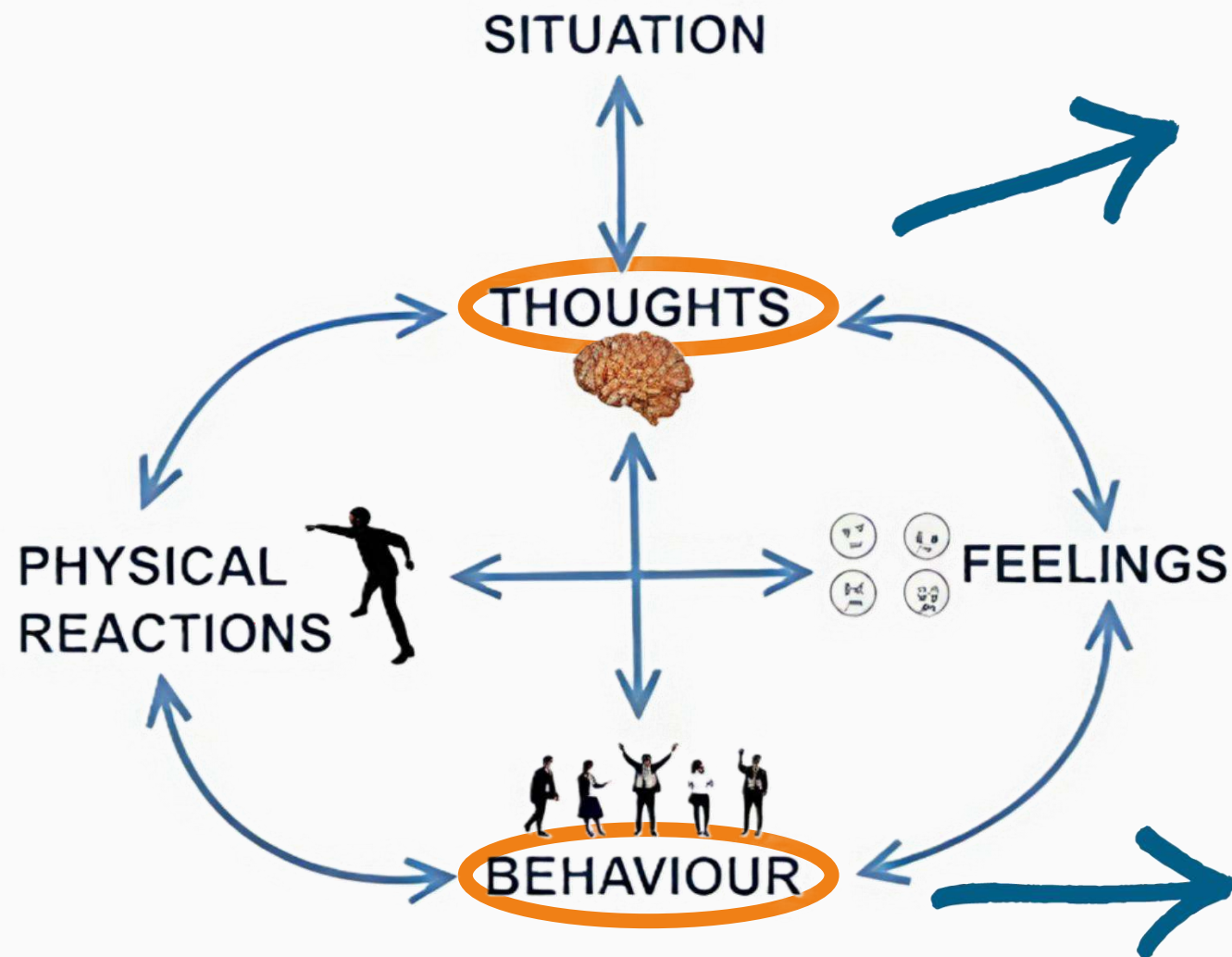
What keeps anxiety going?





If we avoid the feared situation

- We don't get to find out if our worst fears are likely to happen
- We don't get used to the feeling of fear
- We don't develop skills and confidence for managing challenges



Different ways of thinking:

- How realistic is this thought?
- Could something else happen instead?
- Respond in a different way
- Practice confronting the fear

Sharing personal experience:



“I remember hearing the 'scary dog' anxiety analogy quite far along in our anxiety journey. It was a lightbulb moment for me as a parent and I realised that I'd been so focused on protecting the mental health (and safety) of my child (as we are all programmed to do naturally), that I'd missed some very simple points along the way in terms of accommodating anxiety behaviours which in turn re-enforced my child's thinking that they needed certain reassurance or for particular things to happen, to stay safe.

In actual fact, if I'd been able to reduce my accommodations and support with gradual exposure to particular things, my child would have learned that they could experience some anxiety, feel some discomfort and learn that they can cope”.

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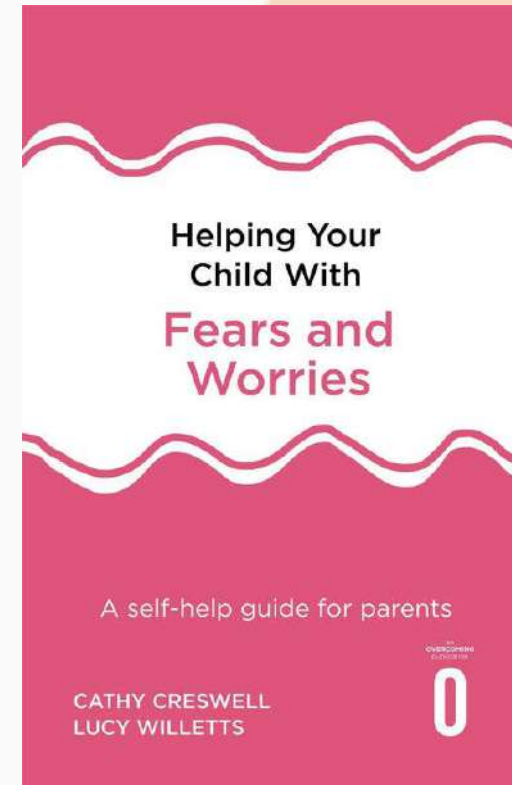
Parent Led CBT – a brief introduction to key practical strategies



Parent-led CBT helps most children

Around half to two-thirds of children make a meaningful recovery, and many continue to improve after the sessions end. ([Creswell et al., 2017](#))

The results were comparable to other anxiety studies which looked at children who received 12-16 individual sessions ([Creswell et al., 2019](#))



What can you do to support your child?



1. Notice difficulties (identifying and understanding the child's anxiety)
2. Help to establish goals
3. Thought challenging
4. Understanding and being aware of our responses
5. Helping the child to face their fears in a manageable way
6. Problem solving
7. Keeping the momentum going.



1. Notice difficulties (identifying and understanding the child's anxiety)



Think about:

- What's happening for the child?
- What are they thinking?
- What sensations can they notice in their body?
- What anxious behaviour are they displaying?

1. Notice difficulties (identifying and understanding the child's anxiety)



Situation	Thoughts	Bodily sensations	Behaviour
Mum getting ready to go to the shops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I don't want you to go.• What if you don't come back?• Something bad might happen to you.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Butterflies in tummy.• Feeling sick.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Begs mum not to go.• Gets really upset,

2. Help to establish goals

- If your child were no longer anxious, what would they be doing that they are not doing now?
- What would your child be doing differently if they didn't feel so anxious?
- What changes would you notice?
- What is your child missing out on due to their anxiety?



2. Help to establish goals

Try to be as specific as possible.

Be more confident.

Worry less about us.

Be relaxed around dogs.



What do these things
actually look like?



2. Help to establish goals



Try to be as specific as possible; what would your child be doing differently:

Be more confident



Invite a friend over for tea

Worry less about us



Go to bed without us having to stay with her

Be relaxed around dogs

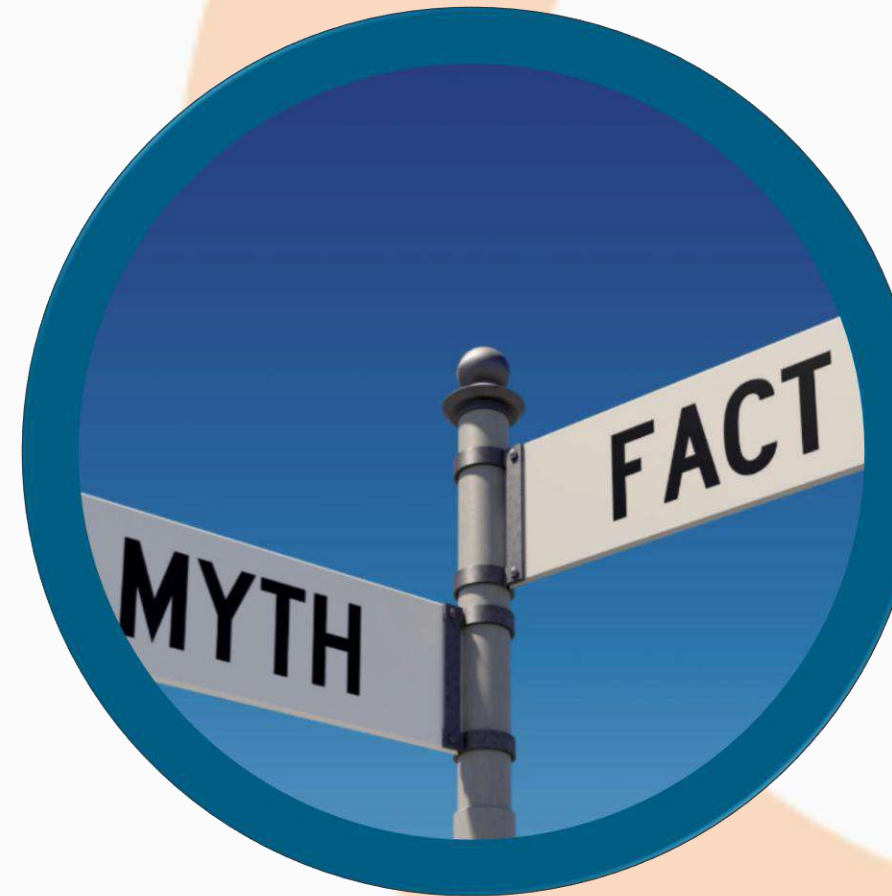


Be able to go to the park where people are walking their dogs

3. Thought Challenging

- Children who are anxious tend to see danger and fearful thoughts about (neutral) situations.
- Thought challenging helps them to weigh up the evidence for and against their thoughts (thinking like a judge in court).

The trick for parents is to ask questions not give answers. This helps child to think for themselves and grow confidence that they can manage anxious thoughts.



3. Thought Challenging

What to think about when helping a child with their unhelpful thoughts:

What is happening?

What are they thinking?

Evidence and alternatives?

What actually happened in the end?



3. Thought Challenging



HOW you ask the questions is as important as which questions you ask.

Pick your moment and make it fun/rewarding:

- Be curious
- Use play or other nonverbal communication
- Sideways talking
- Empathise and normalise
- Check understanding
- Help to label emotions if needed



4. Understanding and changing our responses



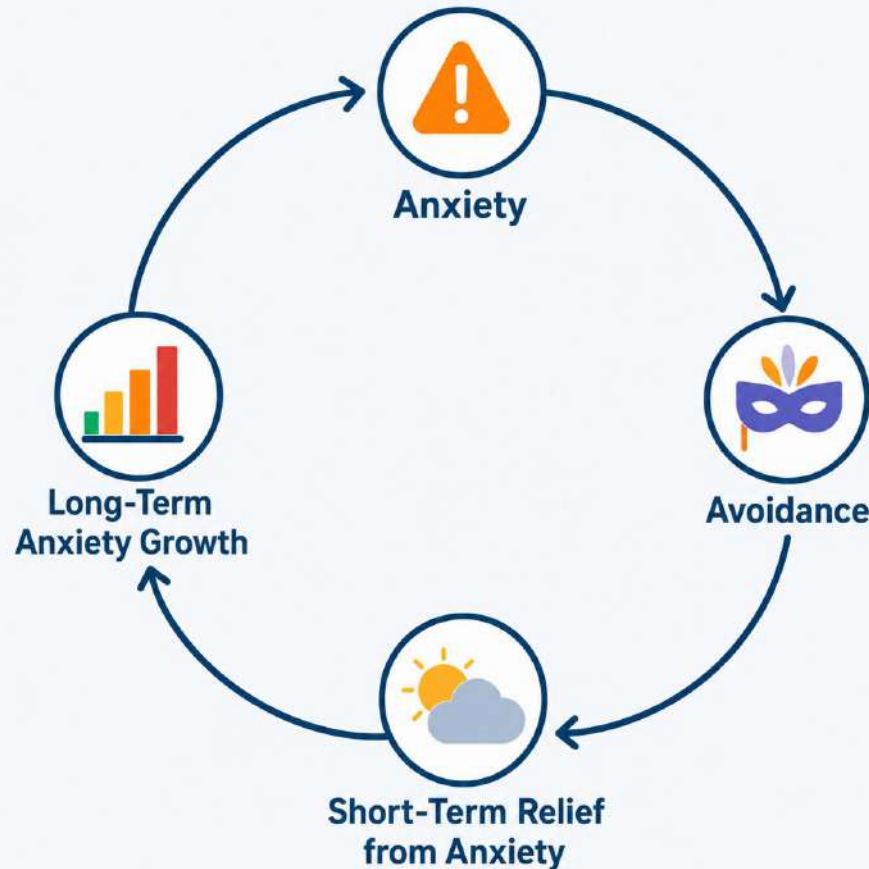
- **Importance of promoting independence in the child:**
 - Attention and praise
 - On the lookout for 'have a go' behaviour
 - Rewards
 - Observing others' behaviours and feelings
 - Allowing independence
- **Importance of gradually reducing reassurance**

Key message is to encouraging independence and having a go.



5. Helping the child to face their fears (in a manageable way)

The circle of anxiety.

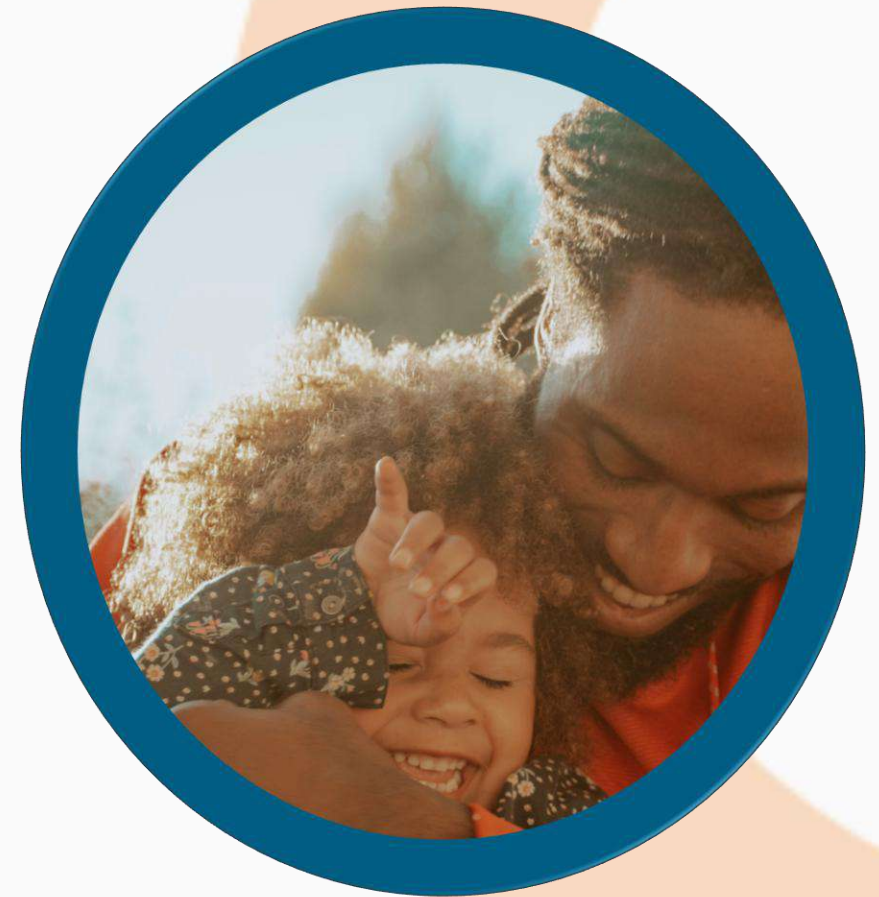




5. Helping the child to face their fears (in a manageable way)

Be guided by the child:

- What are their goals?
- What do they need to learn?
- Do they understand the rationale for facing their fears?



5. Helping the child to face their fears (in a manageable way)



Giving a rationale for facing fears to the child.

Devising a step by step plan together:

- What is the overall goal?
- Break this down into steps
- Rate how anxious each step would make the child
- Get predictions about what will happen
- Order steps from least to most anxiety provoking
- Repeat each step until child is confident
- Plan rewards for each stage for 'having a go'.

Goal – to play alone in my room for 10 mins



Sharing personal experience:



“When going through the parent-led CBT programme I found it very flexible and from the knowledge and resources I was able to consider how to best use with my own child. For example, I didn’t sit down and have conversations about CBT (I knew that would put up a barrier) so instead I would create small step goals and encourage them to stretch themselves in ways which I felt would see an increase in self-confidence from these achievements. If these can be interest-based too, it makes these small incremental steps feel much more positive and enjoyable”.

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6. Problem Solving

5 step plan to support effective problem solving:

1. Help the child to define the problem
2. Encourage them to think about as many solutions (even ones that seem unrealistic)
3. Consider the pros and cons of each one and decide which might be best
4. If the plan is doable, have a go
5. Review what happened and try something else if necessary.



7. Keeping things going

How could you continue to support your child going forward?

- Discuss and agree what you might want to focus on next
- Review progress regularly and plan for setbacks
- Acknowledging both your and the child's efforts and focus on progress

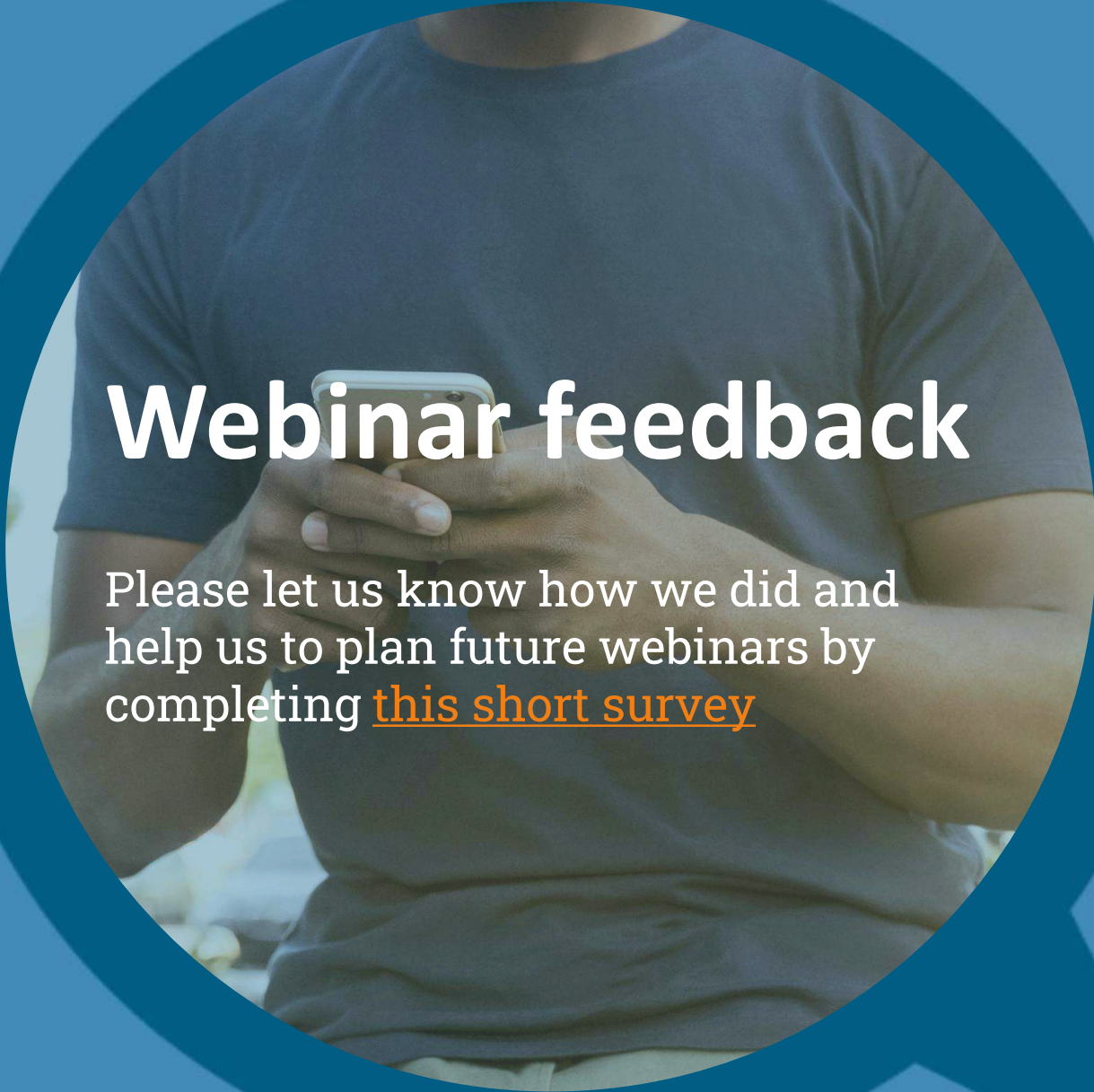


Sharing personal experience:



"We are used to hearing all sorts of comments from professionals. The journey is really tough (understatement) even to the point of being put on a waiting list for support or assessment. When a professional understands us as parents trying to protect our child at all costs, and tailors their language and information accordingly, it can make all the difference to a child's outcome down the line, and also for the whole family unit. Parents and professionals understanding our child's anxiety issues, from listening and not judging but working collaboratively and supportively will have a much better chance of helping that child and ensuring they feel relationally safe"

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Webinar feedback

Please let us know how we did and help us to plan future webinars by completing [this short survey](#)

Give us your feedback

A hand-drawn white arrow pointing from the text "Give us your feedback" towards the QR code.

Upcoming webinars

Supporting Children's Emotional Wellbeing: A Whole Organisation Approach

Thursday 9 July 12.30 - 13.30

Making Knowledge Matter: Sleep and Mental Health in Young People

Wednesday 22 July, 12.30pm - 1.15pm

More to topics in the autumn:

Resilience

Perfectionism

Social Media and more

Sign up or watch recordings of previous webinars at:

<https://charliewaller.org/mental-health-training-support/mental-health-webinars>



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impact!



Additional Resources



- [Charlie Waller Trust resources](#) – FREE downloadable (and FREE printed) resources on a range of topics
- [MindEd resources](#) – FREE resources on a range of topics including depression, suicidal ideation and self-harm

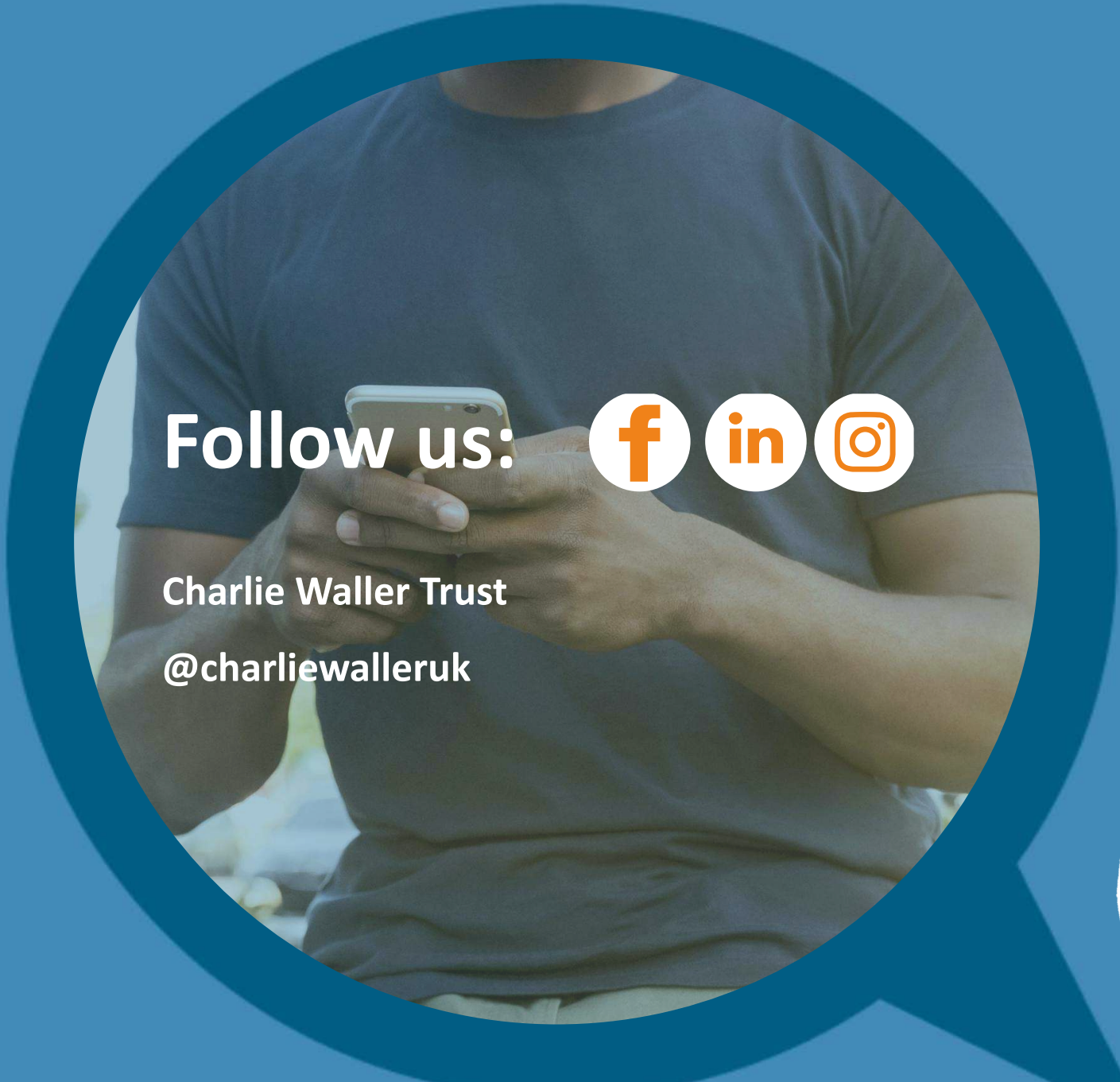


Additional Resources

Helping your child with Fears and Worries: A self-help guide for parents

By Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts





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