



# Supporting Your Child – Understanding EBSA

## Emotional Barriers to School Attendance

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Support Teams



MENTAL HEALTH  
SUPPORT TEAMS

# Overview of Today's Session:

**Part 1.** EBSA – Emotionally Based School Avoidance

**Part 2.** How to support your child when struggling with anxiety and/or school attendance

**Part 3.** Looking after yourself



**What are you  
hoping to gain  
from the  
workshop?**



# Aims for this workshop

- To have a better understanding of what EBSA is and when/why it occurs.
- Give you strategies for responding to your anxious child, building their confidence and ability to cope with the challenges of getting into school
- Learn strategies you can teach your child to help them manage their worries, their physical symptoms, and cope with being in school.
- Think about the importance of looking after yourself.



# Please Remember

- ❖ Confidentiality
- ❖ Respect others' opinions
- ❖ Non-judgemental
- ❖ No question is a silly question
- ❖ Be kind to yourself



# Workshop Feedback form (Before and after)



# What causes Anxiety when it comes to school?

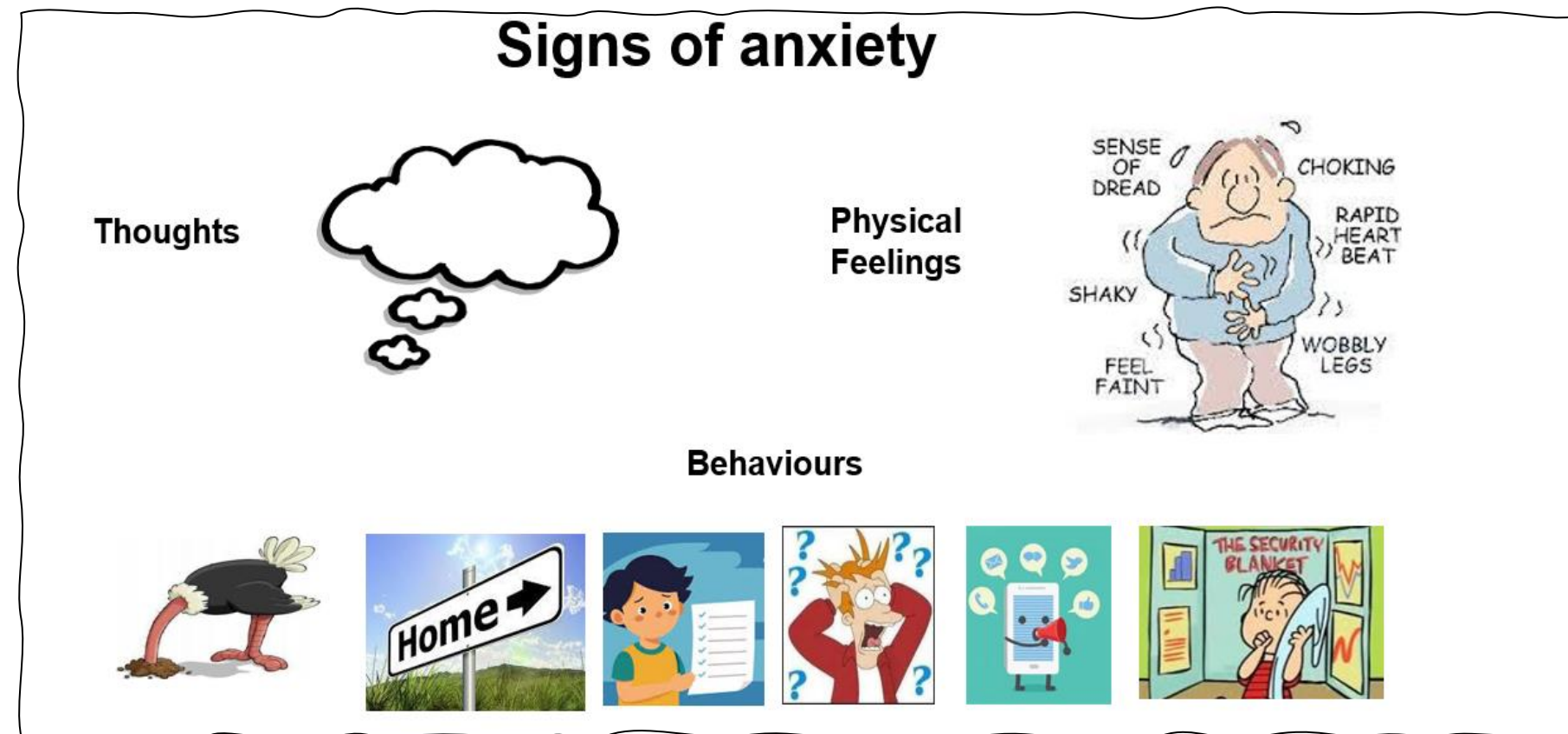
- Friendships
- Organisation (*around the expectations of secondary school*)
- Understanding new systems (*how school works*)
- The school environment (*classroom changes etc*)
- Homework (*and expectations around learning*)
- Relationships with school staff
- Neurodiversity

*Supporting children and young people's transition to secondary school: Guidance for parents and carers.*  
Anna Freud 2024



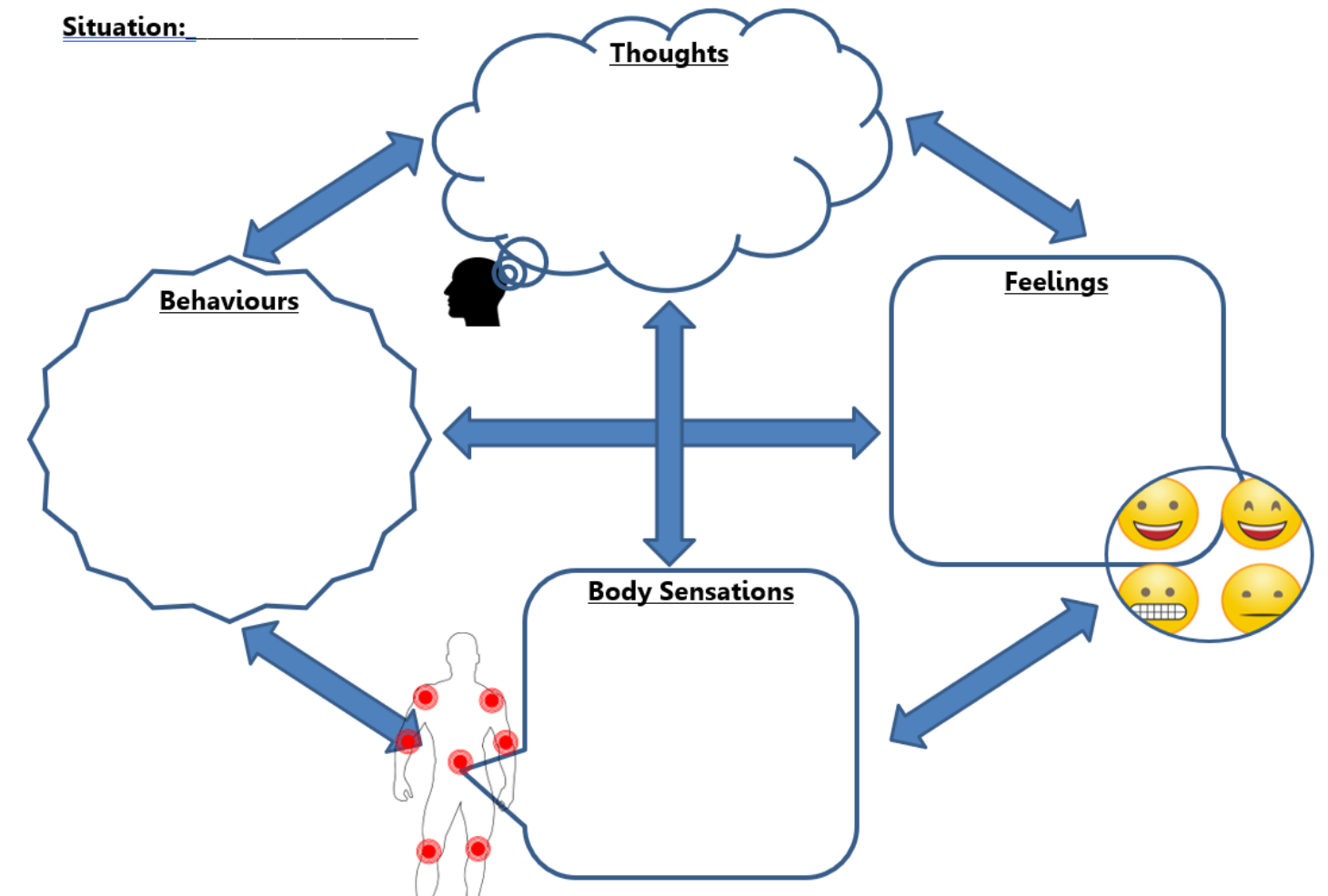
# What is anxiety?

- A feeling of unease (such as worry or fear)
- A normal and often helpful emotion
- Can be mild or severe
- A survival instinct to keep us safe



# What keeps anxiety about school going?

- Avoidance
- Missed opportunities for coping
- Lack of confidence – specifically in their ability to cope
- Lack of independence
- Worries becoming stuck
- Reassurance




## The Cycle of Avoidance



# What is EBSA and when can it occur?





*Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA) is a broad umbrella term used to describe a group of children and young people who have severe difficulty in attending school due to emotional factors, often resulting in prolonged absences from school.*

Emotionally Based School Avoidance: Hampshire County Council good practice guidance for schools and other support agencies (January 2021)

*Occurs when stress exceeds support, when risks are greater than resilience and when ‘pull’ factors that promote school non-attendance overcome the ‘push’ factors that encourage attendance.”*

(Thambirajah et al., 2008: p. 33)



# Language Used for Not Attending School

- *School phobic*
- *School refuser*
- *Truant*
- *School anxiety*
- *Persistent non-attenders*
- *Emotional Based School Avoidance (EBSA)*
- *Emotional Based School Non-Attendance (EBSNA)*

What do you notice?

Why is language important?



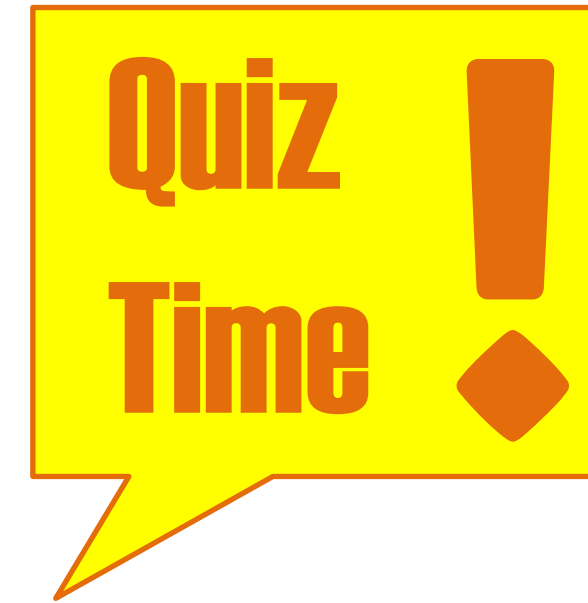
# True or False?



1. EBSA is more common in girls.
2. It is more common in secondary schools.
3. There are points during the school career when EBSA 'peaks.'
4. It is more common in populations with lower socioeconomic status.
5. Approximately 1-2% of the school population in the UK are absent from school due to emotional reasons.



# True or False? Answers



1. EBSA is more common in girls.
2. It is more common in secondary schools.
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# The Four Functions of EBSA

To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, such as feelings of anxiety or low mood.

To avoid situations that might be stressful, such as academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment.

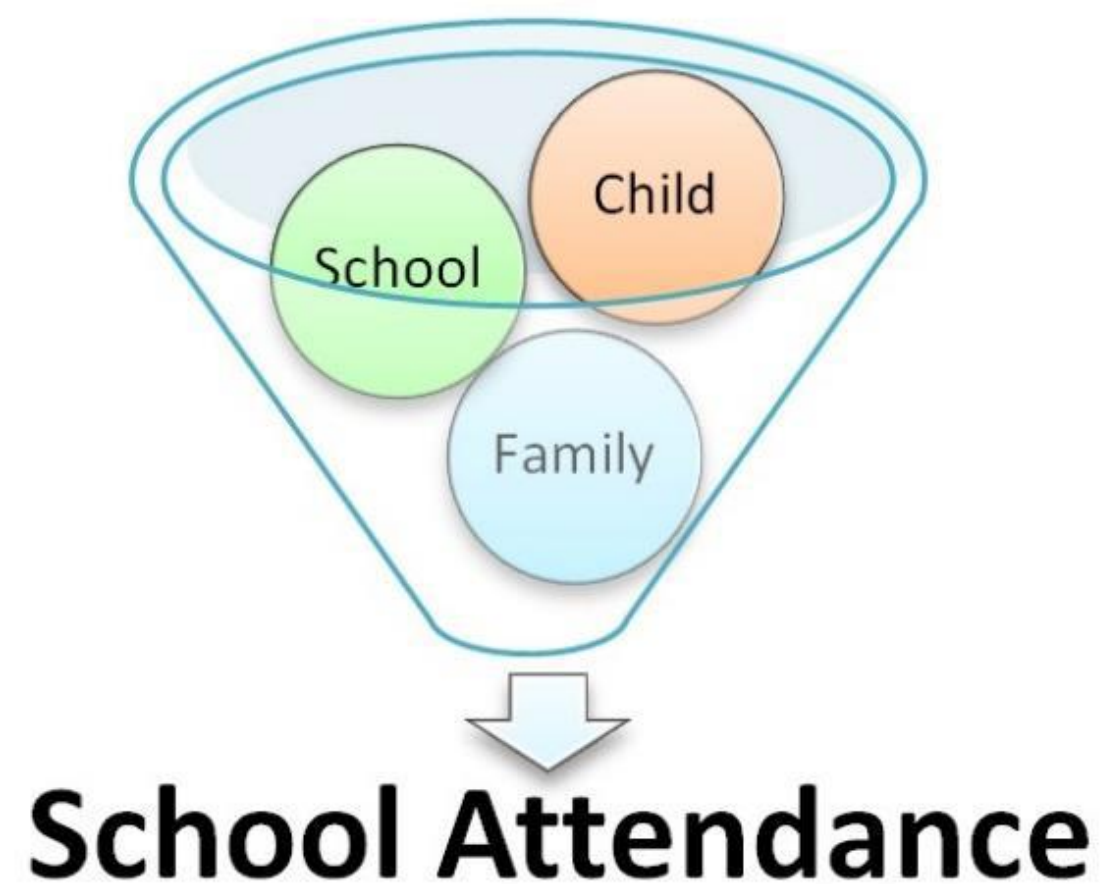
To reduce separation anxiety or to gain attention from significant others, such as parents or other family members.

To pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school, such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time.



# Risk Factors

What may place a young person at greater risk of EBSA?



# Risk Factors - School

- Bullying (most common)
- Difficulties in subjects
- Key transitions
- Structure of the school day
- Academic demands
- Transport/journey to school
- Exams
- Peer or staff relationship difficulties



# Risk Factors - Family

- Parent health problems
- Overprotective parenting style
- Dysfunctional family interactions
- Being the youngest child
- Separation or divorce/change in family dynamic
- Loss and bereavement
- Family stress
- Family history of EBSA
- Young carer



# Risk Factors - Child

- Temperamental style – withdrawal
- Fear of failure
- Low self confidence
- Physical illness
- Age (school phases)
- Learning problems or diagnoses
- Separation anxiety from parent
- Traumatic events
- Moving house, school, country

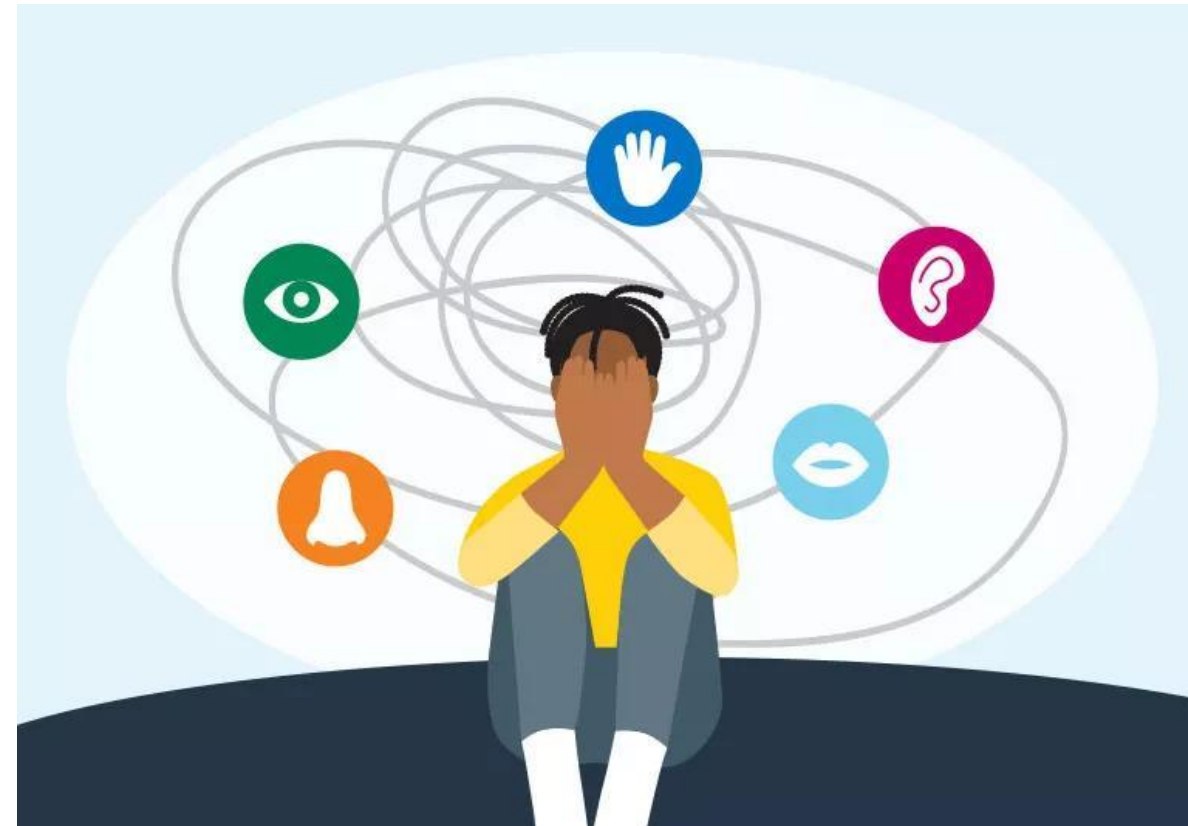


# Neurodiversity

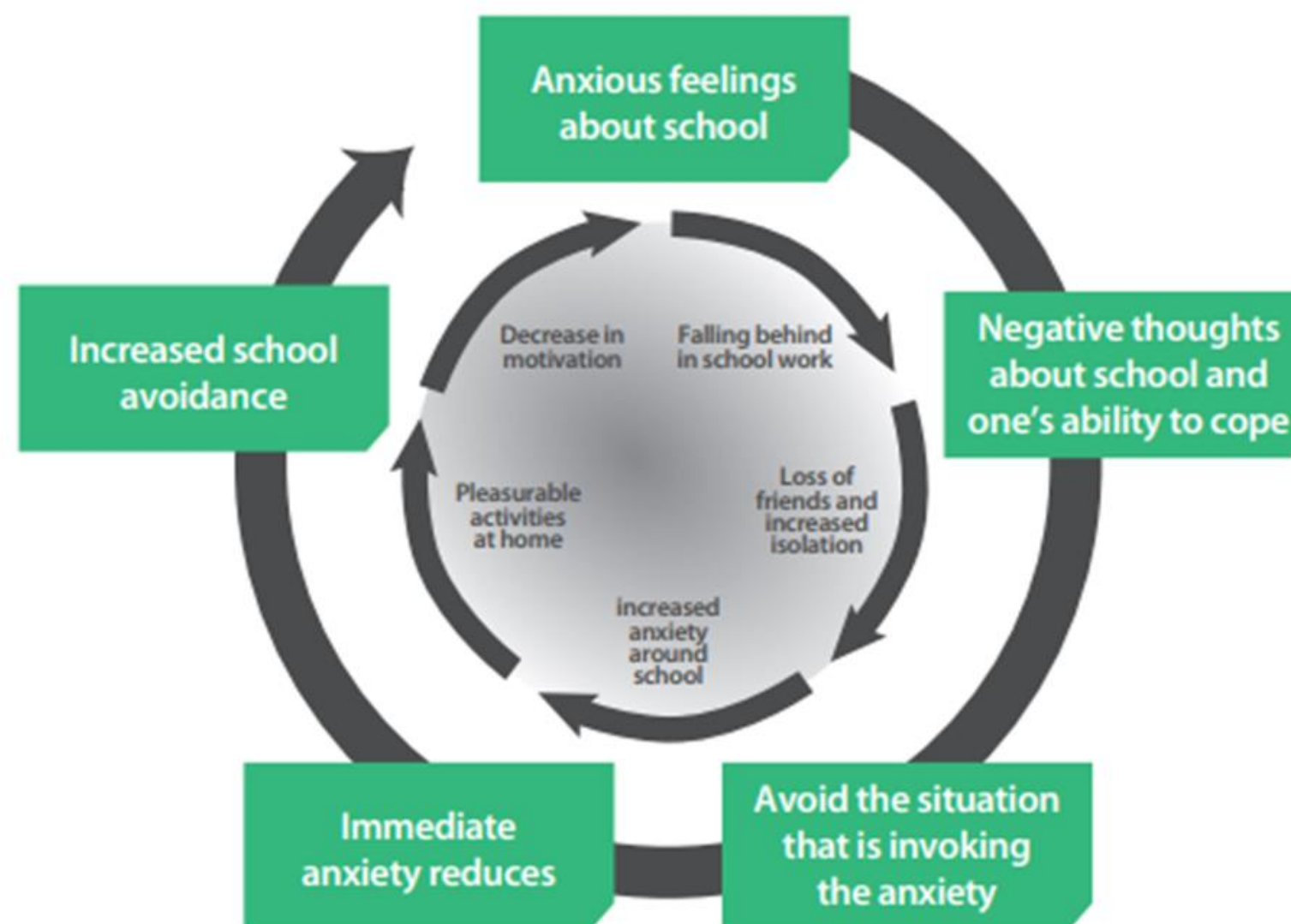


# Challenges in the School Environment

- Sensory challenges/overloads – Noise, smells, sight, touch, taste
- Uncertainties – the ‘what if’ questions that can spiral out of control
- Expectations
- Concentration
- Movement breaks
- Social expectations
- Masking



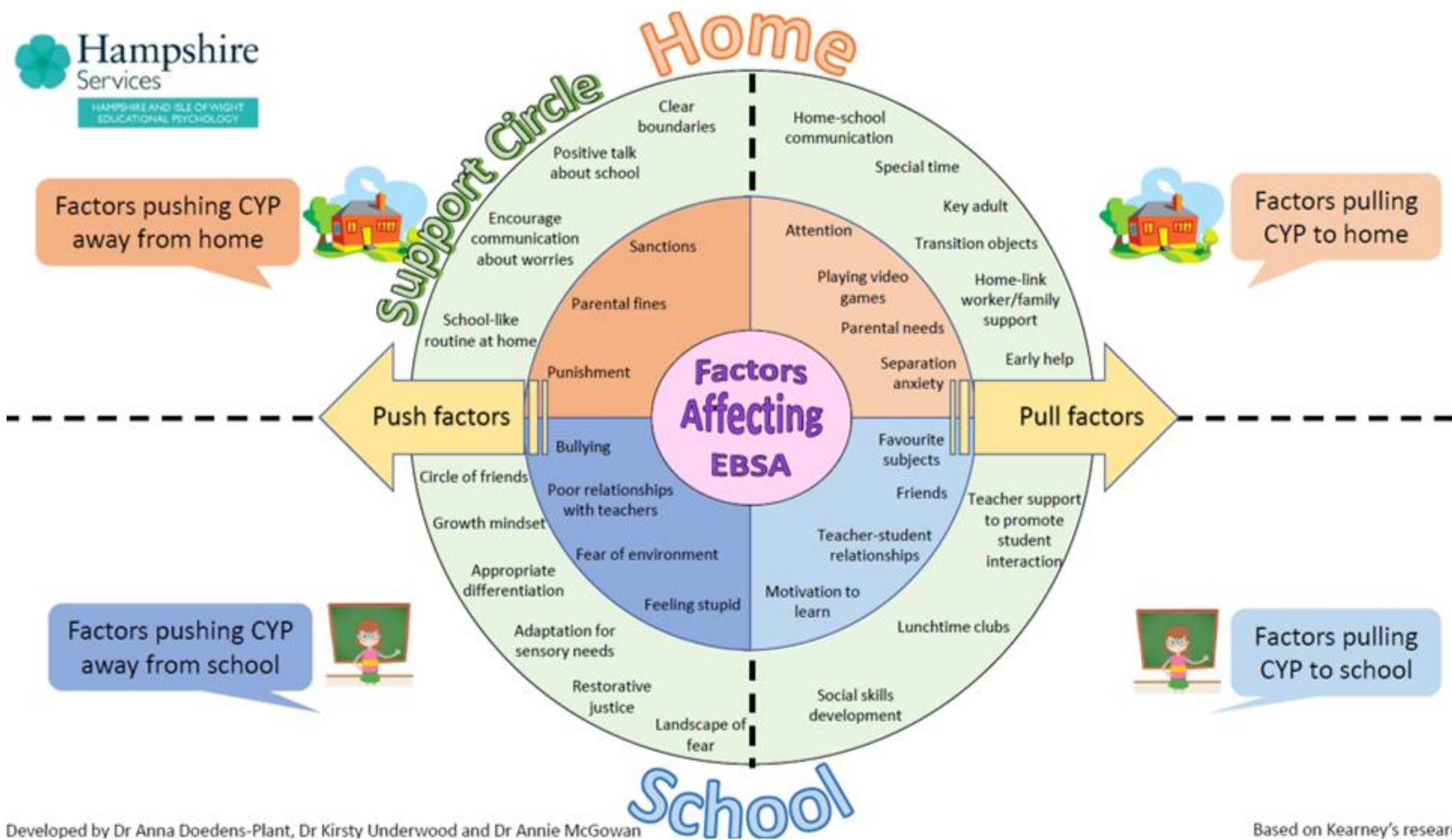
# How EBSA Behaviours Develop?



The longer the problems remain unaddressed the more difficult it becomes to change the school avoiding behaviour.



# EBSA Push/Pull



# How to Support Your Child When Struggling With Anxiety and/or School Attendance



# How you respond is important

Show your child that you are listening, and you understand

Empathise

Normalise

Validate

- Try to avoid jumping in to reassure or problem solve for your child.
- Focus on positives e.g. “It sounds like there are lots of fun things happening at school today”
- Support your child to learn they can cope, e.g. “You were worried yesterday but had a good day, maybe that shows us today will be good too”
- Remind them importance of attending school and explain that you and school will work with them to make it a happier environment.
- Encourage a focus at break/lunch times.
- Something to enjoy when they get home.

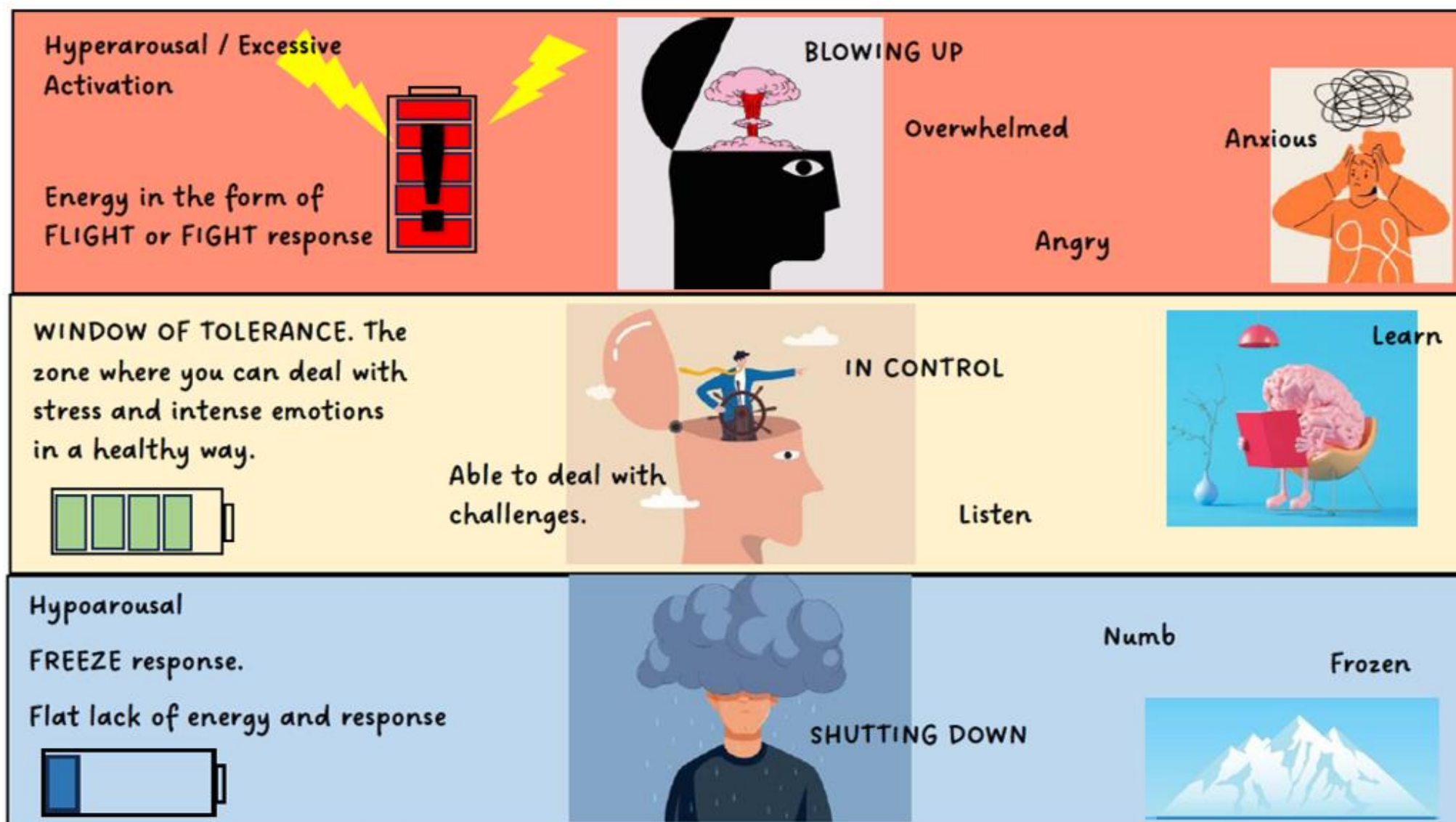


# Building Confidence and Resilience

1. Encourage independent behaviour
  - Young people need to learn they can cope on their own and not rely on adults
    - Do you find yourself stepping in? How could you encourage their independence?
2. Encourage them to try new or challenging things
  - Promote “have a go” behaviour
    - Use praise and rewards when they are brave or try new things

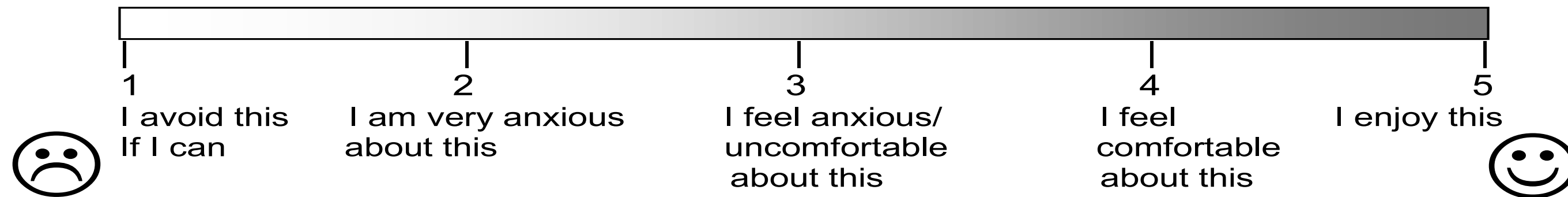
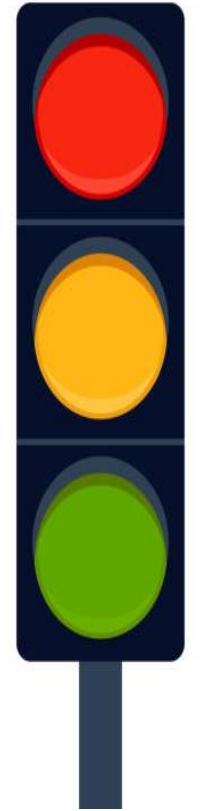


# Window of Tolerance



# Activities with Young People

- Create a map of the school or/and use the school timetable: This will help your child take the day lesson by lesson.
- Use the highlighter pens to mark how the areas on the map make your young person feel.
- **Green:** I feel calm and relaxed in this space.
- **Orange:** I feel anxious/uncomfortable in this space.
- **Red:** I would like to avoid this space as it makes me very anxious.



# Strategies to Manage Anxiety

Help your child understand what anxiety is and learn strategies to manage when attending/settling into school



## EXAMPLES OF WORRIES WE CAN CONTROL

I've lost my  
PE kit

I forgot my  
homework

I don't  
understand  
this question

## EXAMPLES OF WORRIES WE CAN'T CONTROL

What if  
I am late to  
a lesson and the  
teacher is angry  
with me?

What if I  
don't make any  
friends?

There are two types of worries, and we manage them in different ways.



## Problem Solving

If the worry is about a problem that we can do something about, problem solving helps us feel more in control.



**What is the problem?** - Ask your child to describe what the problem is



**Weird and wonderful solutions** – Ask your child to list as many different ideas as possible about what they might do to solve the problem.



**Which is the best solution?** – Ask your child what might happen if they carried out each solution, Ask your child whether each solution is possible, Ask your child to rate the best solutions out of 10.

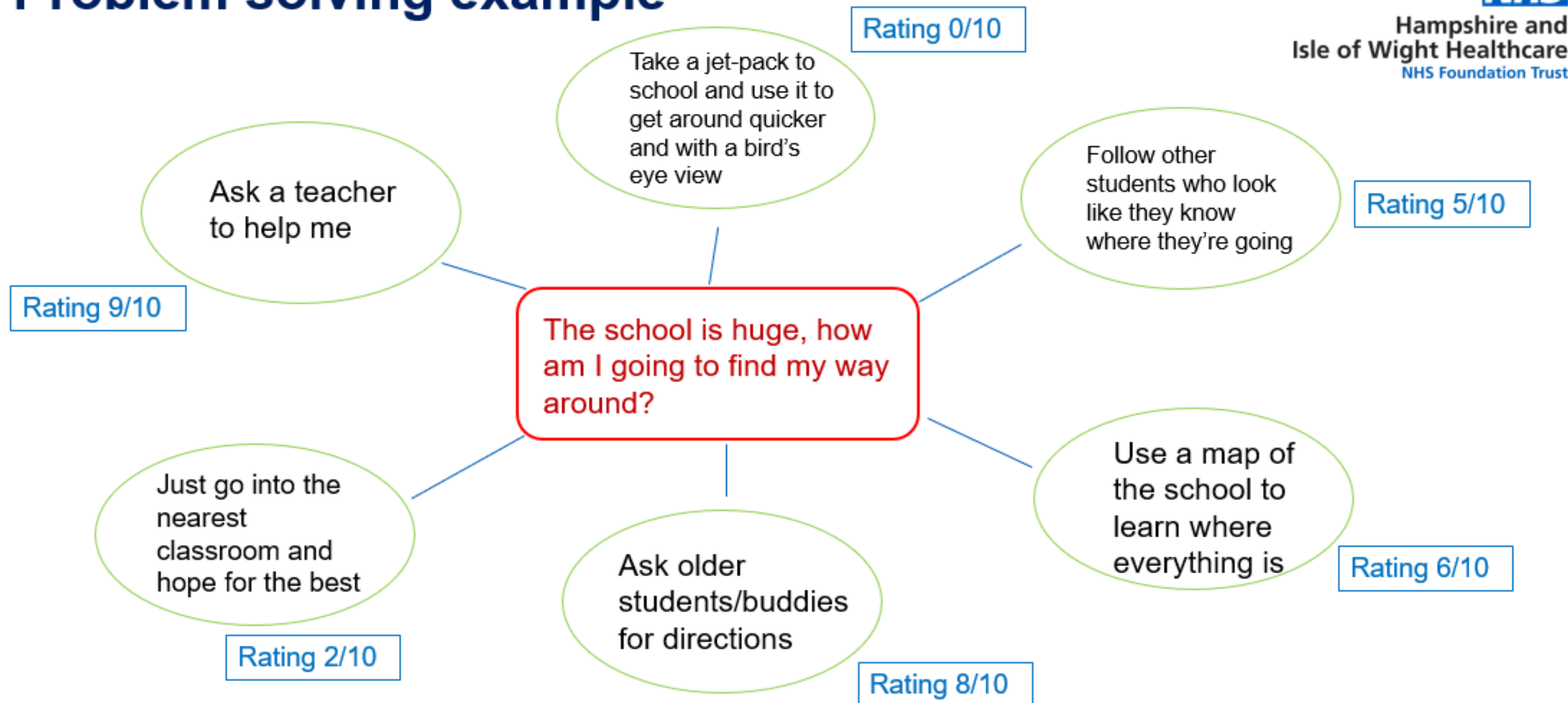


Encourage your child to make a decision and have a go!



Ask your child how it went.

## Problem solving example

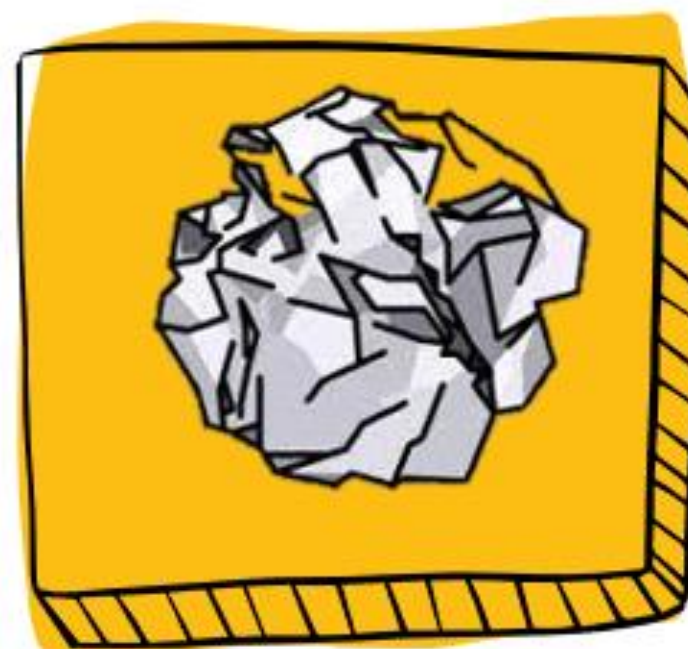


# Letting Worries Go

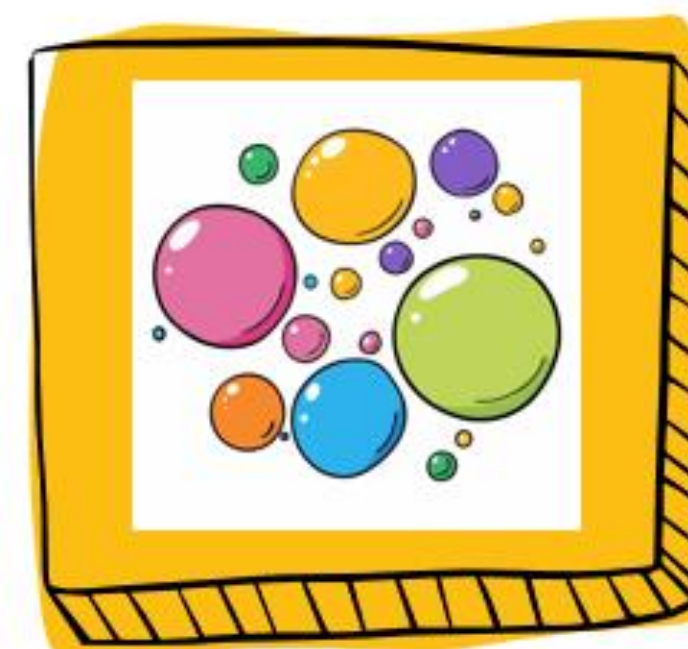
Some worries can't be problem-solved – we need to learn to let these worries go



Write down our worries and put them in a worry box/jar



Rip up/crumple up/throw away the worries that we can't control

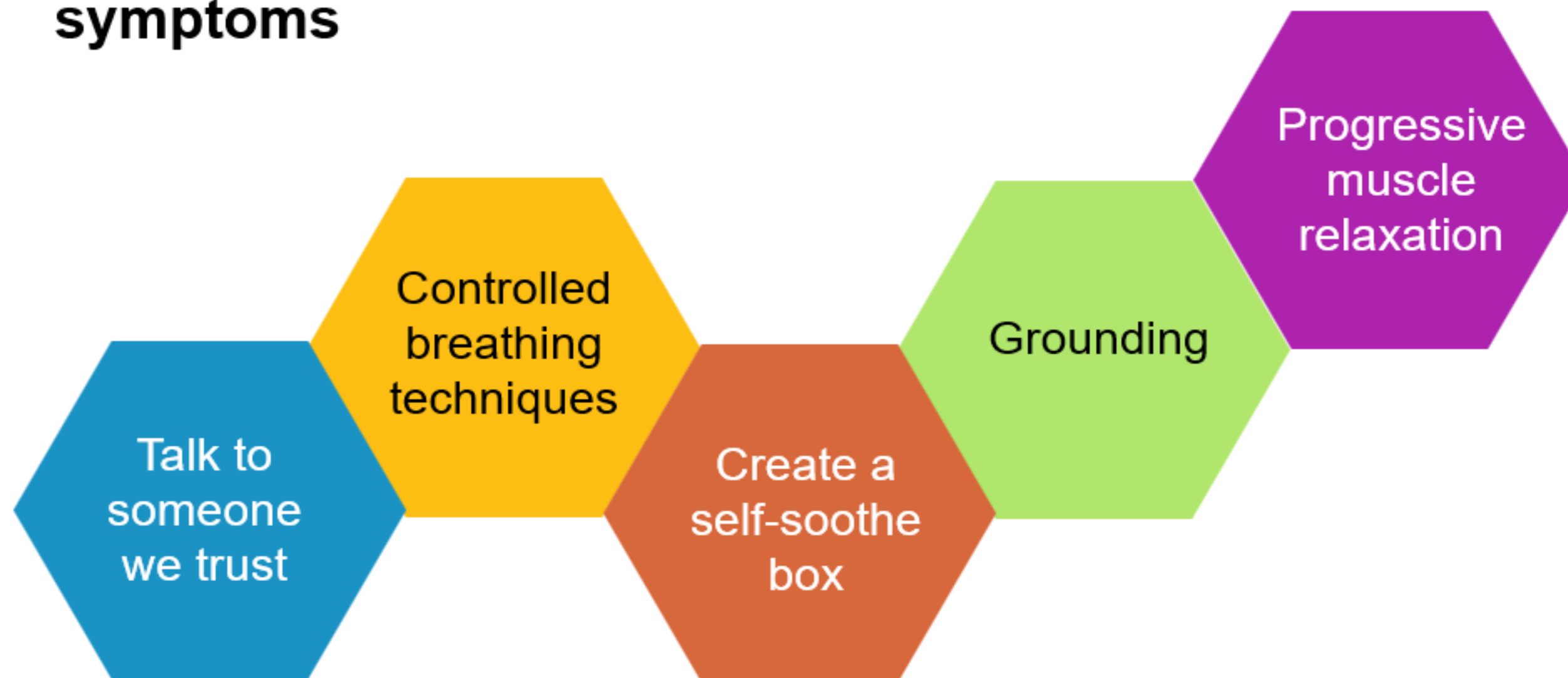


Imagine our worries floating away

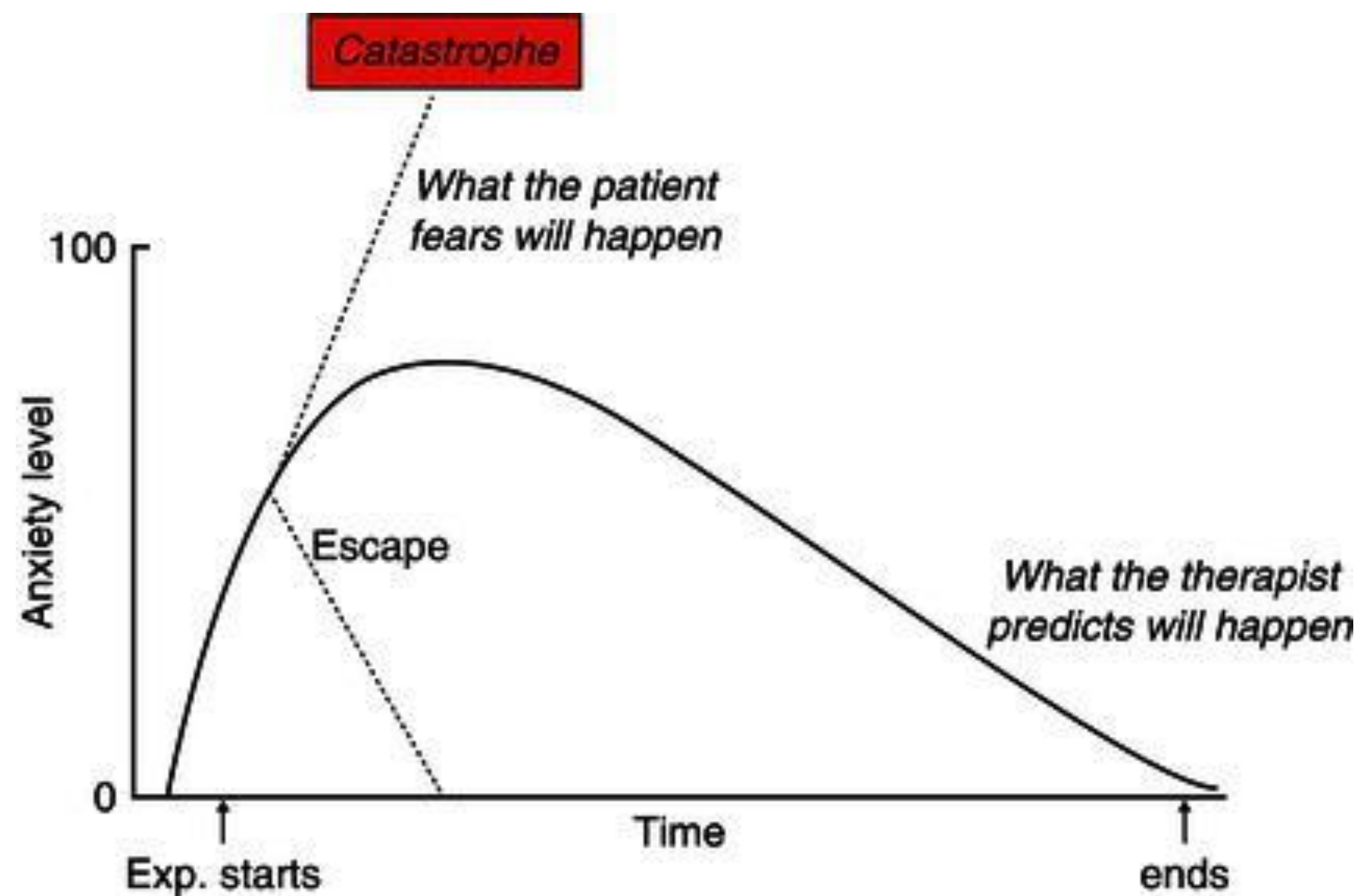


## Coping strategies to manage physical symptoms

Hampshire and  
Isle of Wight Healthcare  
NHS Foundation Trust

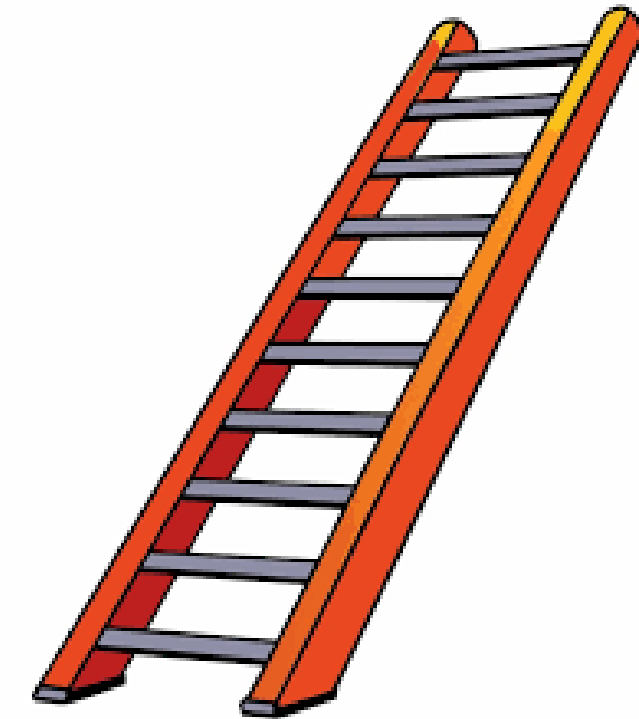


# Overcoming Avoidance



# Ways to Overcome Avoidance

- Graded approach to returning to school – the fear ladder approach
- Helping them to expand comfort zone outside of school
- Look out for opportunities for ‘have a go behaviour’



## Top tips:

- Work with school to develop a graded approach
- Consider rewards for brave behaviour
- Visually record progress to school attendance
- Look at progress over timetabled weeks not per week
- Teach your child other skills ie. problem solving, regulation skills prior to this and consider how they can use this to help them managed challenging themselves.



# Look After Yourself

Supporting your child through difficulties with attending school can be **VERY** challenging – don't forget your own needs.



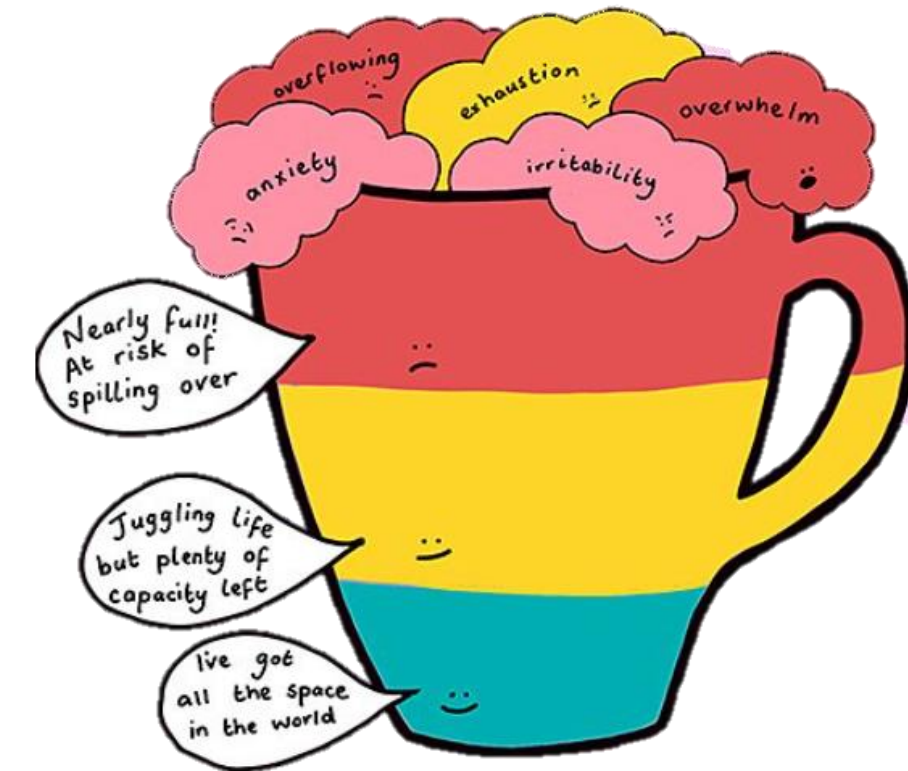
“...Place the oxygen mask on yourself first before helping small children or others who may need your assistance.”



# Look After Your Own Wellbeing

- **Supporting your basic needs** (i.e. eating, sleeping, medication) is fundamental to help you better support someone else
- **Find time** for small breaks and space to reflect
- **Prioritise small moments** for self-care
- **Problem solve:** Focus on what you can control
- **Pace** what you do where possible

**Be kind to yourself**



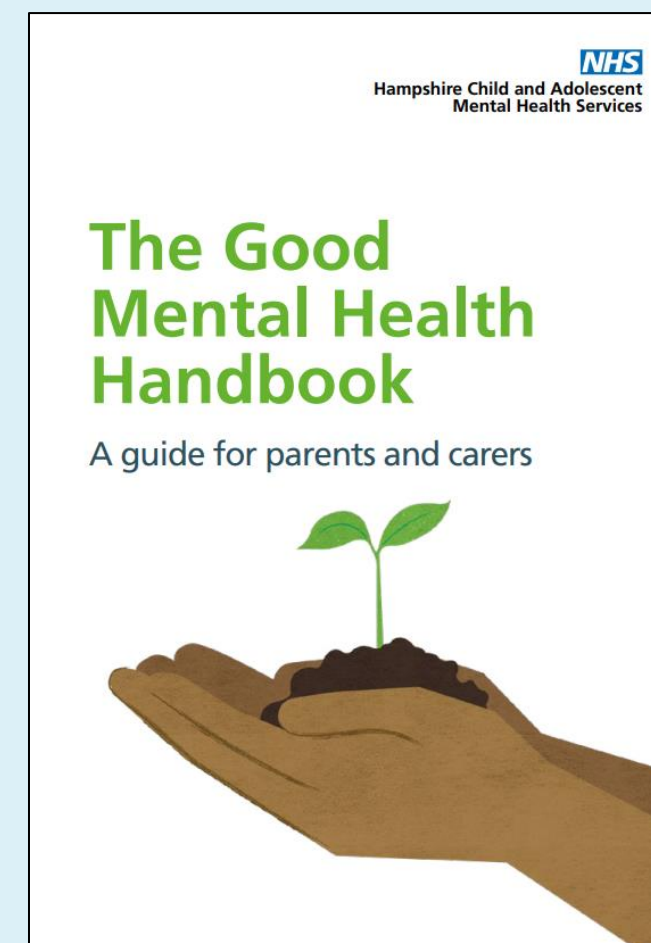
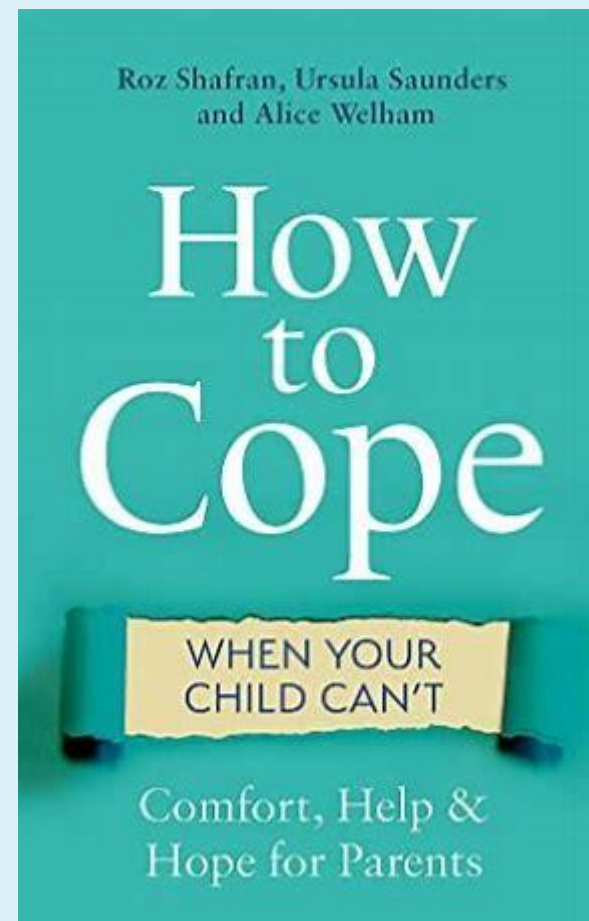
# A Final Note

Stay connected with school

Remember: Try and stay calm and take one day at a time!



# Resources

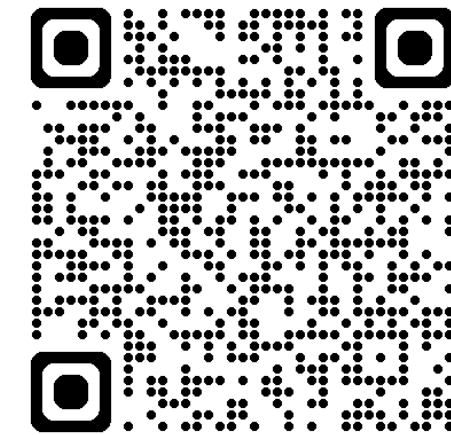


# SIGNPOSTING

## Useful Websites: EBSA

- Not Fine in School - School Refusal, School Attendance
- <https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/educationinclusionsservice>
- <https://www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/legalintervention/panel>
- What can I do if my child won't go to school **National Autism society** website.
- School Anxiety and Refusal | Parent Guide to Support | **YoungMinds**
- **CAMHS**

*Teach Me –  
Award Winning  
Documentary.  
Highly  
recommended!*



# SIGNPOSTING

## Resources

### Websites

Hampshire CAMHS [hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk](http://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk)

Mind [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)

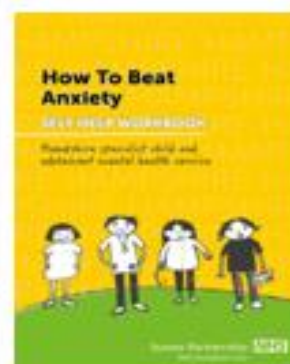
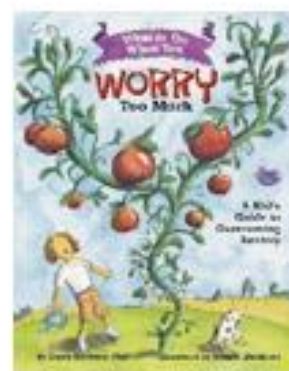
Kooth [www.Kooth.com](http://www.Kooth.com)

Young Minds [www.youngminds.org.uk](http://www.youngminds.org.uk)

AnxietyUK [www.anxietyuk.org.uk](http://www.anxietyuk.org.uk)

Back to Basics [www.hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/childrenandfamilies/back-to-basics](http://www.hants.gov.uk/socialcareandhealth/childrenandfamilies/back-to-basics)

### Books



**What is it?**  
A resource covering exam stress, friendships, LGBTQ+ and more along with activities, and signposting to help.  
**Target audience:**  
11-12 years and above.

### Coping strategies



# Workshop Feedback form (Before and after)





# THANK YOU

<https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/>

Any Questions?

