

# OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY TOOLS FOR ANXIETY

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## AGENDA

- Introduction to Anxiety
- Treatment Options
- O.T. Tools
  - Managing the Environment
  - Sensory Supports
  - Calming Techniques
  - Thinking Strategies
- Parenting Strategies
- Questions

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## ANXIETY

- Anxiety is a common feeling usually described as "uneasiness" or "apprehension." At one time or another, everyone experiences anxiety. It is highly treatable and manageable.

□ Schab, 2008

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**Perceived threat**

**Perceived ability to  
Manage the threat**

= **ANXIETY**

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## Anxiety, Fear and Panic

- ANXIETY: Apprehension about the future, negative mood, physical tension
- FEAR: Immediate alarm to current danger, physical arousal, avoidance
- PANIC: Fear at an inappropriate time, abrupt, intense, and physical arousal

□ Barlow, 2002

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## Normal Fears

- Infants: Stranger anxiety
- Toddlers: Separation, novel situations
- Preschool: Large, harmful, dark, imaginary
- Elementary: Dangers of the world
- Middle childhood: Academic, social competence, natural dangers, death
- Adolescence: Abstract, relationships, future

□ Wagner 2005

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## Normal vs. Problem Anxiety

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Reasonable   | <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Productive   | <input type="checkbox"/> Detrimental    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Manageable   | <input type="checkbox"/> Uncontrollable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mobilizing   | <input type="checkbox"/> Paralyzing     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Specific     | <input type="checkbox"/> Pervasive      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time-limited | <input type="checkbox"/> Chronic        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Age-matched  | <input type="checkbox"/> Age-mismatched |

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## Common Childhood worries:

- Storms and/or tornadoes
- Dogs and/or cats
- Being late
- Bugs, spiders and/or bees
- The dark
- Getting to sleep
- Being away from family
- Getting sick
- Making mistakes
- Parents going out
- Germs
- Dying
- Changes
- Performing in front of others

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Sometimes, all we see is...



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Or this...



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Or this...



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And as parents, we may feel like this...



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Children's experience of ANXIETY will depend on:

- Genetics: how our parents, grandparents, and ancestors experience anxiety.
- Brain chemistry: the type, amount, and movement of the chemicals working in our brains.
- Life events: the situations we are faced with in our lives
- Personality: how we look at and interpret things that happen to us.

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What's the issue?

Anxiety can be effected by....



- Communication
- Motor skills
- Sensory processing
- Learning skills
- Organization
- Social abilities
- Emotional regulation
- Chemical
- Environment

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Can you imagine a world where you...

- ...are not understood
- ...struggle to understand others
- ...have sensory issues
- ...struggle with depression
- ...have ADHD
- ...have difficulty regulating emotions?

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## ...Would you feel happy?



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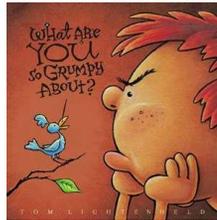
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- When we have attained a basic understanding of the challenges our children face, we have laid the foundation that is needed to understand the difficult moments that can be directly resulted from ANXIETY.



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## Anxious Thoughts

- Something terrible will happen.
- I don't have any control over it.
- It will be my fault if it happens.
- I don't know what to do!
- I have to get out of here!
- I need to know for sure that it's okay
- I can't make any mistakes

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## Physical Signs of Anxiety

- ❑ Tense, jittery, nervous
- ❑ Butterflies in tummy
- ❑ Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea
- ❑ Heart pounding, palms sweating
- ❑ Trouble breathing
- ❑ Trouble sleeping, nightmares
- ❑ On the lookout for danger

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## Anxiety Behaviours

- ❑ Checking to make sure things are safe
- ❑ Asking for reassurance – will it be okay?
- ❑ Leaving the situation – escape
- ❑ Staying away from things that seem scary - avoidance

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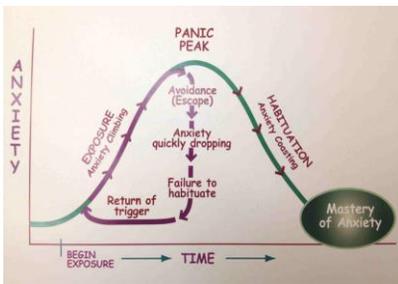
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## The Cycle of Anxiety



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## TREATMENT Options

- Who can I see?
  - Family Doctor
  - Pediatrician
  - Psychologist
  - Psychiatrist
  - Counselor
  - Play Therapist
  - Behaviour Therapist
  - Occupational Therapist
  
- What are some of the treatment options?
  - Medication
  - Modified environment & expectations\*
  - Cognitive-behavioural techniques\*
  - Sensory strategies\*



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## OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY TOOLS FOR ANXIETY

1. **Managing the Environment**
2. **Sensory Supports**
3. **Thinking Strategies**
4. **Calming Strategies**
5. **Parenting Strategies**



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## 1. THE ENVIRONMENT

### A. Operate on the child's time

- Twice as much time, half as much done
- Avoid rushing
- Monitor demands
- Balance the agenda (e.g. familiar activity early in the day)



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# 1. THE ENVIRONMENT

## B. Establish Routine

- Visual Schedule



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# 1. THE ENVIRONMENT

## C. Prepare for change

<u>Change in Routine Card</u>
NOTICE: _____ will be changed on _____ because _____.
The new _____ is _____.

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# 1. THE ENVIRONMENT

## D. Simplify the Language

- Break down the task into smaller steps
- Provide ongoing feedback
- Check-in on a regular basis
- Watch for literalness
- Comprehension not guaranteed
- Listen, probe and offer clarification

Instead of Saying...	Say or Do this instead...
Clean up your bedroom	Pick up 10 pieces of clothing from floor
Work on your homework	Answer question #1 and #2 from math book

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## 1. THE ENVIRONMENT

### E. Set a calm, positive tone

- Model acceptance
- Set a positive example
- Use a calm voice when speaking
- Give facts in an unemotional tone of voice
- Express information in a logical sequence
- Control the tendency to become intense, passionate or stressed.
- Model brave behaviour

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## 2. SENSORY STRATEGIES

- A "sensory diet" involves providing the type of activities that meet an individual's sensory needs throughout the day.
- For example: A child with sensory issues may crave fast movement experiences, such as swinging, and deep pressure activities, such as crashing into mountains of pillows or wrestling. Incorporating these types of sensory activities into the day helps decrease anxiety.
- In addition, aerobic **exercise**, such as **jogging** or performing jumping jacks, releases chemicals called endorphins that also decrease anxiety.
- Adults can create their own sensory diet with their favorite aerobic sport and weight lifting or "heavy muscle" tasks, such as shoveling snow, stacking wood or hoeing a garden.

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## 2. SENSORY STRATEGIES



### The Sensory Diet

SENSORY AREA	CALMING ACTIVITIES
Tactile	-Wear weighted vest or ankle weights -Snuggle under heavy blanket -Play with resistive putty -Wilbarger brushing protocol
Proprioceptive	-Push heavy furniture -Push a heavy cart to deliver books -Vacuum the floor -Wheelbarrow walk
Vestibular	-Jump on a trampoline -swing -Rock in rocking chair -Roll back and forth on yoga ball
Gustatory	-Chew or suck on hard candy or chewy food (e.g. bagel, dried fruit) -Drink through straw -Engage in blowing, chewing or sucking

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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### AFFECTIVE EDUCATION

- Why do we have emotion?
  - Their use and misuse.
- Identification of different levels of expression
  - Facial expression
  - Tone of voice
  - Body language
  - Context



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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

Feeling Thermometer



#### AFFECTIVE EDUCATION

- Once the key elements that indicate a particular emotion have been identified, it is important to use an 'instrument' to measure the degree of intensity.

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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

Name: Colton My Behavior Scale

Rating	Looks like	Feels like	I can try to
5	hurting others throwing things	like a flood growing	Too late - other people should leave me alone
4	screaming swearing	like a train wreck	WALK AWAY! stop talking go to Mr. Nelson office
3	ripping up assignment running out	like I can't stand it	walk to the weight room and lift - write a note
2	pacing in the room	getting nervous brain is racing	write down my thoughts get a drink read Happy Book
1	sitting doing work	fine pretty good.	Stay that way!

From The Incredible 5-Point Scale by Bruce, Bark, Boon and Curtis, 2004

#### AFFECTIVE EDUCATION

- The Incredible 5-Point Scale (Buron & Curtis, 2004) can be another very helpful strategy for teaching children how to recognize and communicate the magnitude of his/her distress and learning ways to self calm and possibly prevent his behaviour from escalating

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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### **AFFECTIVE EDUCATION**

- The FEAROMETER is another tool for measuring anxiety.



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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### **AFFECTIVE EDUCATION**

- It is important to explore how such emotions affect their bodies and thinking, such as:
  - Increasing heart rate
  - Sweating
  - Dry mouth
  - Muscle tension
  - Wobbly knees
  - Headache



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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### **COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY**

- This involves challenging the person's current thinking with logical evidence and ensuring the rationalization and cognitive control of emotion.
- A process when the child's inaccurate perceptions or dysfunctional beliefs are corrected.

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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### **COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING**

- Review of faulty thinking patterns:
  
- For example:
  - All-or-Nothing thinking
  - Negative lenses
  - Fortune telling
  - "Should" statements
  - Over generalization

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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### **COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING**

- Thought Stopping
- What's the worst that could happen?
- Cost-Benefit analysis
- Perfectionism
- Letting go of control
- Seeing the bigger picture
- Talking it out
- Positive affirmations

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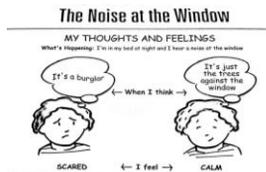
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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### **COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING**

- We have to identify POISONOUS (i.e. negative thoughts) and change them to POSITIVE thoughts (i.e. the antidote)



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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### **CALM THINKING**

- ❑ What am I worried about?
- ❑ Why does it worry me?
- ❑ What are the chances it will happen?
- ❑ What proof do I have that it will happen?
- ❑ What else could happen?
- ❑ So what if it happens?
- ❑ Can I be absolutely sure it won't happen?
- ❑ How could I handle it if it happened?

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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### **EXPOSURE AND RESPONSE PREVENTION**

- ❑ Exposure, exposure, exposure!
- ❑ The single most important management strategy.

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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### **EXPOSURE**

- ❑ Use rewards as motivators to get through the necessary exposures (it takes a drive to fight a drive!)
- ❑ This is NOT bribing. This is a reward – something that was earned through hard work.
- ❑ Rewarding retrains the brain to see the brave behaviour as a good thing...something that gives them Dopamine.

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### 3. THINKING STRATEGIES

#### □ EXPOSURE

- If there is no reward that is big enough to overcome the anxiety, then break down the behaviour into smaller chunks (e.g. develop a hierarchy of exposure)
- Once a specific behaviour has been managed with the use of a reward, continue to reward its successful completion for at least 2-3 weeks thereafter.

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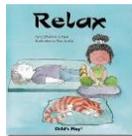
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### 4. CALMING STRATEGIES

- When our children's minds are tense, their bodies are tense, too.
- Relaxing their bodies will help them relax their mind.



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### 4. CALMING STRATEGIES

#### □ Relaxation:

- Is a skill
- Pick the right time
- Make the time
- Create a habit
- Create a relaxing environment
- Make it fun
- Keep it simple and short

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## 4. CALMING STRATEGIES

### □ TENSE-STRETCH-RELAX Games



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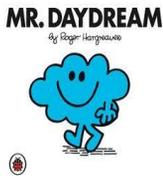
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## 4. CALMING STRATEGIES

### □ DAY DREAMS and Guided Imagery



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## 4. CALMING STRATEGIES

### □ DEEP BREATHING

- Candle breathing
- Lazy 8 breathing
- 6-sides of breathing



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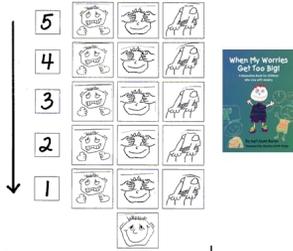
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## 4. CALMING STRATEGIES

### My CALMING SEQUENCE



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## 5. PARENTING STRATEGIES

### **The 3 S's: Security, Structure, Stability**

- Security: Unconditional love, despite problems
- Structure: Kind but firm limits
- Stability: Consistency – say it, mean it, do it!

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## 5. PARENTING STRATEGIES

### **Caregiver Responses**

- May unwittingly fuel anxiety
- Protective and closely involved
- Walk on eggshells, avoid upsetting child
- On alert for distress, rush to fix the problem
- Hesitate to encourage child to take risks
- Feel sad, frustrated, angry, guilty

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## 5. PARENTING STRATEGIES

### **Communication**

- ❑ Emotion and logic are mutually exclusive
- ❑ Avoid reasoning with a distraught child
- ❑ Wait until the child is calm
- ❑ Be concise and clear
- ❑ Give child time to digest information

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## 5. PARENTING STRATEGIES

### **Teaching By Example**

- ❑ Increase self-awareness
- ❑ Avoid mixed signals, messages of danger
- ❑ Teach and model:
  - Normal responses to threat and danger
  - How to accept and live with uncertainty
  - Reasonable risk-taking
  - Confidence in coping.

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## 5. PARENTING STRATEGIES

### **Self Reliance**

- ❑ Goal: Internalize strategies for coping
- ❑ Stop "auto-assisting"; redirect to "self-assist"
- ❑ Empower, foster confidence, independence
- ❑ Encourage reasonable risks, persistence
- ❑ Nudge one notch above comfort zone
- ❑ Discourage escape and avoidance
- ❑ Foster self-calming skills

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## 5. PARENTING STRATEGIES

### **Self-Calming**

- ❑ Taking space: Voluntary removal from situation that triggers loss of control
- ❑ Proactive teaching and planning
- ❑ Feeling Thermometer to identify early cues
- ❑ Designated space and activity to self-calm
- ❑ Teach child to take control of emotion
- ❑ Develop self reliance in soothing

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## 5. PARENTING STRATEGIES

### **What NOT to do:**

- ❑ Do not discuss family finances with them.
- ❑ Do not expose them to conflict between spouses.
- ❑ Do not talk to them about YOUR worries.
  
- ❑ Stop answering all of their questions of reassurance (2-3 at a maximum)

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## 5. PARENTING STRATEGIES

### **Summary of Steps**

- ❑ Identify triggers
- ❑ Anticipate and dissipate
- ❑ Offer choices
- ❑ Foster self-calming
- ❑ Disengage
- ❑ Reengage
- ❑ Reduce recurrences

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## SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

### Things to Remember....

- ❑ The child's environment (routine, structure)
- ❑ The child's understanding of feelings and their intensity (5-point Incredible Scale, Feeling Thermometer, social stories, comic strip conversations)
- ❑ The child's sensory experience (Sensory diet)
- ❑ Correcting the child's inaccurate perceptions or dysfunctional beliefs (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy)
- ❑ Exposure and response prevention.
- ❑ Other medical factors (medication)

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## SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

### Additional recommendations:

- ❑ Encourage and reward your child for their effort and engagement
- ❑ Ignore excessive displays of anxiety
- ❑ Make the connection between anxious thoughts, physical changes and anxious behaviour
- ❑ Convey confidence in you child's ability
- ❑ Model you own courageous behaviours

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## Finally....

### Bill of Rights for Behaviorally Challenging Kids

- ❑ If we don't start doing right by kids with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges, we're going to keep losing them at an astounding rate. Doing the right thing isn't an option...it's an imperative. There are ***lives in the balance***, and we all need to do everything we can to make sure those lives aren't lost.

Dr. Ross Greene, Lives in the Balance

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# OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY TOOLS FOR ANXIETY

QUESTIONS  
& DISCUSSION

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