



Kings Langley School

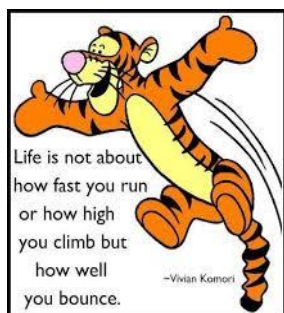
Unlocking Potential for Life

Supporting Confidence, Self Esteem and Positive Mental Health

**A Self Help Guide for
Students and Parents**



Understanding and Managing Anxiety



Many children can be affected by low self esteem and levels of anxiety and the challenge we all face is how to support this to avoid it escalating from pretty harmless tendencies ('a bit on the anxious side') into behaviour that is concerning. If a child has low confidence or self esteem, this will impact their willingness to attend school and be involved in all of the opportunities that school can provide academically and otherwise. It will also impact how they cope with life out of school and how they develop friendships.

Statistics state that 1 in 10 children will experience a problem with their mental health but that does not mean that it will become a serious issue for them. Anxiety occurs when stress exceeds the support they have around them so those around children need to help them understand that anxiety and stress is a common and normal emotion. Stress is a hormone and a natural response that the body triggers when preparing for a challenge. Therefore we will all experience stress at some time in our lives and therefore it needs to be managed and not avoided and we need to encourage our children to make stress a 'friend' and find strategies to help manage it and avoid it escalating to the point where our children cannot manage it.

The Six 'C's



Competence

Confidence

Connection

Contribution

Coping

Control

Competence - Children flourish when what they can do matches our expectations. This needs to be managed as too much or too little affects their self esteem and can lead to anger, frustration and sometimes despair. We need to empower our children to make positive choices and decisions and encourage them to solve their own problems with our support.

Confidence – Children need our attention and will behave in ways that gain the most attention. This might not always be behaviour that we want and therefore a key tip is to reduce the notice we taken when they are behaving negatively and give attention when they are making positive choices. Children need to be able to hear and receive criticism and praise but praise is very powerful. What we pay attention to is what we get more of and this is true of children of any age.

Connection – Helping our children identify and name feelings is empowering. All feelings are valid and behind every behaviour there are feelings and we need to help our children to express them healthily, understand them and also to respect the feelings of others. Adults can often be dishonest in trying to protect children's feelings so the adults need to be honest and say how you feel because by acknowledging your feelings you are helping to role model how children can manage theirs.



Contribution – Children get a great sense of satisfaction when they feel they can and have made a contribution, it is one of the best boosts for self esteem. Therefore we need to create opportunities for children to contribute in some way whether at home, school or in the community. Contribution also helps as a distraction and is key to building confidence and reducing anxiety.

Coping – This is key to managing anxiety is finding coping strategies that work for us and therefore we need to encourage our children to develop positive coping strategies by showing them what works for us. We need to encourage our children not to over-react and encourage them that everyone has the ability to cope. We also need to own our own mistakes and talk to our children when we may not be coping.

Control – Helping our children to understand the outcomes of their decisions – both positive and negative. We need to help them to understand they can make changes to the way they feel, guide them to be able to put their feelings and anxiety into perspective and help them take responsibility for their actions.

Developing Confidence and Resilience

Helping our children to own their anxiety is key and we must not allow them to expect others to ‘fix it’ for them. We need to encourage them to take ownership of how they are feeling, teach them to problem solve and support them in working out how they can handle challenges – what works and what doesn’t. If they own it they can do something about it. We can help to teach our children how to problem solve and support them in working out how they can handle challenges and to work out what works and what doesn’t.

Children can often fall into **‘Thinking Traps’**. Children can be quick to catastrophise and these ‘thinking traps’ can become overwhelming. We need to talk to them about what they are thinking and help them challenge their thoughts - Is it True?, Where is the evidence?, Is it a helpful thought? We can then help them to look at alternative thoughts.

Helping children put things into perspective also helps when our children are becoming overwhelmed. Discuss the specific issue that is causing the anxiety. We need to help our children explore what is the worst case that could happen, what is the best case and then discuss with them to be more realistic and ask what is the most likely to happen and then help them to develop a plan of what they can do

Positive Mental Health

Stress is only negative if we choose it to be and we are often very good at talking ourselves down and focusing on the negative. We can choose our mood by how we think, therefore if your child is becoming overwhelmed, take time out. Distractions are key to helping when children are becoming increasingly anxious but they may need support with the distraction. Encourage them to have time to do something they enjoy.





We also need to encourage our children to think more positively – encourage them to say ‘I can’ rather than ‘I can’t’. We need to introduce the work ‘Yet’ – I can’t do this activity.....yet and also remind our children of their past successes when they ‘have’ managed or succeeded.

We can encourage children by asking ‘How’ questions rather than ‘Why’ questions as this can help them to solve their own problems. We need to avoid providing all the answers as this will also help them problem solve. Asking such questions as ‘So how might you handle that’ or ‘What do you think you could do differently’ can help them to manage their emotions and will help to teach children that emotions are ok but they need to be expressed safely.

Boosting Self Esteem

Adults need to encourage children to ask these questions:

- *What can I do to get back on track?*
- *I can’t control everything, so what is in my control?*
- *Can I change something I’m doing to make things better?*
- *What can I learn from this?*
- *Who can help?*
- *How can I move forward?*

Adults also need to model resilience as we cannot expect our children to control their behaviour if we are ‘flipping out’ and importantly when we make a mistake admit it as this is a great role model for resilience.

Encourage your children to be kind to themselves, help them to avoid comparing themselves to others. Encourage them to say positive things about themselves and try to get them to notice the good things. We need to encourage them to celebrate their successes, reduce putting too much weight on negatives. Get them to write a positive list of things they like, encourage them to do things they enjoy and finally encourage them to have fun in something.

Useful Sources of Information

- healthforteens.co.uk
- Healthyoungmindsinherts.org.uk
- nspcc.org.uk
- mind.org.uk
- Kooth.com
- Themix.org.uk
- youngminds.org.uk
- www.gadeschoolsfamilysupport.co.uk
- www.kls.herts.sch.uk/student_wellbeing/student_and_family_services

