



# ANXIETY

## EXPERIENCED BY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

**A panel discussion to celebrate Psychology Week, hosted by the  
Institute of Educational and Developmental Psychology**

# KARAKIA

**Whakataka te hau ki te uru  
Whakataka te hau ki te tonga  
Kia mākinakina ki uta  
Kia mātaratara ki tai  
E hī ake ana, te atakura  
He tio, he huka, he hau hū  
Tīhei mauri ora!**

Cease the winds from the west  
Cease the winds from the south  
Let the breeze blow over the land  
Let the breeze blow over the ocean  
Let the red-tipped dawn come with a sharpened  
air.  
A touch of frost, a promise of a glorious day.

**Whakatauki  
Mā te huruhuru ka rere te manu  
Adorn the bird with feathers so it may soar**

# INTRODUCING THE PANEL:

Robyn Stead, IEDP Chairperson, registered educational psychologist, working in private practice in Auckland. I'm married and have two sons one 24 and one 21 years old.

Margaret McNally, IEDP Secretary, registered educational psychologist, I work at Learning Support, I have two teenage boys.

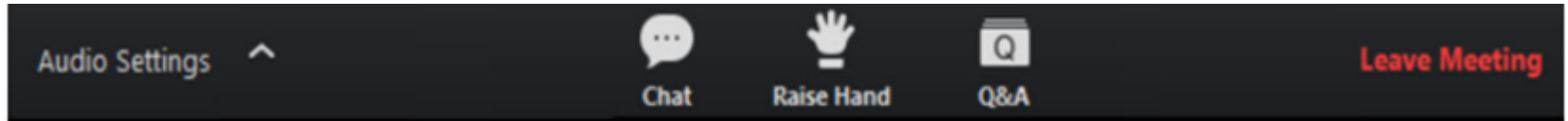
Polly Schaverien, IEDP Committee member and registered clinical psychologist. Director of *How I Learn* – which specialises in learning assessments, and work in private practice supporting people with anxiety, depression and eating disorders. Parent of two teenagers.

Jo, IEDP Student Representative and registered educational psychologist. I work in the Resource Teacher, Learning & Behaviour (RTL B) service supporting schools, teacher, children and young people and their families. I have three adult sons and live in Tauranga.

Katrina, Student Representative, registered classroom teacher and Resource Teacher of Learning and Behaviour in Tauranga. Currently on the Master of Educational and Developmental Psychology programme.

# HOW TO ASK QUESTIONS OF THE PANEL

Use the Q & A button at the bottom of your screen to ask questions.



# DEFINING OUR TOPIC: ANXIETY IS A JOURNEY

Tonight we are talking the typical experience of anxiety, fear or worry that everyone encounters at one time or another.

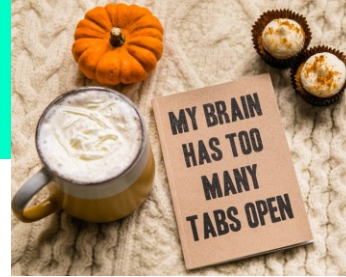
Being a student can be joyful, interesting and exciting...



but it can also make us feel anxious.

We'd like to provide some ideas about how you can help and to provide some answers to your questions

# WHY DO WE FEEL ANXIETY?



From an evolutionary perspective anxiety is a useful adaptation because it helps keep us safe from physical dangers in the environment. Anxiety helps us to consider, plan and strategize how to keep ourselves safe.

Anxiety is something that our thinking mind creates which is reflected in our bodies.

In our modern world there are certainly things which anxiety legitimately helps us to negotiate safely.

# COMMON TRIGGERS FOR ANXIETY IN SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN/YP

- Assessment and grades
- Peer relationships
- Relationships with teachers
- If Learning feels hard
- New situations
- Sensory overload – e.g. too much noise
- Change – of any description

# WHEN ANXIETY BECOMES A PROBLEM: YOUR SMOKE DETECTOR IS TOO SENSITIVE

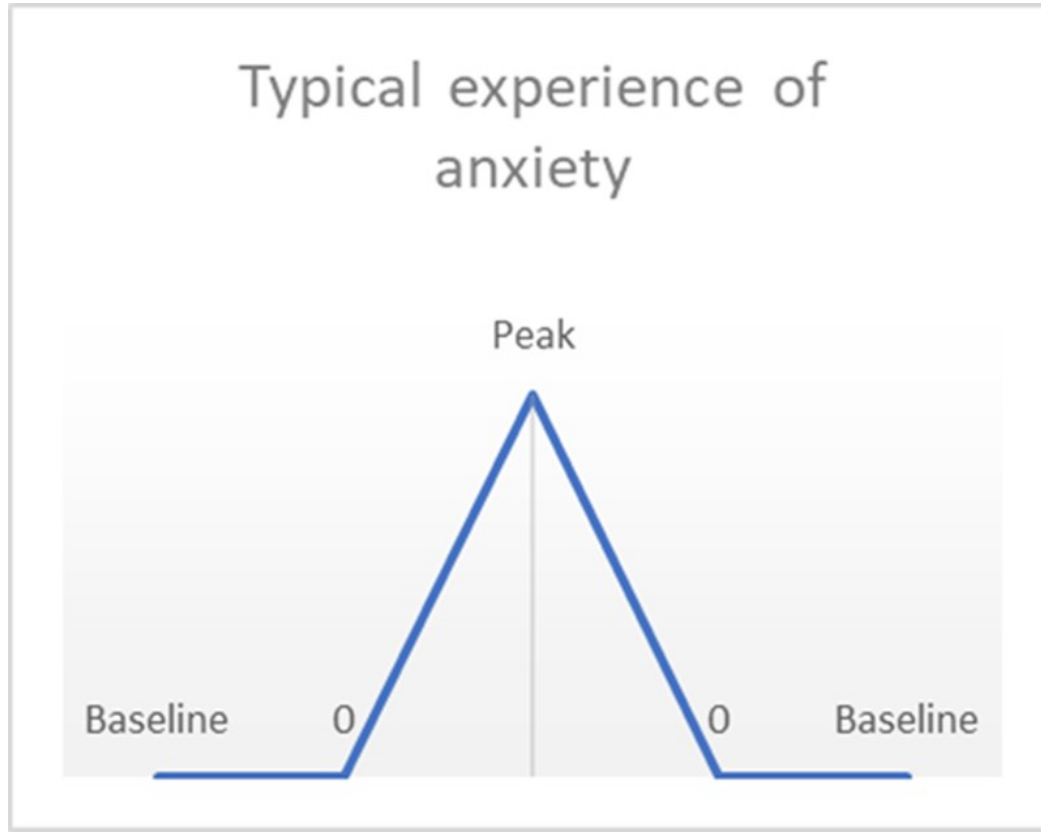
When there is something that is legitimately concerning (for you) but your reaction is overly extreme.

One bad experience can make us think every similar experience will be bad.





# WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE FEEL ANXIOUS



# HOW TO HELP CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE MANAGE ANXIETY

Allow children to experience the change in their mood/feelings from baseline to the peak of anxiety and then the descending of the anxious feelings back to baseline.

Acknowledge the reality of the strength of the feelings.

Normalise the experience of anxiety for children. Everyone experiences anxiety/worry. It often feels worse than the situation is.

Link feelings with the way we are thinking. Behind every worried/anxious feeling is a thought.

Ask your child what is causing them concern about the situation.

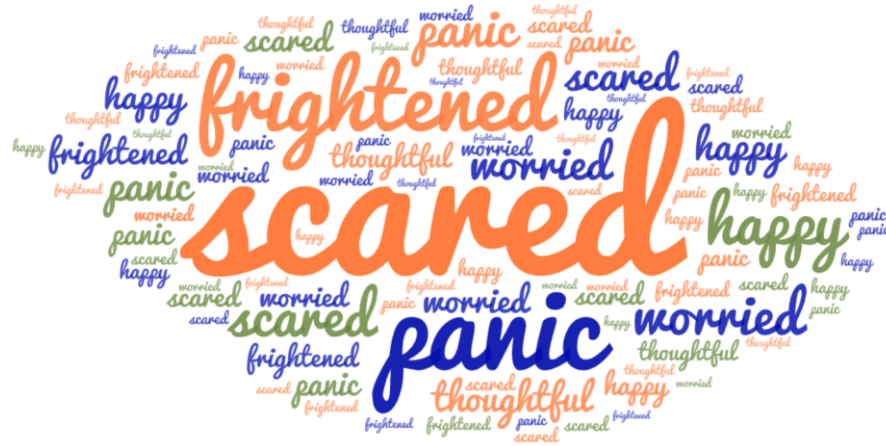
Validate the feelings of anxiety.

Avoid telling children not to feel something.



# HOW TO HELP: TALK ABOUT FEELINGS

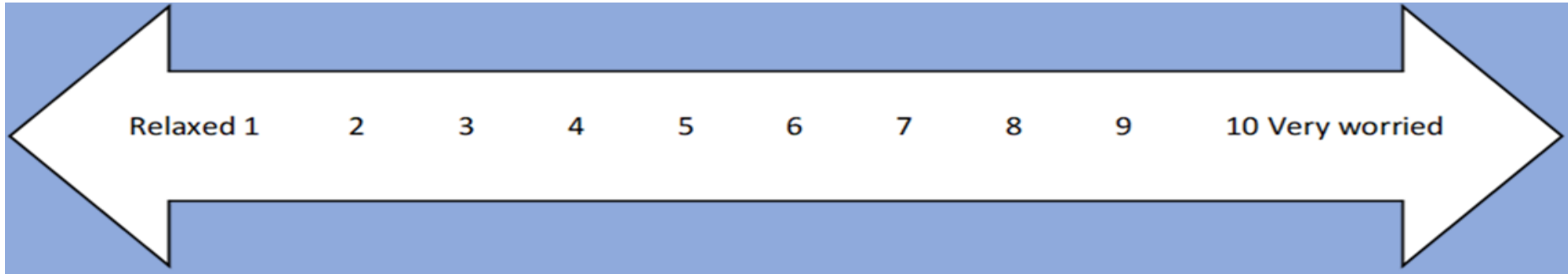
Sometimes children have difficulty talking about their feelings because they don't have the language to describe them.



# HOW TO HELP: USE A SCALE TO PUT THOUGHTS INTO CONTEXT

What if...?

- talk about the situation your child is worried about
- select a number that represents how worried they are.
- Ask “What would help you feel just a little less worried?”



# HOW TO HELP: PRACTICE REALISTIC THINKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

When your child is worried or anxious it is easy for them to jump to the worst-case scenario or to catastrophize the situation. **Help them to think through the reality.**

Remind your child that their thinking is creating the feelings and that thinking can be used to alter the feelings and find solutions to the situations they are concerned about.



# HOW TO HELP: TALK ABOUT PHYSICAL REACTIONS

Talk about where in the body anxiety or worry is felt.

Common experiences are:

- *increased, shallow breathing*
- *fast heart beat*
- *urge to go to the toilet*
- *feeling hot and/or sweaty*
- *tears*
- *aching stomach*
- *Trembling*
- *blushing*



Naming and talking about these experiences helps us understand what is going on for the child, and helps the child understand their own experience.

# HOW TO HELP: ENGAGE IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Physical activity can help send the signal to our brain that the ‘danger has passed’.

- ***practice tummy breathing***
- ***engage the senses*** e.g. holding an object that is tactile, wrapping a blanket around them, having a bubble bath. Try building a ‘sensory tool box’ for your child.
- ***get active*** e.g. walking, backyard cricket, skipping, bouncing on a trampoline, playing catch or just running around outside.



# HOW TO HELP: CALM THE ENVIRONMENT

Keep the child's **routines predictable** and reduce other demands.

- praise your child's management of what they perceive as difficult situations. Keep the **focus on what they can do**.
- '**positive forecasting**' – remind your child of previous success.

**Remember – Self Care** – making sure you are alright is important. Check if you are feeling anxious about this situation for them. They will notice!





# HOW TO KNOW IF YOU MAY NEED TO SEEK FURTHER SUPPORT

If your child's worries/anxiety significantly interfere with the child or family daily functioning and routines.

The worries/anxiety are not age appropriate.

The worries/anxiety persist across an extended period

(longer than 6 months).

## **A couple of useful questions to ask yourself:**

Is anxiety stopping my child from doing the things they want or need to do?

Do most children of the same age also have the same fear or worry?



# WHAT TO DO IF YOU HAVE AN IMMEDIATE PROBLEM

Your GP is a great person to contact, as they can link you to resources in your community.

Speak with your child/young person's teacher or someone in the leadership team at your child's school about how to access support.



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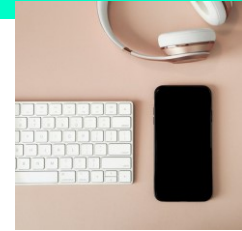
<https://parent2parent.org.nz/>

<https://www.parenthelp.org.nz/ages-and-stages/>

<https://www.thelowdown.co.nz/> support for a young person to manage emotions and talk about concerns, this support can be accessed using text or email or phone depending on what suits.

<https://www.youthline.co.nz/> support to manage emotions and talk about concerns, this support can be accessed online.

<https://www.whatsup.co.nz/> support to manage emotions and talk about concerns, this support can be accessed online.



# IF YOU HAVE A CRISIS SITUATION

If you, or your young person is at immediate risk, and you are worried about their safety, or the safety of others:

Dial 111

Or go to your nearest hospital emergency department

Or contact your local mental health crisis team, information can be found on the you can call helpline 0800611 116 for local information.

If you need to talk to someone else:

Free call or text 1737 for support from a trained counsellor

Lifeline 0800 543 354, Free text 4357 (HELP)

Youthline 0800 376 633, Free text 234

Samaritans, 0800 726 666

# WHAT SCHOOLS ARE PROVIDING



Teaching about anxiety, other emotions and strategies links with

the **Health and PE curriculum** and also the **Key Competencies**

- **Mindfulness programmes:** Pause Breathe Smile and Smiling Minds
- Social and emotional **learning curriculums:** Bounce Back, Zones of Regulation,
- Building **emotional vocabulary** so children are able to “name it to tame it”
- Individual and classwide **accommodations** such as quiet spaces, brain breaks, break cards, check-in systems

# USEFUL RESOURCES: APPS

These can be useful to help develop an awareness of the way thinking influences feelings, among other uses.

- Smiling Minds, Australian, designed for schools, children as well as adults
- Calm, American, designed for both children and adults, has some exercise free videos (free resources:<https://www.calm.com/resources>)
- Headspace, British, designed for both children and adults

# USEFUL RESOURCES: BOOKS 1

**Books for parents** to help develop more understanding of their child/young person's mental health:

- *Helping your anxious child* second edition (Ronald Rapee, Ann Wignall, Susan Spence, Vanessa Cobham, Heidi Lyneham)
  - *Untangled and Under Pressure* (Lisa Damour,)
- Both books focus on parenting girls with Under Pressure considering anxiety specifically.



## **Books for teachers**

*Mental health education and hauora: Teaching interpersonal skills, resilience, and wellbeing.* Most suitable for teachers working with students in years 7-11.

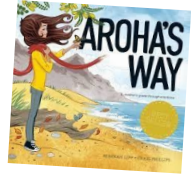
<https://www.nzcer.org.nz/nzcerpress/mental-health-education>

# USEFUL RESOURCES: BOOKS 2



## Books for young people experiencing anxiety:

- *Hey Warrior* and *Hey Awesome* by Karen Young, which explain anxiety to children so that they can understand anxiety and learn to manage it.
- *Aroha's Way* by Craig Phillips a picture book for children around uncomfortable emotions; fear, apprehension, worrying thoughts and nervousness with ways to manage them



## Books for teens & young adults experiencing anxiety:

- *The Illustrated Happiness Trap: How to Stop Struggling and Start Living* by Russ Harris
- *When Life Gives You Lemons* by Celia Painter and Abbie Kriebler
- *Stuff that Sucks* by Ben Sedley



# USEFUL RESOURCES: WEBSITES AND BLOGS

- **Sparklers Website** – Some very useful resources put together after the Christchurch Earthquakes and Updated for Covid-19, <https://sparklers.org.nz/>
- **Hey Sigmund** – A comprehensive website focused on anxiety with a range of resources for a wide age range <https://www.heysigmund.com/about/>
- **The melon health anxiety toolbox** is designed for young people – <https://www.melonhealth.com/manual/anxiety-toolbox/>
- **Dr Lisa Damour** – Website & podcasts designed for parents around a range of issues <https://www.drlisadamour.com/podcast/>
- **WayAhead** – An Australian website aimed at educating about mental health including anxiety. Resources & guides are provided for parents and schools <https://wayahead.org.au/>

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

