

# PSYCHOEDUCATION

## ANXIETY:

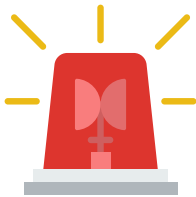
## FIGHT, FLIGHT, FREEZE.

### OUR BRAIN



One area of the brain is called the **amygdala** which controls how we feel (fear, anger, happiness etc) and how we feel can determine how we react to our situations. The second area of the brain is called the **pre-frontal cortex** and controls our thinking, learning and helps to moderate our behaviour. The pre-frontal cortex helps us to think logically about our behaviour and make choices in how we act.

When the **amygdala** and **pre-frontal cortex** work together we are able to **think, feel and behave** well and manage our thoughts and feelings **rationally**.



Occasionally our amygdala can go on "**high alert**" and will sometimes react to '**normal**' situations as **threats**. This stops the amygdala from working together with the pre-frontal cortex and stops us from being able to think and behave rationally. This then starts the process of **unpleasant anxiety symptoms** and will cause us to go into the **fight, flight and freeze** in response to what is happening in our brain.

### FIGHT

If the amygdala senses a **threat**, it will activate the body's fight, flight or freeze alarm and release **adrenaline** and **cortisol** into the **body**. This means the pre-frontal cortex cannot think rationally or regulate the body and our behaviour. This can result in our body getting ready to **fight** the perceived threat by **pumping blood** around our body. The heart will **beat faster** and we may **breathe faster**, as our body is preparing to "**fight**" the perceived threat with **anger**.



### FLIGHT

Another reaction we might have is to **flight** and to try and **get away** from the perceived threat. Rather than staying to defend yourself (**fight**) your body might prepare to **run away**. This will also result in the body producing **adrenaline** and **cortisol** chemicals making the **heart beat faster**. This helps us to become very alert and focused on getting away from the threat and **escaping** with anxiety.

### FREEZE

The third reaction our body's might have is to **freeze**. The overwhelming physical sensations of anxiety might cause our body to feel **stuck on the spot**. A persons body might go **rigid and stiff**, or **limp and unable to move**. When a persons body freezes it is trying to protect them. Just like the fight and flight this is a **natural response**.



# MY REMINDERS

## SELF HELP TIPS TO SUPPORT PANIC / ANXIETY SYMPTOMS

### ANXIETY IS A NORMAL EMOTION



It is true! anxiety is our body's natural way of trying to protect us from danger. Anxiety is useful when faced with the danger of crossing a busy road, or when faced with a hungry tiger, but sometimes our brain reacts to situations that are **not dangerous** in reality. This might include: being asked to speak in front of the class by a teacher, or meeting new people for the first time. These situations are not a dangerous **threat**, but our brain reacts as though they are and anxiety can start to **overwhelm** our body and brain.

Having some anxiety is **normal**. We can all feel some anxiety before a big exam for example. But when these anxious feelings start to **take over** our day to day activities and change our **behaviour** we may need some help to manage our anxiety -and that is ok!

### PHYSICAL BODY SENSATIONS

Anxiety can bring with it some **unpleasant physical sensations**. These sensations can feel very **overwhelming** and leave us physically **exhausted** after our anxiety subsides. These are just a few examples:

- Racing heartbeat
- Sweating & shaking
- Breathlessness
- Feeling dizzy
- Butterflies in our stomach



Physical body sensations can be **different** for each individual. It can help to notice and write down the sensations you feel, as this can help you to notice when anxiety is starting. This can help you to **identify situations and thoughts** you might be having that are **triggering** anxiety for you.

### ASK FOR HELP



It is **important to talk** to someone you trust when your thoughts or feelings are becoming hard to manage alone. **Be honest!** everyone has mental health and speaking about our mental health might help the problem feel less overwhelming. Sometimes talking to someone you trust can help you to feel more calm about the situation and come up with a plan to help together.