



Children's mental health and wellbeing

Emotional health refers to a person's ability to cope with day to day life. It includes the way they feel about themselves and how they respond to whatever happens around them.

Good mental health and emotional wellbeing is **not about being happy all the time**, but rather having the resilience and flexibility to cope with challenges that are part of life.

Half of all mental health difficulties start before the age of 14. Therefore it is vital to provide support to children experiencing anxiety and struggling with fears and worries to ensure that this does not develop into a more complex issue.

What is anxiety?

- Anxiety is a normal emotion that everyone experiences.
- It is a physiological reaction that occurs in response to a perceived harmful event or threat to survival.
- A small amount of occasional anxiety in certain situations is normal and can actually be helpful.
- When anxiety becomes a problem is when it interferes with daily life.





when little people
are overwhelmed by
big emotions, it's our job
to share our calm,
not to join their chaos.

-L. Knost

©hannahdove

Avoidance

Disturbed
sleep

Withdrawn/
shy

Refusing to
go to
school

Not being
able to
concentrate

Shaking

Illness/ sick
days

What does anxiety look like in children?

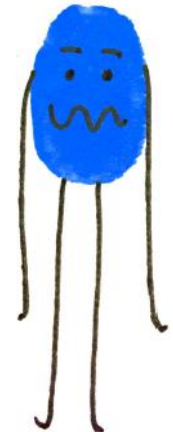
Sweating

Phobias

Panic
attacks

Shortness
of breath

Worrying
over small
things



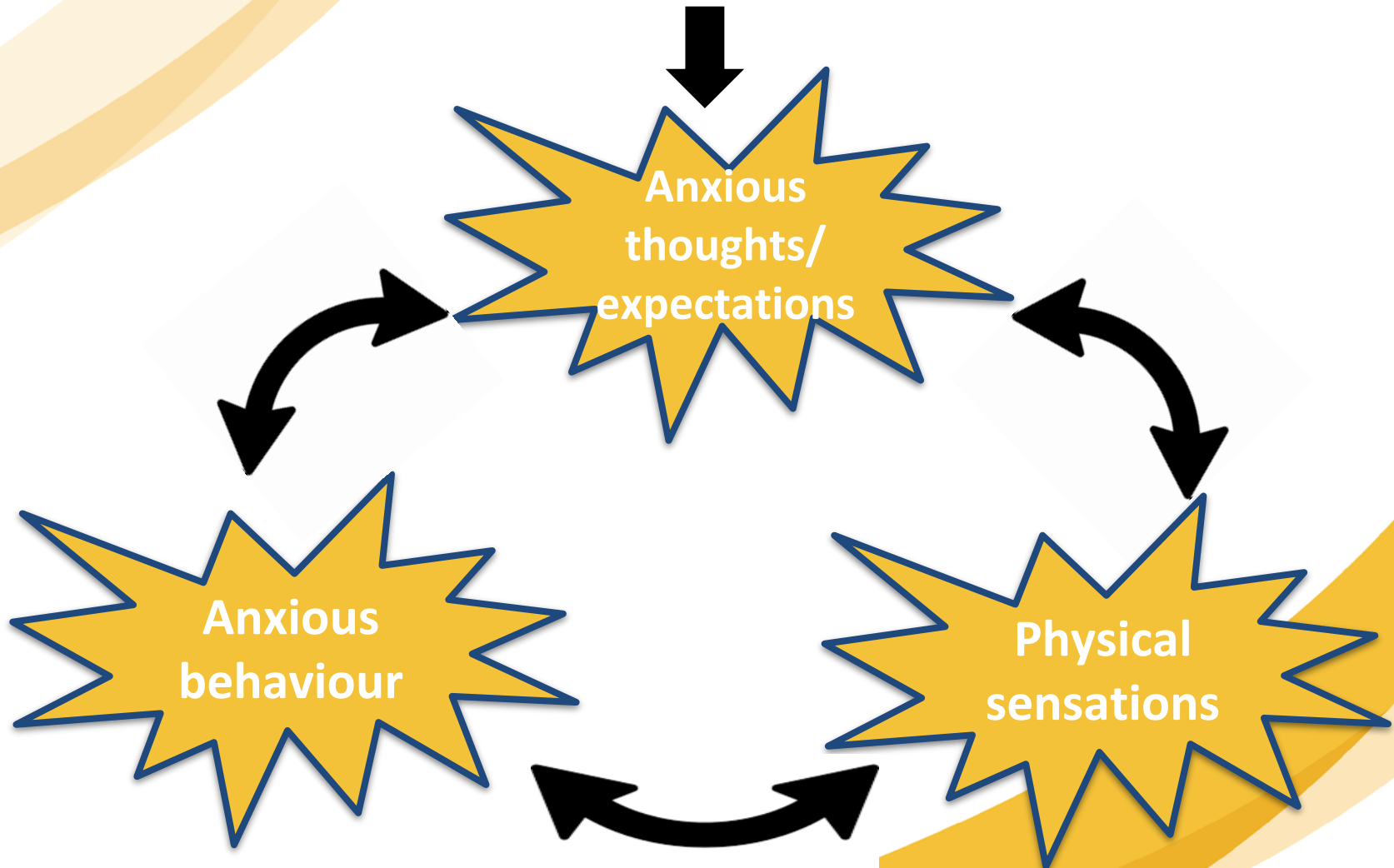
Anxiety and age

Age	Common fears and worries
0-6 months	Strong sensory stimuli (e.g. loud noises); loss of support (e.g. falling).
6-12 months	Strangers; separation from caregivers.
2-4 years	Imaginary creatures (monsters); the dark;
5-7 years	Animals; natural disasters; injury/ illness; media-based fears
8-11 years	Poor academic and athletic ability.
12-18 years	Peer rejection; world issues
Adulthood	Illness, death.



Anxious cycle

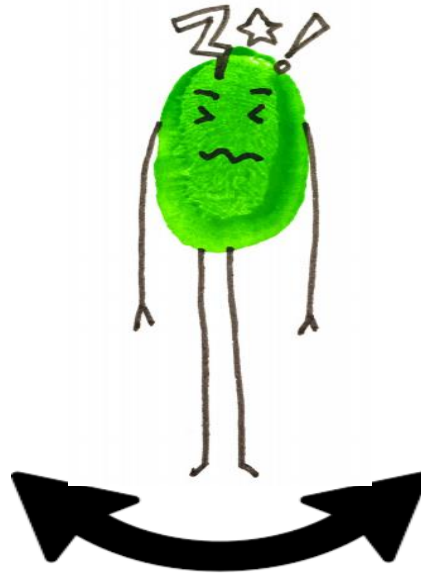
Perceived anxious situation (trigger)



Anxiety cycle example

Trigger: answering a question at school

Thought: 'I will make a mistake and everyone will think I'm stupid.'



Behaviour: avoids putting hand up, worries about getting chosen by teacher.

Physical sensation: Shaking, sweating, throat tightens, trembling.

Talking to your child

Opening up a conversation is the first step, but this needs to be done in a sensitive way.

Lots of children and young people find it easier to talk while doing an activity. This takes the pressure off because they don't have to sit still or make eye contact all the time, and because it makes pauses and silences more comfortable.

Having something to do with their hands, or something practical to focus on, can also make it easier for some children and young people to reflect or think more clearly.

Rather than feeling like a 'big chat', the conversation can start more naturally while you're both doing something you enjoy.

Refusal to talk

If they don't want to talk try saying one of the following –

- You can talk to me, I'm here for you.
- If you need to talk to someone else, that's okay too.
- If you talk to me about what is worrying you, I can do my best to help.
 - Even if I don't understand, know that I want to.
 - We're going to get through this together

Remember that you know your child. You can tell when it isn't the right time or they aren't in the mood to talk.

What to do if your child opens up

1. Validate their feelings. You could say 'it's really understandable that you're feeling...' to let them know that their feelings are okay.
2. Thank them for sharing what's going on and be encouraging about the way they've opened up.
3. Let them know that you love them, you're there for them, they can talk to you whenever they need to, and you can help them get support if they need it.
4. Ask them if there's anything you could do that they would find particularly helpful.
5. Spend time together thinking about what's making them feel this way. It could be something at home or school, a relationship with a friend or family member or something else.
6. Remind your child that this is temporary. Reassure them that things can change and they can feel better.
7. Avoid conversations at the height of distress. It's important to be there for them, but it can be more helpful to talk about the causes when things are feeling calmer.

Additional support for parents

Emotion posters

Use the emotion posters to help your child identify their feelings

Stormbreak at home

Set up your child's home stormbreak account on

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SX4eSQto1hw>

Mindfulness at home

See handout activities

Mindfulness videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llbBI-BT9c4> – rainbow breathing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UEuFi9PxKuo> – bubble breathing

Breathing techniques

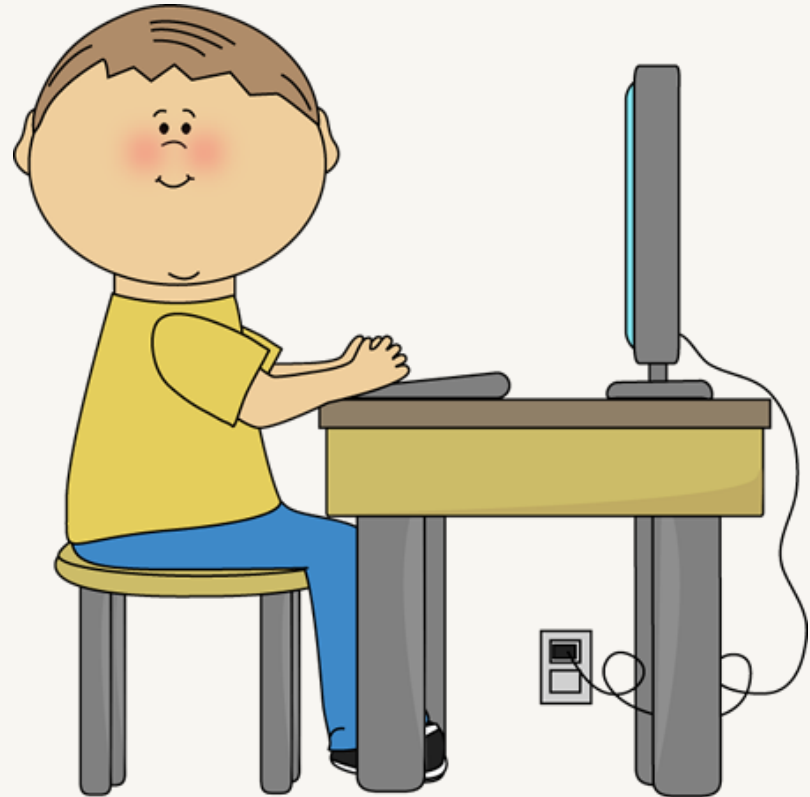
See poster handout

Additional online resources:

- Advice for parents and stories for children <https://kidshelpline.com.au/kids>
- BBC Bitesize Emotional Wellbeing - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/topics/ztkk7ty/resources/1>
- Anna Freud Centre information booklet about mental health - <https://www.annafreud.org/what-we-do/schools-in-mind/resourcesfor-schools/advice-for-parents-and-carers-talking-mental-health-withyoung-people-at-primary-school/>

E~safety

Helping Children Stay
Safe, Happy and
Healthy Online



Technology is a wonderful tool. It helps our children learn, create, communicate and have fun. But just like crossing a road or learning to swim, children need guidance to use the online world safely and confidently.



Link to Mental Wellbeing



- Online experiences can strongly affect emotions
- Children may struggle to separate online problems from real-life worries
- Feeling safe online helps children feel safe emotionally

What Are Primary Children Doing Online?



Brief Discussion Points

Children commonly use:

- YouTube
- Online gaming
- Roblox / Minecraft
- WhatsApp family groups
- TikTok/short-form videos (sometimes despite age restrictions)
- Tablets and smart TVs

Key Point

Many children move between:

- Learning
- Gaming
- Watching videos
- Messaging

...very quickly and often independently.

Do you know what your children are accessing when online?

It is recommended that children access devices in a shared space.

Link to Mental Wellbeing

- Fast-paced content can overstimulate children
- Constant comparison can affect confidence
- Online disagreements can feel overwhelming
- Lack of sleep from devices impacts mood and emotional regulation



Main Risks for Primary Children

a) Talking to Strangers Online

- Games and apps may include chat features
- Children may not realise who they are speaking to

Parent Tips

- Disable chat where possible
- Use parental controls
- Keep devices in shared spaces

Wellbeing Link

Children can feel:

- Confused
- Frightened
- Pressured

...if online interactions become inappropriate.

Main Risks for Primary Children

b) Inappropriate Content

- Algorithms can quickly move children from suitable to unsuitable content
- Violent, scary or upsetting videos may appear accidentally

Parent Tips

- Watch together sometimes
- Ask children what they enjoy watching
- Encourage children to tell adults if something worries them

Wellbeing Link

Exposure to upsetting content can:

- Increase anxiety
- Cause worries at bedtime
- Lead to fears children struggle to explain

Main Risks for Primary Children

c) Screen Time & Emotional Health

Too much screen time can impact:

- Sleep
- Concentration
- Mood
- Physical activity
- Family interaction

Parent Tips

Encourage:

- Device-free mealtimes
- Screen breaks
- No devices before bed
- Outdoor play and hobbies

The goal is *balance*, not banning technology.

Main Risks for Primary Children

d) Kindness Online

Children should learn that:

- Words online still affect feelings
- Gaming chats and messages should remain respectful
- Screens can sometimes make people say things they would not say face-to-face

Wellbeing Link

Online unkindness can affect:

- Confidence
- Friendships
- Anxiety levels

The 3 Cs

Conversation

- Talk regularly about online experiences
- Stay curious, not judgmental

“Can you show me your favourite game/video/app?”

Check-ins

- Know what apps children use
- Use age ratings as guidance
- Regularly review privacy settings

Calm Responses

If something goes wrong:

- Stay calm
- Reassure children they did the right thing by telling an adult
- Focus on solving the problem together

“Online safety is not just about protecting children from danger — it is about helping them develop healthy, confident and positive relationships with technology.”

- No parent gets it perfect
- Small conversations make a huge difference
- The strongest protection is a trusted relationship with an adult

New Government Guidelines (March 2026)

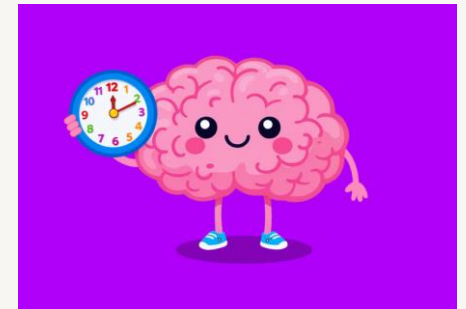
Screen time guidance for under 5s

The Government accepts that digital screens are a part of modern life and that finding the right balance between screen time and other activities for young children can be tricky. That's why they've created this evidence-informed guidance to support parents and carers in shaping healthy screen time habits for little brains.

How much screen time should my child have?

Limit total screen time for young children, wherever possible.

- Under 2 years: Avoid screen time other than for shared activities with family that encourage bonding, interaction and conversation.
- 2-5 years: Try to keep it to 1 hour a day. Less if possible.



What content is better content?

- Young children's brains are stimulated much more easily than adults', so they need content specifically made for them.
- **Slow-paced content:** Slow-paced, predictable content is better for young brains. Fast-paced, over-stimulating social media-style videos may affect how young children learn to concentrate, so it's best to avoid them.

When and where is okay for my child to use screens?

Set clear boundaries for when and where little brains use screens to ensure time for other activities that support their development.



Screen free zones / background watching – can distract from beneficial activities for your child such as social interaction and active play.

Mealtimes - Try swapping screens for background music, simple conversation, table games, colouring or even 'I Spy' with colours or letters

Before bed – can over stimulate and effect sleep. Swap screens for reading bedtime stories together.

William Barnes



Where every child counts