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Using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to treat anxiety in a school-based setting

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Using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to treat anxiety in a school-based setting

A Thesis Presented to
the Graduate Faculty of
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By
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Abstract

Anxiety disorders are the most common disorder found among all school-aged children. Adults working in the education field need to be made aware of symptoms and treatments for their students when they're having these heightened feelings of anxiety. According to Hirshfeld-Becker et al. (2010), research has shown that cognitive behavioral therapy is the most commonly implemented and effective source of therapy. It has also been shown to be the most clinically effective way to intervene and decrease anxiety disorders among children as young as four (Hirshfeld-Becker et al., 2010). This literature review examines the prevalence of anxiety among school-aged children and the most effective way to treat anxiety disorders within a school-based setting. In doing so, we are investigating the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy intervention and prevention programs and their effectiveness in schools to treat elevated levels of anxiety disorders among school-aged students. Another aspect of research conducted by Haugland et al. (2017), shows certain barriers seen when implementing cognitive behavioral therapy in schools and the importance of multicultural considerations. With all the information considered, this literature review also develops a group manual, which will be used with Elementary and early Middle school-aged students (8-12 years old) experiencing anxiety. The group manual is called "My Worries Workshop" and it is an 8-week school-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) program designed to help students overcome their anxiety. Through a multitude of group discussions, activities, and homework, this group manual will help these students process their anxiety and change the way they think about it through a process called cognitive restructuring.

Keywords: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Anxiety Disorders, and Multicultural

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Introduction

Anxiety has gained more awareness and attention due to its increased effect on school-aged children. This psychological disorder is one of the most prevalent among youth, impacting anywhere from 20-30% (Kilbourne et al., 2018). Anxiety that students experience can include, but is not limited to, social anxiety, separation anxiety, specific phobia, and generalized anxiety (Ruocco et al., 2018). This disorder can interrupt and, in some severe cases, eliminate normal developmental tasks that students need for social and emotional growth. Furthermore, student anxiety has been documented to have adverse effects on academic and social outcomes. To support students' successful management of their anxiety, my school-based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy program "My Worries Workshop", targets, identifies, and teaches students how to manage their anxiety. Out of the 365 days a year, a child is in school for at least 165 of them, making a school-based intervention program centered around anxiety a prime spot to intervene. This group will include a safe space for all its members to share their thoughts and feelings with both the facilitator and other members experiencing the same thing.

Literature Review: Using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to Treat Anxiety in a school-based setting

Anxiety disorders can affect a child's ability to grow positively with their peers. It also has the ability to affect a student's ability to effectively learn in a school-based setting. This disorder has been shown to negatively affect a student not just academically but also socially and emotionally (Haugland et al., 2017). Without proper diagnosis, the consequences of this disorder going untreated has the possibility for life-long consequences.

The intervention and prevention programs that have been shown to be most effective to treat anxiety in a school-based setting are Skills for Academic and Social Success (SASS), The Cool Kids Program, Friends for Life, and Coping Cat. The successful implementation of these programs has been shown to decrease anxiety disorders in students who have been clinically diagnosed with social phobia, separation anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, specific phobia, and school phobia (Rapee et al., 2006). The research also shows that proper education and training are crucial when using such programs and always being culturally aware of different students' needs to provide the most accurate and sensitive program is most effective. For this reason, the most effective treatment for students with anxiety in a school-based setting is cognitive behavioral therapy intervention and prevention programs.

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed.; DSM–5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013)

Before we continue through this literature review, we need to understand what the process and criteria are for a student who may be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. For

example, according to The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.;

DSM–5; American Psychiatric Association, 2013), anxiety disorders are associated with the

anticipation of a threat that hasn't happened yet, or a future threat. When this occurs a person or

in this case a student would most commonly feel muscle tension or will be in a high state of

awareness which occurs more days than not for at least six months, about several events or

activities such as work or school performance (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This

heightened awareness is a persistent stress-inducing period that causes major avoidant behaviors

which can cause high levels of fear resulting in panic attacks. One thing that is important to

remember is that anxiety is usually not something that just disappears, rather it lingers and can

for long periods. This of course can be dependent on factors such as age or the specific anxiety

disorder that a student is experiencing but if not treated in the early stages, it has the ability to

linger into adulthood.

Another important aspect to remember when dealing with a disorder like anxiety in

students is the fact that it can overwhelm a person to the point where they may feel a sense of

danger or fear in a perfectly normal non-life threatening situation. This fear or avoidance is

something that clinical professionals have to take into account when diagnosing to determine

whether the reaction is disproportionate to the event. In doing so, all factors are taken into

account with some of the most important being cultural contextual factors (American Psychiatric

Association, 2013).

Anxiety in Schools

One of the most common psychological disorders in both children and adolescents is

Anxiety (Haugland et al., 2017). This disorder can manifest in many ways and can be common

amongst all students regardless of age but for our purposes, we're focusing directly on school-aged individuals. We all know that school is used as a way for children to learn, develop, and gain skills to live autonomously and successfully. This can be learned in countless ways, for example, through the classroom and education as well as through social interactions with peers. These interactions may include sports, clubs, or other school activities.

All of these activities help a student develop important skills and their development both mentally and socially. Due to the role that a school plays in children's lives, the literature supports that schools are an important environment for both the treatment and prevention of anxiety (Rapee et al., 2006). Not everyone can assess a student for anxiety, but employees, volunteers, or individuals working with these students need to have the proper knowledge of signs of anxiety. School Counselors are the ones that need to be equipped with the right tools and education to provide effective and adequate assessment and or intervention (Rapee et al., 2006).

Anxiety disorders are among the most frequent childhood emotional disorders and some of the more commonly seen diagnoses are social phobia, separation anxiety disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, specific phobia, and school phobia. Students can also experience more than one anxiety disorder at a time (Rapee et al., 2006). If untreated, these disorders can negatively impact a student's ability to be present both socially, mentally, and emotionally. Scaini et al.(2022), found that less than 20% of children clinically diagnosed with anxiety receive the proper resources and support after their diagnosis.

According to Rapee et al.(2006), 50-70% of students who meet the criteria for anxiety disorders lack the support and attention needed, therefore their diagnosis goes untreated for an average of two years. Both anxiety and emotional disorders are found to be comorbid, meaning these disorders tend to be present at the same time (Fadhli & Situmorang, 2021). Anxiety and

emotional disorders can affect a student's ability to: concentrate, successfully maintain positive relationships, and achieve personal goals (Fadhli & Situmorang, 2021).

For example, during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, students' abilities to cope with anxiety were heavily reduced and support within schools was almost diminished due to social distancing (Fadhli & Situmorang, 2021). Students who were already struggling may have lost the ability to seek professional support and students who developed anxiety due to the pandemic had no idea where to start. This behavior can largely affect and change the way a student seeks help or expresses their need for support (Fadhli & Situmorang, 2021).

Sulkowski and Storch (2011), found that children's anxiety also impacts family functioning. Effective school-based interventions are crucial in providing early intervention for students experiencing anxiety. This will overall help encourage students to be more open about their anxiety as well as give the school counselors adequate intervention and prevention programs.

The Importance of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Schools

The availability of a cognitive behavioral therapy program in schools for children suffering from anxiety is immensely important for the well-being of children. The school setting is an ideal place to address anxiety as students spend most of their time there. With that being said, due to the highly stressed social and academic nature of schools, and the majority of the time that is spent within them, there is a severe increase in anxiety symptoms for students (Haugland et al., 2017). According to Warner et al.(2016), this makes the setting of a school unique in nature, which can confront students' anxiety daily. Anxiety affects children regardless of age, making the availability of a successful CBT program to intervene with anxiety at a young

age extraordinarily important (Hirshfeld-Becker et al., 2010). According to Hirshfeld-Becker et al.(2010), CBT programs have been clinically shown to effectively intervene and decrease anxiety disorders in children as young as four. It has been revealed that these CBT approaches have positively affected anxiety among children and their positive social and educational development. This confirms the importance of students suffering from anxiety receiving the treatment they deserve and need at a young age (Hirshfeld-Becker et al., 2010).

According to Kilbourne et al.(2018), children who are suffering from anxiety disorders, have reported the willingness to be a part of such programs like CBT in school settings, compared to mental health providers in the community. There is a tremendous amount of opportunity and support in schools for a student who is looking for guidance for their struggles with anxiety. Students have access to staff throughout the building but if the staff member they choose to reach out to has limited to no knowledge about the topic, the student may get false information and not seek accurate treatment (Haugland et al., 2017). According to Haugland et al.(2017), CBT is an effective early intervention for anxiety.

CBT programs within schools are very critical to the success of those students struggling with a disorder like anxiety. CBT programs can intervene when necessary and with a properly trained provider, as well as the ability to implement the most accurate response necessary, the correct CBT program can diminish if not erase anxiety for that student.

Barriers

Even though these students are more willing to participate in programs such as SASS, Friends, Cool Kids, and The Coping Cat, they aren't always given the opportunity or seek it out themselves. The majority of these students who seek such treatment, help, or even just

information on anxiety tend to hit barriers. These barriers can stem from both the community around them or even the institution they're a part of. There may be a severe lack of mental health knowledge, referral procedures, lack of transportation or long distances to said providers, and even costs (Haugland et al., 2017).

Some students may never receive the opportunity to find an effective treatment for their anxiety due to a lack of parental support (Kress et al., 2018). Depending on the type of CBT program being utilized, a significant barrier that can lead to a severe limitation of some CBT programs is the lack of parental support. Some programs utilize the parental role as a critical part of the process within the program. A program like The Coping Cat understands the importance of the parental role and uses the parents as consultants, collaborators, and co-clients. According to Kress et al.(2018), the collaboration from parents within such programs like The Coping Cat is usually crucial in terms of the counselor receiving extra/outside information to properly assess and diagnose the student. This all plays a role in the successful implementation of CBT programs and without this support, successful therapeutic outcomes may not be reached.

The Effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Schools

Anxiety disorders are among the most prevalent disorders among school-aged individuals and these disorders can alter a child's ability to learn both academically and socially (Haugland et al., 2017). This disorder can impact a student's life and continues to do so if not properly addressed. The effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy approach has been proven to effectively treat anxiety among students for anxiety. Bernstein et al.(2005), researched the effectiveness of school-based interventions for children with anxiety, and their results highlighted the effectiveness of the CBT approach. They found that CBT was effective in

addressing separation anxiety, generalized anxiety disorder, and/or social phobia as an active group surrounding cognitive behavioral therapy (Bernstein et al., 2005).

According to Hirshfeld-Becker et al.(2010), research done over the past few decades has suggested the positive assurance that CBT programs have been developed to treat anxiety disorders on the individual level. With that being said, it's mentioned that there is also a severe underrepresentation of young children in such studies. This is why Hirshfeld-Becker et al.(2010), developed a research study to understand if CBT is effective in treating anxiety in young children as it does for older children/adolescents. To do so, they designed a randomized clinical trial with children ages 4 to 7 who meet the DSM-IV for anxiety disorders.

Their findings showed that participants experienced a decrease in anxiety symptoms as well as an increase in coping skills. According to Hirschfield-Becker et al. (2010), there was a large decrease in participants' anxiety symptoms at 59%, compared to a study done in 2008 where the number was a bit lower at 57%. Research continues to support CBTR as an effective intervention and prevention for young children with anxiety disorders.

Intervention and Prevention Programs

Effective treatment of anxiety in school-based settings is delivered successfully in ways such as intervention and prevention programs. These programs have been found to intervene in positive and effective ways, which provides a greater resource for students with anxiety. According to Starrenburg et al.(2017), childhood anxiety is a severe problem and if not treated effectively at the younger stages of life, it can cause detrimental effects in adulthood. This can be found true universally which is why there are a unique set of intervention and prevention programs to help students who are facing a common enemy in themselves called anxiety. Some

of the programs found in the research that address anxiety in children are Skills for Academic and Social Success (SASS), The Cool Kids Program, Friends for Life, and Coping Cat. The implementation and structure of these programs can be adapted to meet the needs of students between the ages of four to eighteen years old (Starrenburg et al., 2017).

For example, the Friends program was initially developed from the Australian version of the Coping Cat program called the Coping Koala Group Program (Bernstein et al., 2005). These different applications propose a unique set of standards that offer the ability to help students with a variety of different anxiety diagnoses. All three of these programs have been shown to effectively treat anxiety in students but can be used differently from the others.

The Cool Kids Program

The Cool Kids Program, which has been found to be effective, is also widely known for effectively treating anxiety in children. This program is unique due to its ability to be administered to a wide range of clients. This manualized CBT program has three main components including psychoeducation, cognitive restructuring, and child management strategies that help the students improve their social skills and assertiveness (Scaini et al., 2022).

Another unique aspect of this program is its ability to act as both an intervention and prevention program. The effectiveness of this program is high and the structure has been shown to be effective in a school setting where the socioeconomic status is low. The Cool Kids program is focused on prevention and has been found to be effective if implemented effectively (Scaini et al., 2022).

The Coping Cat

The Coping Cat program which has been effectively used both in the United States as well as in countries such as Australia is a manualized 16-week prevention program for children between the ages of 7 to 13 (Kress, 2018, p. 159). According to Starrenburg et al. (2017), the Coping Cat program has been determined to be one of the primary prevention programs that utilize CBT in reducing anxiety disorders: separation anxiety, generalized anxiety, as well as a social anxiety disorder. Starrenburg et al. (2017), evaluated the effectiveness of the Coping Cat program in school-age children with elevated levels of anxiety. After their program concluded, they reviewed their results and concluded that at the start of the training to the 3-month follow-up assessment, there was a large decrease in the reported anxiety among the students (Starrenburg et al., 2017).

The Coping Cat program is an effective prevention program for children experiencing anxiety and students who are experiencing school-related anxiety as well. This evidence-based program contributes to the fight against anxiety and helps youth to also analyze their understanding of their feelings and emotions. In the end, the hope is that Coping Cat prepares these students to grasp what their reactions and responses may be toward their anxiety to help clarify and build coping skills to help manage their anxiety (Kress, 2018).

The Friends Program

The Friends for Life program is known for its ability to adhere to a diverse population of students. The structure and content within the program help maintain a culturally sensitive approach for populations outside of Western culture. It's been shown to provide a sense of awareness and collectivism in the effective treatment of anxiety when working with a diverse

clientele. The Friends for Life CBT program is structured in a unique way that is intended to understand the implications of culture, language, and religion. All of these factors have different implications for students and therefore may need certain modifications to CBT programs. Coming from a background of tragedy, violence, and oppression, aboriginal students have an enormous amount of historical trauma that doesn't just fade away over time.

One of the unique characteristics of this program is parental involvement. This is done by training and educating the parent in identifying triggers, thoughts, and other behaviors that may induce anxiety in their child (Miller et al., 2011). According to Bernstein et al.(2005), involving the parent(s) in the process of intervention for their child has been shown to effectively increase positive interaction between the parent and child, as well as decrease the child's anxiety.

The healing process is greatly different for students belonging to idenengious populations. They emphasize harmony and independence within their environment and spiritual world (Miller et al., 2011). Their healing process has the ability to offer complications in the mind of many mental health providers which can lead to a lack of appropriate cultural considerations, as well as hesitations from the client. The lack of knowledge towards the considerations of others' historical backgrounds as well as the current socioeconomic status may also lead to severe incompetencies on multicultural considerations from the providers. Meaning, it is crucial to attend to cultural factors (Miller et al., 2011). This is why having the ability to provide an anxiety intervention program like Friends is important. This provides individuals with diverse backgrounds the ability to be offered culturally sensitive programs.

Skills for Academic and Social Success (SASS)

Skills for Academic and Social Success (SASS) is a program that is specifically designed to treat social anxiety disorder (SAD) (Warner et al., 2016). According to Warner et al.(2016), the SASS program is a program that is designed to be taught by a clinical psychologist but with the proper training and education, it has been found in recent studies to be delivered effectively by school counselors as well. This program is organized in a way to help students overcome several obstacles that they may be experiencing due to their social anxiety including social discomfort and avoidance, decline or destruction of friendships, as well as academic failure. (Warner et al., 2016).

Students of all ages are put into the confines of a classroom to sit, listen, and absorb the material that is being taught to them. This is a process that is taught to every student at the beginning of their school journey in pre-k and follows them throughout their years in and out of the classroom. According to Warner et al.(2016), more than 9.1% of students are affected by an anxiety disorder such as social anxiety, which has a high likelihood of interrupting the learning component for the student both on the academic and social side of things.

Effective Implementation of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in Schools

After looking through research and reviewing different CBT intervention and prevention programs, it's clear that CBT can be a truly effective school-based program for students experiencing anxiety. With that being said, there is still a very important aspect that needs to be addressed and that's how to properly implement a CBT program in a school-based setting. According to Forman and Barakat, three distinct organizational contexts are needed for

successful implementation: (1) characteristics of the new program; (2) characteristics of those implementing the new program; and (3) the organization/school characteristics (2011).

When it comes to the (1) characteristics of the new program that is being thought of for implementation, the individuals reviewing the program look for a clear advantage from the two and compatibility. This helps them determine the complexity of the program in question and in the end helps with the conclusion of if the new program is a better fit (Forman and Barakat., 2011). After the characteristics of the program are reviewed, it's important to discuss (2) the characteristics of those implementing the new program. If a new program is being put into place, making sure the staff's attitudes and beliefs are compatible with that program is important to consider. This is an important aspect due to the impact the individual(s) implementing the program will have when leading group or individual sessions.

 Lastly, (3) the organization/school climate and its values are important to consider. Both of these have an immense impact on proper and effective implementation. You want to make sure that the culture and values of both the school and the staff fit with the program being considered. All things considered, you want to make sure that the new CBT program fits with the school's mission, philosophy, goals, and policies, as well as correlates with the values and beliefs of the staff (Forman and Barakat., 2011). All three of these characteristics are clear indicators of a program's success and having the right program, the right individuals implementing it, and it is implemented in the right school, is crucial to the success of a new CBT program.

Multicultural Considerations

There is a high need for effective intervention and prevention programs in schools for anxiety in students. According to Lynn et al.(2011), regardless of a student's culture or ethnicity,

anxiety disorders are ongoing and widespread and affect more than 25% of children and adolescents. Meaning these school-based programs need to be effective in implementing a culturally sensitive approach.

Culturally enriched school-based CBT anxiety prevention programs exist in the hopes to provide a well-rounded and respectful approach for all students. Lynn et al. (2017), hypothesized that culturally significant material also increased higher engagement from the participants which in the end increased the program's effectiveness. Regardless of the specific type of CBT program being implemented, the program needs to be accessible. According to Kilbourne et al. (2018), there is a limited amount of availability when it comes to mental health providers as well as stigmas associated with treatment. This has the ability to negatively affect the implementation of any sort of program being run within the community.

Conclusion

While conducting this literature review and reviewing the material surrounding the topic of cognitive behavioral therapy in the school setting, it's clear that there is a positive and healthy way to implement a program to treat anxiety in students. This literature review started the process by reviewing the prevalence of anxiety in schools, the importance of CBT in schools, the barriers to this implementation, the effectiveness of CBT in schools, examples of different intervention/prevention programs within schools, how to effectively implement CBT in schools, and the multicultural considerations. All of this information helps us to better understand the complexity that surrounds the effective implementation of a new program in a school setting and what all that is.

Group Overview

Type of Group

   The following group is created to help students struggling with anxiety. Anxiety has the

ability to affect a student academically but also socially, emotionally, and mentally. This group

creates a safe space for students to learn about those overwhelming feelings of worry and

sadness. This allows them to understand what is going on inside of them and then build the

necessary coping skills to handle their anxiety on their own.

Purpose of Group

   One of the most common psychological disorders in both children and adolescents is

Anxiety (Haugland et al., 2017). This group's purpose is to help students identify that feeling of

anxiety, and give them the necessary skills to combat those feelings that are disrupting their life.

Everyone has the ability to gain awareness of what they're feeling and how to cope with it but

not everyone knows what that feeling is or who can help them. According to Rapee et al.(2006),

50-70% of students who meet the criteria for anxiety disorders lack the support and attention

needed. This then results in students' diagnoses going untreated for an average of up to 2 years.

Students are in school 9 out of the 12 months during the year, making the school environment

the perfect place for this group to be implemented.

Membership Qualifications/Screening for Group

   In order for students to be considered for this group, they will be referred by their

teacher(s) or other staff members within the school building. Students may also be considered

by parent referral or from other mental health providers.

Group Leader/Facilitator Qualifications

The group leader/facilitator is a licensed school counselor who has gone through the academic and personal requirements of an accredited program. In order for this group to run smoothly, something that could be considered would be a co-leader/facilitator. This co-leader/facilitator would also be someone with specific educational background and experience. This co-leader/facilitator should also be someone with training in areas such as social and emotional learning.

Length and Frequency of Group

The length of this group will be 8 weeks. Group members will meet once a week for a minimum of 30 mins. The group leader/facilitator will do their best to make sure these group meetings are completed on the same day of the week, at the same time, and in the same room. If the group is unable to meet a certain week, the group leader/facilitator will do their best to communicate with the classroom teachers as well as reschedule the meeting time.

Size of Group

The size of the group will be open to 5 to 8 students at one time. The group leader/facilitator may make exceptions to this but the intention is to keep this group small to allow for ample amount of time during group time and for the group members to develop a strong connection with other group members and the group leader/facilitator.

Closed Group

      This group will be a closed group to ensure confidentiality, cohesion amongst group members, and participation. The group members that start the group one week 1 will be the same group members they will end it with on week 8. If for some reason a student is removed from the group or leaves the group, that student's spot will stay empty and not be filled by another student. Closed groups help students build a connection with the other group members and it increases the chance for the therapeutic process of the group and the content to be successful.

Group Norms and Expectations

      At the beginning of the group, the group members will go over group norms and expectations. The group leader/facilitator will have the group members complete a poster together, where they will agree on different rules they will be following during their time together. These rules will help the group members understand how they can be successful while in the group.

Evaluation Measure

      In order for the group leader/facilitator to monitor the group members' ability/knowledge at the beginning of the group and the end of the group, all group members will complete a pre/post-test. This test will help evaluate the group members' knowledge of certain content associated with anxiety. The information that is gathered from these pre/post tests will then be used to improve this group curriculum in the future.

My Worries Workshop

A Small Group For Students Experiencing Anxiety
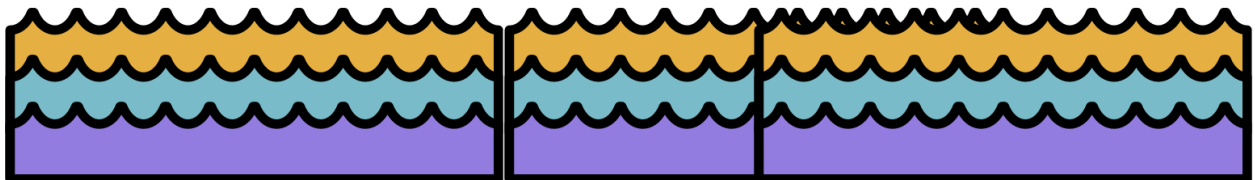
Unit Outline & ASCA Alignment

This 8-week small group uses a cognitive-behavioral approach that teaches students how to identify and manage their emotions while also replacing their anxious thoughts with more helpful ways of thinking. As part of the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy approach, it is important for us to remember that every child is different and that they have the ability to develop their own problem-solving skills to better understand and cope with their anxiety.

Unit Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the term/feeling of "anxiety".

- Students will become familiar with the skill of recognizing their anxiety.

- Students will discover the triggers of their anxiety.

- Students will identify how their feelings are associated with their anxiety.

- Students will change the way they think of their anxiety.

- Students will continue their work on letting go of their anxious feelings.

- Students will become more aware of different skills and techniques that will help them cope with their anxiety.

- Students will improve their positivity of themselves.

- Students will discover the different coping skills and techniques available to them when dealing with their anxiety.

ASCA Mindsets and Behaviors:

- M 1. Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental, social/emotional and physical well-being.

- M 4. Self-confidence in ability to succeed

- B-SMS 6. Ability to identify and overcome barriers.

- B-SMS 7. Effective coping skills.

Materials for Group:

- Check the session outline in the group manual

According to ASCA ethical code A.7.b states that school counselors should "inform parent/guardian(s) of student participation in a small group." In this group manual, we use a Cognitive Behavioral Therapy approach which has found that parent involvement is crucial and adds to the overall effectiveness of the program. For this purpose, a parent letter is included.

(Barrett, 2020)

Dear Families,

Part of my role as the School Counselor is to provide students with a safe environment to be vulnerable and work on skills that they may need extra attention on. I will be leading a small group of students to learn and practice different skills surrounding anxiety.

In this group, we will be learning and practicing the following skills:

1. Understanding and identifying anxiety
2. Understanding different forms of anxiety
3. Learning different calming/coping strategies
4. Developing and using positive self-talk
5. Identifying different support systems

If you would like your student to be a part of this group, please complete the form below and return it to your student's teacher by_____. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me directly!

School Counselor

Student's name:_____

Your name:_____

Teacher's name:_____

☐ Yes, I would love for my student to be in this group!

☐ No, I don't want my student to be in this group!

Hello Teachers,

I am looking for nominations for students who may benefit from a group counseling program that addresses anxiety. In the group, we will focus on the following skills:

- Understanding and identifying anxiety
- Understanding different forms of anxiety
- Learning different calming/coping strategies
- Developing and using positive self-talk
- Identifying different support systems

If you have students who could benefit from instruction on these skills, please consider nominating them for participation in this group. We will meet weekly to practice skills to transfer to the classroom and outside of school.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me!

Thank you for your support of the school counseling program,

School Counselor

Group Nominations:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6

Small Group Attendance Tracker

Topic: Anxiety

Name	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7	Week 8	Comments

My Worries Workshop: Anxiety

Student: _____   Date_____

Rater:_____

Read each statement and circle the most accurate response at that moment for the student's current ability and skills.	Yes, all the time!	Sometimes	Hardly at all	Never
The student experience persistent worrying and excessive fears.	4	3	2	1
The student shows increased signs of irritability.	4	3	2	1
The student has a difficult time concentrating and paying attention in class.	4	3	2	1
The student is avoidant and isolates themselves.	4	3	2	1
The student comes to school tired or exhausted.	4	3	2	1
The student shows positive and healthy coping strategies.	4	3	2	1
The student tells someone when they're struggling.	4	3	2	1

Is there anything else you would like your school counselor to know?

My Worries Workshop: Anxiety

Student: _____   Date_____

Read each statement and circle the most accurate face.	😃	😐	☹️
I know what anxiety is.	😃	😐	☹️
I am able to identify what I am feeling.	😃	😐	☹️
I never have difficulty concentrating or paying attention in class.	😃	😐	☹️
I feel confident when I am around my peers.	😃	😐	☹️
I enjoy coming to school and being with my peers.	😃	😐	☹️
I know healthy ways to cope with my anxiety.	😃	😐	☹️

Is there anything you would like your school counselor to know?

Adapted from The Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders (SCARED)

Session 1: Welcome & Introduction

Objectives:

- Students will meet other group members and the group facilitator.

- Students will become familiar with group expectations, rules, confidentiality, and its limits.

- Students will become familiar with the structure of the group.

Outline:

- Welcome all of the students to the group! Explain that we will be working together over the next 8 weeks to learn about anxiety and how we can deal with that feeling.

- **IceBreaker:** "Before we begin, it's important for all of us to feel comfortable with one another. So, I would like us to do an icebreaker activity that will help us get to know everyone a little bit better.

  - Everyone will use the following prompt "My name is_____, and something that makes me feel anxious or worried is_____."

    - The group facilitator will first model this prompt for the students and answer any questions.

- **Group Rules:** "Just like in the classroom, we will be using rules to make sure everyone is safe, respectful, and responsible during our time together". Let students share their own ideas on group rules and expectations (You may want to give some examples).

- **Confidentiality and the limits:** "Who here knows what confidentiality means?" Give the group members time to answer. "Confidentiality means that whatever you say or hear during our time in the group, it stays here and with us. This means I can't go and tell your

parent(s), teachers(s), or another student (s) what you told me. But there are a few exceptions to that rule. Meaning, that the only way I can tell someone outside this group something, would be if you share that someone is hurting you, that you're hurting yourself, or that you want to hurt someone else. These are the only three exceptions to our rule of confidentiality. Does anyone have any questions?"

- **Pre-Test:** The group facilitator will now explain the purpose and use of a pre-test assessment. You can ask the students questions like "Who knows what an assessment is and why it's important?" If no one has an answer, make sure you take the time and explain the purpose.

- **Feelings check-in/opening ritual:** Explain to the group that at the beginning of every session together, we will start with a check-in. You will go around the circle to every student and they will have a chance to identify how they're feeling at that moment.

- **Journals:** At this time, you can explain to the students that in this group we will be using a method called journaling. "This journal will be a tool that we use to help us all gain awareness and understanding toward our anxiety".

- **Homework:** Group members will be asked to journal about how they're feeling after the first session. (Remind them this needs to come back every session with them).

- **Closing Ritual/Wrap-up:** "Before we end for the day, does anyone have anything they want to share with the group?" Give students a chance to share their thoughts or feelings with the group.

GROUP RULES
&
EXPECTATIONS

1

2

3

4

5

6

Session 2: What is anxiety?

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the term/feeling of "anxiety".

Outline:

- **Opening Ritual/Feelings Check-in:** Welcome students back to the group and let them know we will be starting with our opening ritual of a feelings check-in. Remind them that this may look different every week but the purpose is the same. Which is to give an opportunity to all group members to reflect on last week's topic and any feelings that arose while away from the group.

- **Review Homework:** "Students, now we're going to go over our first journal entry". Give students the ability to share what they wrote down or how it felt.

- **Topic 1: Anxiety:** Explain to the students that today we're going to learn about anxiety. Present the question to the group "Who knows what anxiety is?" Give time for students to share their thoughts. Here are some bullet points to hit.

  - Anxiety can be a thought (mental) or feeling (physical) that can make you feel scared.

  - Anxiety is not dangerous and can sometimes be helpful in certain situations.

  - Everyone experiences the feeling of anxiety, it is normal.

- **Activity: Youtube Video:** Explain to the students that at this time we're going to shift into a video that helps us understand anxiety a little bit better. (Link provided below or you can type: Brain Basics: Anxiety for Kids - with Lee Constable)

  - [Anxiety For Kids](#)

- **Group Share:** Once the video has ended give a moment of silence to let it sink in and then let group members turn and talk.

- **Closing Ritual/Wrap-Up:** At this time, the group facilitator will bring the group members back together and explain the homework as well as give group members a chance to share any thoughts or feelings.

  - **Homework:** Students will be asked to take their journals home with them and write a journal entry or draw a picture of how they believe their brain works when it comes to anxiety.

Session 3: Recognizing My Anxiety

Objectives:

- Students will become familiar with the skill of recognizing their anxiety.

- Students will discover the triggers of their anxiety.

Outline:

Opening Ritual/Feelings check-in: Welcome students back to the group and give time for group members to share their experiences or feelings regarding last week's session and topic on "What is anxiety?". Give about 5-6 mins for an open discussion and then move into reviewing homework and the first activity. .
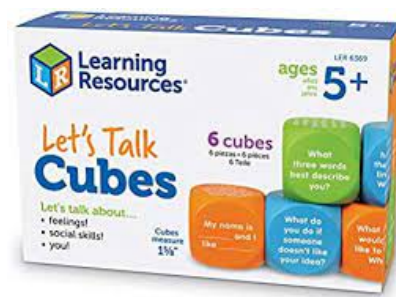
- **Review Homework**

- **Activity #1 Let's Talk Cubes:** Introduce the group members to the "Let's Talk Cubes". "Hello everyone and welcome back to our group. Today we're going to learn more about anxiety but specifically our own anxiety. Before we start though, I want us to continue to get more comfortable with one another. So, we're going to be using the "Let's Talk Cubes".

  - Once everyone has a chance to roll and answer the prompt, ask the group members to share what they liked or disliked about the activity.

- **Topic: Recognizing my own anxiety or anxious feelings.** Now let the group know that you're going to be shifting gears into more of a conversation based on their own personal experience with their anxiety.

- **Group Share:** Here are some questions to ask the group. (But feel free to ask other questions that you feel would be beneficial to the group discussion).
    - Does anyone want to share a time they felt nervous or scared?
    - What are some things that make you feel worried or anxious?
- **Activity #2 Discovering Our Own Anxiety Triggers Worksheet:** Explain to students that now we're going to be identifying what gives us those feelings of being anxious, worried, or nervous (See Appendix A).
- **Closing Ritual/Wrap-up:** At this time, the group facilitator will bring the group members back together and explain the homework as well as give group members a chance to share any thoughts or feelings.
- **Homework:** The student's homework will be to finish the trigger's exercise and journal about their most "triggered feeling".

Session 4: Working Through Our Anxiety

Objectives:

- Students will identify how their feelings are associated with their anxiety.

Outline:

- **Opening Ritual/Feelings check-in:** Welcome group members back to the group and talk over the "Triggers Worksheet". Ask for group members to share their experience working through the worksheet and what was their biggest trigger(s).

- **Review Homework**

- **Topic:** Working Through Our Anxiety.
  - Introduce today's topic to the group. "Last session we had the opportunity to identify what triggers our anxiety, so can anyone guess what we will be working on this session?" Give some time for answers…. "Now we will be working through those triggers through an activity called Inside and Outside" (Refer to Appendix B)

- **Activity: Inside and Outside Feelings Worksheet:** At this time, introduce the group to the Inside and Outside Feelings worksheet. This worksheet is intended to help students identify their anxiety and help them compare how they think, feel, and behave when struggling with certain feelings or emotions (anxiety). This worksheet is broken down into 3 steps.

    1. Finish the sentence at the top by writing a feeling that you sometimes experience.
    2. Fill in the boxes and bubbles on the left. Write what you think, how your body feels, and what you do when you felt this way at that time.

3. Now, imagine that you are still in that same situation, but you think of something else instead. Fill in the new thought on the right-hand side and work down to record the way you believe you would physically feel and act.

Session 5: Changing The Thought

Objectives:

- Students will change the way they think of their anxiety.

Outline

- **Opening Ritual/Feelings check-in:** Welcome the group members back and at this time group members will be given the chance to reflect on the topic from session 4.

- **Review Homework**

- **Group Discussion or Turn and Talk:** Once group members have been given enough time to discuss any thoughts or concerns from last weeks topic, now we want to move into a more group discussion based on their worksheets they completed. Use your own discretion but if you think it would be more beneficial for the group members to do a turn and talk with a partner, you can do that as well.
    - Once group members have established a solid understanding of the process of working through their anxiety and those feelings associated with it, we're not going to work on changing the thought.

- **Activity: Worry Jar:** Explain to the group that everyone worries about something and those worries can cause anxiety. In this activity, students will take 5-10 mins alone to put those anxious feelings in the worry jar (Refer to Appendix C).
    - Group Share

- **Homework:** Group members will be asked to take their journals home with them and continue the list of worries. Group members are also encouraged to complete this list with a parent and share the results of it with them.

# Session 6: Coping Skills

Objectives:

- Students will discover the different coping skills and techniques available to them when dealing with their anxiety.

Outline:

- **Opening Ritual: Feelings check-in**

- **Review Homework**

- **Topic: Coping Skills**

   - At this time, you will be introducing the group members to coping skills. Some students may not know what that means, so we will define this for them. "This week we're going to be talking about coping skills. Does anyone know what that might mean?" Give time for group members to answer. "Coping skills are what someone used to manage their emotions in stressful or unwanted situations".

- **Anxiety Coping Thermometer With Coping Skills**

   - Introduce the Anxiety Coping Thermometer to the group (Refer to Appendix D). "Before we move on to our first activity, I would like to introduce everyone to the "Anxiety Thermometer" tool. This thermometer is used to help us with recognizing our feelings, identify how we act due to those feelings, and then what we can do about it. For example, if you're feeling extremely anxious and identify with the 4th emotion (orange) which states
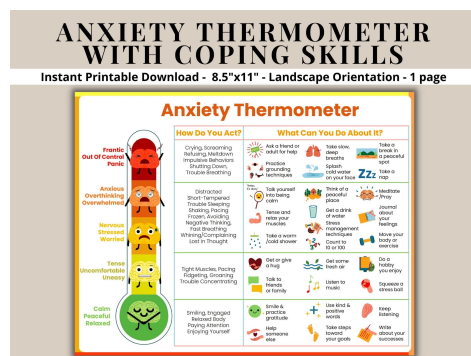
feelings such as "anxious, overthinking, and overwhelmed", you can then look to the right and it will give you".

- ○ Open up to questions.
- ○ Once questions have been answered, give the group members time to look through the thermometer and run through scenarios with a partner.

- **Activity: Coping With Anxiety Worksheet:** A this point the group members should have a decent understanding of what it means to cope with anxiety. Now, you will introduce the activity to the class. "Now that we have been introduced to what it means to cope as well as the Anxiety Thermometer, we're going to move into our activity. This activity is going to continue to help us identify our anxiety and what those feelings are when we feel anxious. It will also help us work through different coping skills that we can all use when we feel anxious (Refer to Appendix E).

  - ○ Group Share

Homework: At this point, every group member should've had the chance to share with a partner or with the whole group about their experience with the worksheet. Now, you will introduce the group to their homework. "Thank you for such a great day of work friends. You're going to have a little more to do for homework this time. First off, like always I want you to complete a journal entry on your thoughts on today's lesson. I would also like you to complete the Coping Statements For Anxiety worksheet (Refer to Appendix F).

Closing Ritual/Wrap-up: Have everyone share their favorite coping skill to use when they feel anxious. If they don't know or haven't used one before, let them share one they look forward to using.

Session 7: Letting Go!!

Objectives:

- Students will continue their work on letting go of their anxious feelings.

- Students will become more aware of different skills and techniques that will help them cope with their anxiety.

- Students will improve their positivity of themselves.

Outline:

- **Opening Ritual: Feelings check-in**

  ○ Welcome all the students back to the group and then proceed with the opening ritual of the feelings check-in.

- **Review Homework**

  ○ The group members were asked to complete another journal entry, as well as complete the Coping Statements For Anxiety worksheet. Ask the students to turn to their table partners and share their experiences with the worksheet. What was hard, was it helpful, what was your favorite part, etc? Give everyone about 3-5 mins to share and then open it up to a whole group discussion about the worksheet.

  ○ Once group members have been given enough time to discuss with their peers both in small and whole group discussions, move on to the topic of the day.

- **Topic: Letting Go!!** Today is our 7th group session together, which means we only have one left after this. Because we're getting to the end, we need to work on something essential today. Can anyone guess what that is? (give the group members some time to

think and answer). Today, we're going to be working with those anxious feelings again but in a slightly different way because today we're going to work on letting those feelings go.

- ○ Can anyone give examples or ways they "let go" of those anxious feelings? Give time for students to answer. Examples could include but are not limited to yoga, breathing exercises, meditation, mindfulness meditation, and positive affirmations.

- **Activity #1:** The first activity that will be done will be focused on helping the group members regulate their anxious feelings that are affecting their daily functioning. All members will be asked to participate in a few different activities in a large group. The first one will be the introduction to yoga, the second will be breathing exercises, and the last one will be positive affirmations.
  - ○ Yoga Poses that melt away stress. (Group Facilitator will look up yoga poses that melt away stress and bring a printout to the group).
  - ○ Breathing Exercises (Group Facilitator will look up different breathing exercises like box breathing and rainbow breathing on Google and bring printouts to the group).
  - ○ Positive Affirmations (Group Facilitator will go through these different statements with group members working on their positive affirmations to themselves).
    - ■ I am strong and powerful.
    - ■ I am growing stronger and healthier
    - ■ I believe in myself.
    - ■ I can overcome anything.

- This feeling will pass and I will be okay.

- I am worth the time and energy.

○ Once the group members have gone through all those different exercises to help them regulate their anxious feelings, we will now be moving into our second activity.

- **Activity #2 Letting Go of Anxious Thoughts:** At this time, group members have had a chance to work through different coping strategies that allow us to help with regulating our anxious feelings. Now, you're going to work on letting those feelings go. All group members will receive a Letting Go of Anxious Thoughts worksheet. For about 5-10 mins, each group member will work individually to write down their anxious feelings inside the balloons (Refer to Appendix G).

- **Group Share:** At the end of that time, we will come back together and group members will have a chance to share the anxious feelings they're going to work on letting go. Once students are done sharing, you will now present the homework for their final group.

- **Homework:** Students will pick 1-2 anxious feelings they wrote in their balloons and write a journal entry on how they will work on letting those feelings go. They will then be asked to share that entry with a parent and/or guardian.

- **Closing Ritual/Wrap-up:** Before everyone leaves, they need to answer a prompt question (the group facilitator can pick any question to ask the group).

Session 8: Closing

Objectives:

- Students will gain more awareness of their anxiety and identify a vision statement that will help them continue to focus on the positive attributes other than just the negative ones.

Outline:

- **Opening Ritual: Feelings check-in**

Welcome all the students back to the group and then proceed with the opening ritual of the feelings check-in.

- **Review Homework:** At this time, go over the homework assigned from last week.
  - Group Share/Table Talk: Let the students share their anxious feelings that they picked to write a journal entry about and how they will work on letting those feelings go. Also, give time for students to share their experiences with sharing those feelings with their parents and/or guardian.

- **Topic:** Closing
  - Introduce today's topic to the group. "Welcome back everyone and welcome to our final week together. We've worked on so many things in the past 8 weeks together that today I wanted to do things a little differently. Today we're going to do an activity where we write a vision statement. Does anyone know what a vision statement is? (Give time for answers or guesses). A vision statement is an inspirational set of words that helps us describe a different version of our current

life. For example, this could help you change something in your life that may be negative or hurting you into a positive thing".

- **Activity:** Vision Statement
  - First have all group members write out 10 words that describe them when they're feeling their best and not feeling anxious.
  - Then have them pick the 7 most important to them.
  - And now the 5 most important to them.
  - After all the group members have picked their 5, they will use that to write their vision statement for the rest of the year. (this can also be for the next school year, etc).
  - The prompt of the vision statement should read: "During the rest of this year, I_____ am going to show up each day…….
    1.
    2.
    3.
    4.
    5.
       Because…………. (ex: I want to be the best version of myself for me, my family, and everyone else around me).
- **Group Share:** At this time, bring everyone back and go through the vision statement with them. Give a chance for every student to share their vision statement with the group.
- **Homework:** Since this is the last group their homework is to continue to work on these skills and use the coping strategies to help when they start to feel anxious.

- **<u>Last Closing Ritual/Wrap-up:</u>** The last closing ritual/wrap-up will be a circle share of your favorite moment, activity, or something learned in the group. Once everyone shares, hand out a piece of candy.

Critical Analysis

Strengths

Strengths within this manual are highlighted by its evidence-based models and the ability for this manual to be utilized amongst a variety of populations. This manual provides an abundance of activities and information for facilitators to use in order to incorporate the most unique experience for all students involved. The ability for this manual to be adjusted and manipulated to be directed to a wide variety of students makes it unique. Another strength that is highlighted throughout this manual is its ability to allow the students to be creative. The ability to be creative helps give the students the ability to focus on their feelings of anxiety and work through them. This helps give the students the ability to cope with their anxiety. The whole manual is centered on the idea of inclusivity and diversity, meaning that no matter the population of students involved, it can be utilized and utilized correctly.

Areas of Improvement

Within this manual, there are a few areas of improvement. For example, this manual could use more parent/family involvement and possibly more full group activities. Parent/Family involvement is essential to the success of the student's ability to develop coping strategies for their anxiety. There are certain aspects within this group manual that were intended for parental/family involvement but more direct contact with those individuals throughout the group curriculum would benefit that student largely. Another aspect of this group manual that could be improved is more direct contact within the group as a whole group. Throughout this manual, there are full group shares and table talks with elbow partners but giving the students the ability to work directly with the larger group on certain activities within

this group manual would help with self-esteem and positive self-talk and image. In the end, this

would create a more inclusive environment for all the students involved.

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Appendix A

ANXIETY TRIGGERS

An anxiety trigger is something that makes you feel anxious, worried, or nervous.
Read each item and rank from 1-10 how anxious each trigger makes you.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

CALM   A LITTLE ANXIOUS   ANXIOUS   EXTREMELY ANXIOUS!

____ School quizzes, tests, or assignments

____ Fear of failure

____ Being around certain people

____ Going to a new place for the first time

____ Conflict or drama with peers

____ Having too much time by myself

____ Working in groups

____ Pressure to act or behave a certain way

____ Performing/presenting in front of other people

____ Not feeling prepared

____ Changes to my routine

____ Feeling left out by my peer group

____ Interacting on social media

____ Being away from my phone for too log

____ Friends not texting me back

____ Having too much to do

____ Looks/appearance

____ Watching the news

____ Having conversations with peers or adults

____ Things not going the way I planned

____ Small spaces

____ Large crowds

____ Meeting new people

____ Not knowing what could happem

____ Not having enough money

____ Thinking about the future

____ Thinking about the past

____ Family or home stress

____ A sick friend or family member

____ My job, boss, or co-workers

____ Parent or teacher expectations

____ Heights or roller coasters

____ Trying new things

____ Grades

____ School violence

____ Loud noises or raised voices

____ Other: _____

____ Other: _____

⭐ What are the 3 biggest or most frequent triggers to your anxiety?

_____

_____

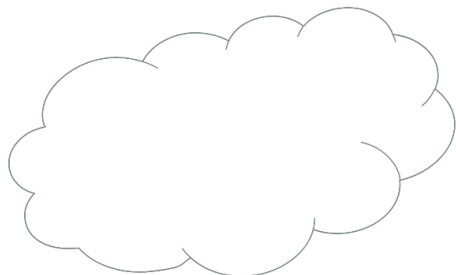⭐ What are your current coping skills to manage these triggers? Are they effective?

_____

_____

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Appendix B

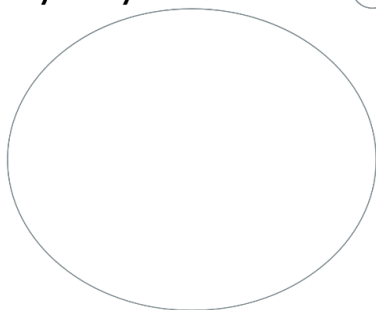## When I Feel...

I think...

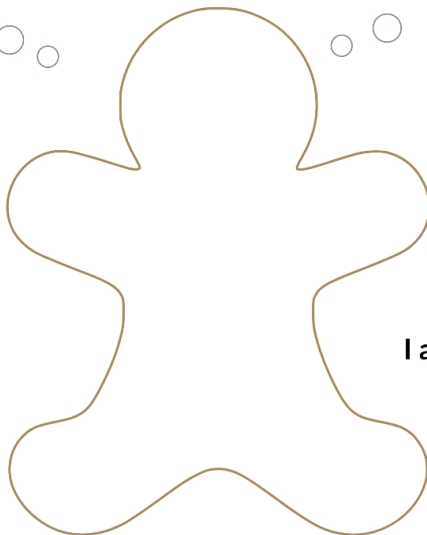**I think...**

My body feels...

My body feels...
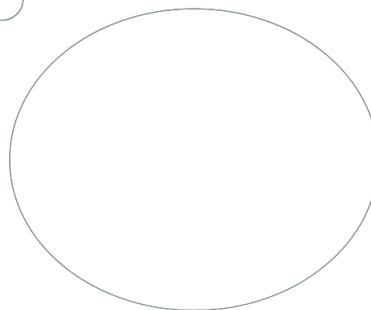
I act this way...

I act this way...

Appendix C

Worry Jar

A worry jar is a special place where you can store whatever it is that you're worried or anxious about.

Please write your worries in the jar!

Appendix D

Anxiety Thermometer

	How Do You Act?	What Can You Do About It?		
Frantic Out Of Control Panic	Crying, Screaming Refusing, Meltdown Impulsive Behaviors Shutting Down, Trouble Breathing	Ask a friend or adult for help / Practice grounding techniques	Take slow, deep breaths / Splash cold water on your face	Take a break in a peaceful spot / Take a nap
Anxious Overthinking Overwhelmed	Distracted Short-Tempered Trouble Sleeping Shaking, Pacing Frozen, Avoiding Negative Thinking, Fast Breathing Whining/Complaining Lost In Thought	Talk yourself into being calm / Tense and relax your muscles / Take a warm /cold shower	Think of a peaceful place / Get a drink of water / Stress management techniques / Count to 10 or 100	Meditate /Pray / Journal about your feelings / Move your body or exercise
Nervous Stressed Worried				
Tense Uncomfortable Uneasy	Tight Muscles, Pacing Fidgeting, Groaning Trouble Concentrating	Get or give a hug / Talk to friends or family	Get some fresh air / Listen to music	Do a hobby you enjoy / Squeeze a stress ball
Calm Peaceful Relaxed	Smiling, Engaged Relaxed Body Paying Attention Enjoying Yourself	Smile & practice gratitude / Help someone else	Use kind & positive words / Take steps toward your goals	Keep listening / Write about your successes

Appendix E

COPING WITH ANXIETY

Some things that make me feel anxious are...

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

When I feel anxious:

I feel this in my body...	I have these thoughts...	I do these things...

I can cope with anxious feelings by:

Check the coping skills that might be helpful, try to choose at least one from each category!

RELAXATION SKILLS

- [ ] Take 3 deep breaths
- [ ] Get a hug or give a hug
- [ ] Practice mindfulness
- [ ] Tense and relax your muscles
- [ ] Take a nap
- [ ] Other: _____
- [ ] Other: _____

DISTRACTION SKILLS

- [ ] Count from 1 to 100
- [ ] Find a trusted person to talk to
- [ ] Watch a funny movie
- [ ] Listen to music
- [ ] Do a hobby, write, draw, color, build
- [ ] Other: _____
- [ ] Other: _____

MOVEMENT SKILLS

- [ ] Take a break in your safe place
- [ ] Exercise/Run/Jog
- [ ] Jump up and down
- [ ] Stretching
- [ ] Yoga poses
- [ ] Other: _____
- [ ] Other: _____

THINKING SKILLS

- [ ] Use encouraging self-talk
- [ ] Think of 3 things you are grateful for
- [ ] Think of a peaceful place
- [ ] Challenge unhelpful thoughts
- [ ] Imagine sending your worries away on a rocket
- [ ] Other: _____
- [ ] Other: _____

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Appendix F

COPING STATEMENTS
FOR ANXIETY

Coping Statements are things you say to yourself to calm down, or encourage yourself through an anxious situation. Use the below coping statements whenever you feel worried or anxious. In the empty thought bubbles write down some more positive things you can say to yourself whenever you feel anxious.

I can cope with this. I am stronger than I think.

It's just anxiety, it's not dangerous, it's just temporarily uncomfortable.

I've survived other tough times before, and I will be strong this time too.

I will stay present and ground myself with my 5 senses. What do I see, feel, hear, smell, and taste?

Worrying is not solving any of my problems. What can I do instead?

I can move forward even when I feel anxious.

Just focus on the thing I can control. Forget about the things I can't!

This is just a feeling. It will pass.

Anxiety is a normal emotion. It tells me it's time to use my coping skills.

These are just my anxious thoughts. I don't have to believe them. I am safe right now!

This feeling is a reminder to slow down, and take some deep breaths.

I can overcome my anxiety if I take small steps toward facing my fear.

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Appendix G

Letting Go Of Anxious Thoughts

Sometimes letting go of our worries can help us feel light and free.
What are some anxious thoughts you can let go of?
Draw or write these thoughts in the balloons and let them go!