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School Counselors Treating Anxiety in Public School Settings: A Group Manual

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Abstract

As anxiety becomes more prevalent in children and adolescents, the demand for mental health resources has also increased. School counselors are highly trained mental health professionals who could be one of the answers to help close the gap of the demand for mental health resources. This review aims to analyze the benefits and effectiveness of school counselors treating anxiety in public school settings by utilizing small group interventions. Most public school settings have school counselors available for students, which is an opportunity for school counselors to provide mental health services. Several research studies have been conducted on this topic, showing benefits of school counselors treating anxiety. This review will analyze different therapies and strategies used to treat anxiety in public school settings such as cognitive behavioral therapy and small group interventions. It is important to note that depending on the school district in which the school counselor is employed, the administration may require tasks that interfere with the amount of time in the day to implement mental health treatments.

Keywords: Anxiety, School Counselors, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

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Introduction

The American School Counseling Association (2019), or ASCA, describes the therapy that school counselors provide as short-term, lasting 6-8 weeks. If longer-term counseling is needed, it is best practice to refer to outside community resources. One of the issues surrounding this ASCA position statement, is the extreme need for mental health services and those services not always being available to the students. Services may not be available to students due to several barriers, which include transportation, health insurance, lack of providers, etc. However, school counselors may be one of the solutions to these barriers by providing small group interventions at school. These interventions have shown to be beneficial in reducing the symptoms of anxiety in students.

Small group counseling is considered a responsive service according to ASCA (2019). These services are meant to specifically address a problem a student may be having. Studies have shown the effectiveness of school counseling interventions, such as small group counseling. In a study conducted by Whiston et al. (2009), researchers concluded that receiving counseling services was more effective for students than not receiving them at all. This shows the importance of school counselors providing direct students services, which includes small group interventions.

There are several positive aspects to the group process, in which students can feel safe, supported, and cared for (Gerrity & DeLucia-Waack, 2007). A group setting can provide opportunities that individuals sessions may not be as successful in. Discussion and role-play are two key components of group sessions that may not be as effective in an individual session. However, as the need for mental health interventions increases, the need for counseling curricula and group manuals also increases. This literature review and small group manual will aim to

provide school counselors with a small group manual focused on reducing symptoms of anxiety that is grounded in research.

Literature Review

McLoone et al. (2006) suggests that anxiety is one of the most common mental health disorders among children. Most public school students have access to a school counselor, which means families could have immediate access to mental health interventions (McLoone et al., 2006). With anxiety becoming more prevalent in school-aged children, it is important to note that school counselors can implement mental health interventions with children at school. School counselors are in a unique position to provide services that students may otherwise not be able to receive outside of school. Clinical counselors and psychologists are often hard to get in to, which is one of the barriers for students receiving outside services. Therefore, school counselors must provide an option for families to support their children with their mental health, specifically anxiety (Warner et al., 2016). To reach as many children as possible, it is important that school counselors can effectively provide interventions for anxiety. This could include additional trainings or additions to the school counseling staff.

When children have symptoms of anxiety, their academics and education are greatly impacted (McLoone et al. 2006). This impact on education provides another reason why schools should be aware of the prevalence and effects of anxiety on children. To provide a successful learning environment, schools must ensure that students are provided with the tools to effectively manage their own emotions and feelings. One of the tools they can provide for students is a highly effective school counseling program. Included in these programs, is the option for students to receive small group or individual counseling services. It would be important to ensure school counselors have the proper training to effectively provide interventions for anxiety in small group or individual sessions.

School counselors may have several different responsibilities required of them throughout the day. The American School Counselor Association, or ASCA (2019), provides school counselors with multiple resources to implement an effective counseling program. ASCA (2019), includes resources to help school counselors advocate for more staffing and resources. As mental health disorders become more prevalent, the need for counselors to advocate for their jobs and resources become crucial. Therefore, this review strives to advocate for the importance of school counselors working directly with students throughout most of their day, whether that be preventative measures or specific interventions. Allowing school counselors to focus on counseling rather than non-counseling related duties, provides students with the support they need and deserve. It also allows more time for school counselors to implement tier two services, such as small group interventions.

Public schools have a specific budget to finance the education of K-12 students. It is common that there is not enough funding to spread out to all areas of a school. Often, school counselors advocate for more resources to assist them with implementing a comprehensive program. With more research being completed on child and adolescent mental health, it is important to consider utilizing this data and research to advocate for more mental health resources. As mental health disorders become more prevalent, the resources and program planning become more important (Ghandour et al., 2019).

Prevalence

In a study, Ghandour (et al., 2019), found that about 10% of 40,000 children from ages 3-17 have symptoms of anxiety or depression. This study was conducted on a national level, which shows that anxiety is a national epidemic. It is important for public schools to consider these rising numbers of mental health disorders. One of the effects of the increase in mental health

disorders, is that behavior problems are also increasing (Ghandour et al., 2019). Students spend most of their day at school, so an increase in behavior problems can largely affect the overall environment of a school. Maintaining a positive environment is important for the success of students and the mental health of school staff. To maintain a positive environment, behavior management is one of the key aspects. Implementing specific interventions, such as small group sessions, aimed toward reducing symptoms of anxiety or depression may also result in a decrease of behavior problems.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Cognitive behavior therapy, or CBT, analyzes human thoughts, behaviors, and emotions and how they affect the way humans think, feel and act. CBT has been used as a treatment for anxiety with all ages. However, CBT is rarely used in public school settings (Forman & Barakat, 2011). Forman (2011) aims to determine how CBT is implemented in schools and if it is affective. Many schools are looking for more ways to positively impact students' mental health. With the ever-growing need for mental health services, implementing CBT treatments and strategies can provide school counselors with another intervention to utilize throughout small group and individual sessions.

Some school counselors have started to use CBT treatments as an intervention for anxiety. With implementing something new in the school setting, it is crucial that staff know how to effectively implement CBT. Counselors must be mindful of their administrator's perspective, current school programs, structure, and level of training of the school counselor. When counselors are properly trained, the more effective CBT treatment is. It is also important to have high-quality materials to use in sessions, for example small group manuals (Forman &

Barakat, 2011). School counselors can utilize existing treatment manuals or create their own according to ASCA standards.

Research Studies on CBT in School Settings

A cognitive behavioral therapy program, called Taming Worry Dragons (TWD), was implemented by five female teachers and one female school counselor to determine the effectiveness of whole group classroom interventions. Before the study began, the counselor and teachers participated in a training to ensure high quality implementation. The training was conducted by a licensed psychologist (Miller et al., 2010). It is important that staff is properly trained to have effective outcomes. In theory, high trained mental health professionals will then create positive outcomes for their client.

While most of the students did not show reduced symptoms, the program did show effectiveness among students with more prevalent symptoms of anxiety (Miller et al., 2010). Thus, determining that school counselors who use TWD as a small group counseling intervention with students who have been identified with symptoms of anxiety, may have success. The researchers noted that the time of year and classroom atmosphere may have influenced the result of the study. Also, due to the high case load numbers in most schools, counselors can reach more students by facilitating small groups.

Hirshfeld-Becker et. al. (2010) conducted a clinical study that utilized a CBT approach that included up to 20 sessions over 6 months of children ages 4 to 7. This study was unique because it also included parent involvement by having them participate in six counseling sessions, without their children, that focused on parenting strategies for children with anxiety (Hirshfeld-Becker et. al, 2010). In a school setting, parent involvement is becoming increasingly important, especially when dealing with behavior, or high levels of anxiety. It is evident that

students have anxiety both at home and school, so this study gives parents the opportunity to work on coping mechanisms at home, which connects to what they are working on with the counselor at school. This study shows that with parent involvement, CBT treatment can be affective among 4- to 7-year-old children. Perhaps including additional parent sessions within small group manuals can help decrease the high levels of anxiety among children.

Ginsburg (2009) also studies the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral intervention for children of families with anxiety disorders through an 8-week intervention. In the study, Ginsburg (2009) notes that it is the first study on preventative measures for children of families with anxiety disorders to be published; creating an opportunity for it to be replicated in other areas. This short-term prevention model could be formatted to be used by school counselors, as short-term models often are more beneficial in a school setting. By utilizing short term models, school counselors can have multiple sessions, which means they would be able to reach more students throughout the school year. If a school counselor replicated this study in other settings, possibly shorter terms, could show positive results.

As clinical counselors and psychologists are becoming harder to get into, school counselors can provide an option for families to support their children with their mental health, specifically anxiety, by utilizing CBT treatments in small group settings. Warner et al. (2016), delivered a 12-week CBT intervention for students with social anxiety disorder (SAD) to determine whether or not school counselors can effectively treat social anxiety in a school setting. The study concluded that with proper training, school counselors can implement interventions with success. As stated in previous studies, training is important to ensure that students are given adequate instruction, which in theory should yield a positive outcome.

Small Group

School counselors providing mental health services can look many ways. Many school counselors provide tier one interventions, meaning all students have access to social emotional learning. However, the need for tier two services, which are usually implemented through small group and individual counseling sessions, are becoming more prevalent. There are many options for tier two interventions, but small group intervention is one of the most common (Hatch et al., 2019). This is why having a strong, research based, small group manual is important.

There are several important considerations when selecting or writing a small group manual, especially within the school setting. Due to the role of the school counselor specifically implementing short-term interventions, rather than long-term treatment that community-based mental health providers would provide, it is important that counselors identify the most important and necessary skills that need to be addressed. According to Hatch et al. (2019), school counselors must have knowledge of the science, or curriculum, but also make sure to use their own art of counseling to ensure the curriculum is engaging for students.

Choosing an appropriate small group manual is important. Several manuals are available for free or by purchasing, but not all are grounded in research. In order to best serve the needs of students, manuals must be data driven and research based (Hatch et al., 2019). However, this is also a challenge due to the amount of small group manuals available that are research based. Therefore, group manuals can be affective when the time has been spent analyzing the content and ensuring practices are grounded in research.

In addition, it is important to note that although the small group curriculum may be appropriate, the delivery is just as important towards successful results (Hatch et al., 2019). Within the art of counseling, counselors must get to know their students, use fun and engaging activities, collaborate with other staff members, utilized effective classroom management, as

well as facilitation counseling skills. All these elements play a key role in the success of a small group intervention. Therefore, when choosing or creating a group manual it is important to consider these features.

Intervention

Intervention that has been proven to be successful is vital toward establishing positive mental health in children. With the proper intervention, the rate of mental health disorders in children and adolescents should decrease. Mental health professionals have stressed the importance of preventative intervention for years (Ginsburg, 2009). Hirshfeld-Becker & Biederman (2002), discuss the importance of early intervention and that research has provided hope toward the effectiveness of early intervention. Specifically, students who received intervention experienced less symptoms and less additional mental health problems than the students who did not. School counselors who utilize small group interventions is one example of an early intervention.

Ghandour (et al., 2019), notes that at times treatment of mental health problems may be implemented in the school setting. Public schools can utilize their school counseling program to respond to the crisis of rising mental health disorders. Additionally, this provides an opportunity for low-income families to receive mental health services that they may not otherwise have access to (Ghandour et al., 2019). If organizations, such as public schools, do not start to address mental health as a top priority, the effect of students' overall daily lives, health, and achievement could be at risk.

Involving Parents and Families

One of the important factors of intervention is parental support. Often it is found that mental health disorders are passed genetically through families (Ginsburg, 2009). The possibility

of the parents also having mental a health disorder, could increase the anxiousness of the child. It is not uncommon for parents or guardians to be unaware of how to help their children with their mental health problems (Hirshfeld-Becker & Biederman, 2002). To effectively treat mental health disorders, it is vital to educate families as well. Along with educating parents, it is important to listen and hear the concerns of the family to adequately treat their child. Including parent education and communication can increase the effectiveness of the intervention. Parent education can be implemented throughout sessions in small group counseling interventions.

Successful Strategies Within Group

Hirshfeld-Becker & Biederman (2002), provide several successful intervention strategies that can be utilized to reduce negative mental health symptoms. They discuss the successful use of play in therapy with children. Using games and play is effective when considering the age of the child. The earlier the intervention, the more successful play can be, when used in a therapy session. Additionally, puppets can be used for re-entering the child to an anxiety-provoking experience. While the child is experiencing their emotions through play, it is important to continue to coach through this intervention. Implementing this strategy in small group can look like students coaching each other through anxiety-provoking situations.

Coaching and positive self-talk are two strategies that can be successful interventions for children with anxiety (Hirshfeld-Becker & Biederman, 2002). As mentioned previously, parental involvement is key to the success of each therapy session on a child's mental health. Therefore, it is important to provide parents and families with the proper tools so that they can encourage their child at home and coach them as well. Anxiety does not only exist in the counseling room, it always exists, so it is important to provide as many supports throughout their day as possible. One of the largest supports in a child's life is their parents and family. In addition, small groups

provide students with a community of people who have common struggles. This is a community that can help students understand they are not alone.

Ginsburg (2009) provides additional research on specific interventions that are successful in treating childhood mental health disorders. About 70% of these skills were perceived as beneficial in the counseling process, talking to a professional or therapist. Also, giving families information on specific mental health related challenges was shown to be successful. Providing handouts, journaling, mindfulness, and hand-outs were rated significantly lower in their perception of effectiveness, but still provide positive outcomes. It would be important to consider utilizing these interventions throughout sessions in a small group manual.

Three specific school-based programs were analyzed by McLoone et al. (2006), which included Cool Kids, Friends, and Skills for Social and Academic Success (SASS). All these programs specifically utilized cognitive behavioral therapy. Two of which were helpful in treating most problems of anxiety, and one was specific to social anxiety. These programs express the importance of exposing children to their anxiety provoking events, as avoidance of an anxiety provoking event will only make the anticipation worse. Throughout these programs, children analyze their thoughts and feelings while working toward establishing new ideas that are more realistic. This is discovered by using experiences and factual evidence. In small group, students can work through these situations in a safe space, along with others to support them.

Cultural Considerations

Metzger et al. (2020) state that African American youth experience trauma at a higher rate than those from other cultures. Specifically, these youth have experienced situations involving discrimination and racism higher than that of other situations. This statistic is alarming because many trauma treatments do not address the specific cultural norms, or racist trauma,

which would be important in the successful treatment of a minority client. Trauma related anxiety often stems from negative racial experiences, which is an important thing for school counselors to consider as well. All of these are vital factors towards the successful counseling of African American youth.

It is extremely important for school counselors to consider the racial and cultural background of all of their students, especially in a group setting. This is crucial toward the success of any intervention or therapy that may be used in a school setting. While the research from Metzger et al. (2020) specifically talks about African American youth, many of their points can be addressed within other racial and ethnic groups. Regardless of the student a counselor is working with, the strategies used will need to be chosen carefully and vetted on its effectiveness before use. Racial and cultural background have significant effect on a child's anxiety symptoms; therefore, it will continue to be a vital component of their counseling plan.

An important factor to consider implementing is racial socialization, or RS (Metzger et al., 2020). Racial socialization ensures that children are prepared to cope with the negative effects of a racial minority status. This is ensured by educating children and providing them with opportunities to become stronger in their own identity. By implementing RS, students may become more resilient to the barriers they will face as they grow up. This has shown to aid in positive behavior, student success, and overall health. It is an important component for a school counselor to consider inputting into sessions. Metzger et al. (2020), provide extensive positive effects to adding this to a therapeutic session. While working with any minority client it is important to provide them with tools to have a healthy positive cultural identity.

Conclusion

Multiple pieces of research conclude that school counselors do in fact have the capability of effectively providing intervention for anxiety within a public school setting. With proper training, school counselors can provide students with services directly at frequented place, which can eliminate several barriers that other mental health services might have. As mental health disorders increase, it is important to consider using school counselors for direct therapeutic services for students. As trained professionals, with a master's degree, they have the basis for effectively providing interventions for mental health disorders.

To effectively provide these services, school counselors may need to seek out additional training in specific theories or therapies. There are several counseling theories and therapies, so there is always room for more training. For example, a school counselor would most likely need additional training in racial socialization, which was mentioned in the research by Metzger et al. (2020). Furthermore, it is always important for school counselors to continue to educate themselves in all areas, but especially areas they are not as familiar with.

It is important to note that the limited resources provided by public schools may not always allow for school counselors to provide these specific interventions. It is important that school counselors continue to advocate for their role within the school. This could include advocating for additional training and or the hiring of more school counselors.

The benefits are clear, as direct school counseling services can greatly impact the outcome of student success. As stated previously, intervention has shown to be highly beneficial for children and adolescents. With utilizing the counseling resources that are directly in our public school settings, it may be effective in reducing the number of cases of childhood or adolescent anxiety.

Group Manual Overview

Group Leadership

This group manual is designed to be led by a licensed school counselor. This manual

could be led by a school counseling intern if they are supervised by a licensed school counselor.

ASCA Standards

M1   Belief in development of whole self, including a healthy balance of mental,
            social/emotional and physical well-being

B-SMS 7   Effective Coping Skills

Theoretical Models

Psychoeducational Group Model   Provides explicit teaching on coping skills to help students
                                   manage their anxiety

Adlerian Group Counseling Theory   Emphasizes positive relationships, explicit teaching, and
                                   practice (Corey, 2016)

Solution-focused Therapy   Promotes perseverance and self-confidence (Corey, 2016)

Outline

  I.   Group Information, Informed Consent and Professional Disclosure

 II.   Pre-Assessment/Post-Assessment

III.   Weekly Group Plans and Goals
        a. Session 1: Introduction to Group
        b. Session 2: Defining Anxiety
        c. Session 3: Recognizing Physical Sensations with Anxiety
        d. Session 4: Identifying Small and Big Feelings
        e. Session 5: Identifying Triggers
        f. Session 6: CBT Triangle
        g. Session 7: Role-play/Practicing Helping Strategies
        h. Session 8: Celebration/Closing the Group

IV.   At-Home Practices

        a. Parent/Guardian Letters and Psychoeducation Handouts

Group Counseling Sessions

Information and Informed Consent

Dear parent(s) and guardian(s),

My name is (insert counselor name), and I am one of the school counselors at (insert school name). You are receiving this letter because your child has indicated a skill, or skills, that could be worked on in a short-term, small group, counseling intervention. My sessions are grounded in research and can be highly beneficial for students. I hope to have your child meet with me in a group! If you have any questions, please reach out by sending me an e-mail or calling the school directly.

Who are the group sessions designed for?	How long will we meet?
Any student in grades 3, 4, or 5 who may benefit from additional support with managing feelings of anxiety.	This will be an 8-week program. During this time, your student will attend a 30-minute group session, once a week.
How many students will be in a group?	**What are the expectations?**
Small group sessions will be limited to groups of 3-5 students. Once sessions begin, we will not be adding new students to build trust within the group.	Develop helpful strategies and gain specific skills to cope with anxiety.

Sincerely,

(insert counselor name)
School Counselor
(insert school name)
(insert phone number)
(insert email)

Permission Form
I give permission for my child, _____, to participate in a weekly 30-minute session for 8 consecutive weeks that focuses on anxiety.

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Counselor Signature: _____ Date: _____

Professional Disclosure

Parent(s) and Guardian(s),

Short-term group counseling has shown to be highly beneficial for students. As I am eager to begin working with your child, please read over this professional disclosure and consider having a conversation with your child at home to prepare them for our group sessions. As part of a school counselor's ethical code, it is important that I inform you about the practices, limitations, and policies we have.

Our Commitments as a Group
- Members of the group will feel safe and respected.
- Members will get an equal chance to share and discuss their feelings but will not be forced to share.
- Things that are talked about within group sessions are private and will not be shared outside of group sessions. The only exceptions to this are stated under professional commitments.
- Please note that although we discuss the importance of confidentiality, this is a limitation when working with a group.

Professional Commitments
- As state by law, we must report:
    - If we believe you may cause harm to yourself or you discuss hurting yourself.
    - If we believe you may cause harm to someone else or you discuss harming someone else.
    - If we believe someone else is causing harm to you or is going to cause harm to you.
- If any of these occur, we must report to the necessary people. If this involves you harming someone else, we must inform that person and their parent or guardian, as well as law enforcement if deemed needed.

Pre and Post Assessment

Students will be given a pre and post assessment for counselors to gain more background knowledge and analyze growth after 8-weeks of sessions have been completed. Students will take a self-survey utilized by Danielle Barnes throughout her research on "Helping Students Understand and Manage Anxiety through a School Counseling Program Using Mindfulness Techniques". The questions on the pre and post assessment will be the same.

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Core Curriculum Pre-Test
Mindfulness for Anxiety Intervention

Student Name: _____   Date: _____

Please circle the number on the scale that best describes your level of agreement:

Not Applicable N/A	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Neither Agree or Disagree 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1

1. I can tell when I am feeling anxious.   N/A 5 4 3 2 1

2. It is very uncommon to have anxious feelings.   N/A 5 4 3 2 1

3. I can tell when a friend is experiencing anxious feelings.   N/A 5 4 3 2 1

4. I know how to manage my anxious feelings.   N/A 5 4 3 2 1

5. My anxious feelings often take over and I feel helpless.   N/A 5 4 3 2 1

6. I understand the concept of mindfulness.   N/A 5 4 3 2 1

7. Mindfulness can help me manage my anxious feelings.   N/A 5 4 3 2 1

8. I know how to focus on my physical sensations & thoughts.   N/A 5 4 3 2 1

9. Breathing deeply helps me relax and regain control.   N/A 5 4 3 2 1

10. I have a variety of strategies I can use when I am feeling anxious. N/A 5 4 3 2 1

11. I plan to use those strategies in my everyday life.   N/A 5 4 3 2 1

(Barnes, Danielle, 2018, p. 62)

Weekly Group Plans and Goals

Session 1: Introduction to Group

Goal: Group members and leaders will get to know each other to help create a trusting

environment.

    I.   **Introduction**

        a. The group leader will facilitate an introduction of the group and group members.

            They will discuss the goal of the group process: Learning about tools to help us

            when we feel worried or nervous.

        b. The group leader will facilitate a discuss on confidentiality and the importance of

            keeping things private, as well as the limitations to confidentiality.

        c. The group leader will facilitate a discussion on creating group norms and

            expectations. Some examples of norms include one person speaks at a time, keep

            things private, respect other group members, bodies are calm. Group leader will

            write down the norms and post these during each session for group members to

            reference.

   II.   **Group Discussion**

        a. The group leader will facilitate "Peaks and Pits", which is inviting group

            members to share something positive that has happened in their life recently and

            something negative that is weighing on their mind.

  III.   **Activity/Role Play**

        a. Making connections: group members will form a circle. Group members will take

            turns, each stating something about themselves (ex. I have a dog). If any other

            members have that in common, they will step into the circle. This activity will

help establish things that members have in common, which will help with

building trust and willingness to share.

IV.   **Wrap Up - Relaxation Exercise**

    a.   Bumble Bee Breaths: Members will sit crisscross and close their eyes if they are

comfortable. They will cover their ears with their fingers. Then, they will breathe

in deeply and when they breathe out, they will hum (Cosmic Kids, 2013).

Session 2: Defining Anxiety

Goal: Group members will be able to understand and define what anxiety is.

I.   **Introduction**

    a. The group leader will facilitate "Peaks and Pits", which is inviting group members to share something positive that has happened in their life recently and something negative that is weighing on their mind.

    b. The group leader will provide the option for further discussion if group members would like to process.

II.   **Explicit Teaching**

    a. The group leader will read pages 12-17 of "What to Do When You Worry Too Much" by Dawn Huebner, Ph.D.

III. **Activity/Role Play**

    a. Group members will receive a blank piece of paper. The group leader will direct members to draw something, or things that they worry about.

    b. The group leader will facilitate a discussion between group members about their drawings

IV.   **Wrap Up - Relaxation Exercise**

    a. Nose breathing: Have group members place their finger over one nostril and breathe in. Then, they will switch their finger to the other nostril as they breathe out. Repeat this movement as they breathe. This should take a maximum of 2 minutes (Mindfulmazing, 2021).

Session 3: Recognizing Physical Sensations with Anxiety

Goal: Group members can recognize how their body feels when worried or anxious.

I.   **Introduction**

   a.   The group leader will facilitate "Peaks and Pits", which is inviting group members to share something positive that has happened in their life recently and something negative that is weighing on their mind.

   b.   The group leader will provide the option for further discussion if group members would like to process.

II.   **Explicit Teaching**

   a.   The group leader will tell members: "A physical sensation is what we feel in or on our body. For example, feeling cold is a physical sensation. Some other examples of physical sensations include headaches, heart racing, upset stomach, tight/tense muscles, tingling. Physical sensations are important to recognize because they are our body's way of telling us something is going on. Today we are going to identify the physical sensations our bodies experience when we feel big emotions, like anxiety."

III.   **Activity/Role Play**

   a.   The group leader will provide a list of possible physical sensations and post for group members to look at and reference during the activity.

   b.   Group members will be provided with an outline of a human body. The group leader will direct members to identify the parts in their body where they feel anxiety. Members will draw on those specific parts of the body. Example: swirl over the stomach to show feelings of an upset stomach when anxious.

    c. Group members will be invited to share their physical sensations that they experience when feeling anxious.

IV. Wrap Up – Relaxation Exercise

    a. Five Finger Breathing - Instruct the group members to look at the back of their hand. With their other hand they will use their pointer finger to trace up and down each finger. When they trace up, they will breathe in; when they trace down, they will breathe out. When they get to the end of their hand, they will go back the other way.

Session 4: Identifying Small and Big Feelings

Goal: Students will be able to recognize when feelings are small verses when they are big.

I. **Introduction**

   a. The group leader will facilitate "Peaks and Pits", which is inviting group members to share something positive that has happened in their life recently and something negative that is weighing on their mind.

   b. The group leader will provide the option for further discussion if group members would like to process.

II. **Explicit Teaching**

   a. Group leader will open a discussion about big and small feelings: "We all have feelings each and every day, some feelings are small, and some feelings are big. When we have big feelings, we should talk to an adult or use a strategy to help us."

   b. Group leaders will give examples of small and big feelings using the feelings thermometer: "These feeling thermometers can help us determine how big or small our feelings are. Depending on the situation, we might be at a 2 on the feeling thermometer or maybe at a 10, or somewhere in between."

III. **Activity/Role Play**

   a. Group leader will facilitate a discussion on identifying situations at each level of the feeling thermometer: "Let's start with a 6, what are some things that would have you at a 6 on the feeling thermometer?"

   b. Group members will be provided with their own feeling thermometers, in which they can write their own situations for each level of the thermometer.

IV. **Wrap Up – Relaxation Exercise**

    a. Body Scan

    b. Group leader will facilitate body scan using the following script:

"Begin by bringing your attention to your environment, slowly looking around and noticing that you are safe in this moment. Bring your attention into your body.

You can close your eyes if that's comfortable for you or maintain a soft gaze, with your eyes partially closed but not focusing on anything in particular.

You can notice your body seated wherever you're seated, feeling the support of the chair or the floor beneath you.

Take a few deep, long breaths, within the range of what is comfortable for you.

And as you take a deep breath, bring in more oxygen, enlivening the body. And as you exhale, you might experience a sense of relaxing more deeply.

You can notice your feet on the floor, notice the sensations of your feet touching the floor. The weight and pressure, vibration, heat.

You can notice your legs against the chair, pressure, pulsing, heaviness, lightness.

Notice your back against the chair, supporting you. If you are not able to notice sensations in all areas of the body, that is OK. We are more connected to certain areas of the body than others, at different times of the day.

Bring your attention into your stomach area. If your stomach is tense or tight, can you allow it to soften? Take a breath.

Notice your hands. Are your hands tense or tight? See if you can allow them to soften.

Notice your arms. Feel any sensation in your arms. Do your best to allow your

shoulders to be soft.

Notice your neck and throat. Try to allow them be soft. See if you can invite a sense of relaxation in.

Try to soften your jaw. Do your best to allow your face and facial muscles to be soft. Then notice your whole-body present. Take one more breath.

Be aware of your whole body as best you can. Take a breath. Slowly open up the eyes, without focusing on anything in particular. Allow the head and neck to gently rotate, taking in the space you are in. When you feel ready, you can return to your normal gaze." (Greater Good in Action, 2022)

Session 5: Identifying Triggers

Goal: Students will be able to identify specific things or situations that may cause them to become anxious, or more anxious.

I.   **Introduction**

    a.   The group leader will facilitate "Peaks and Pits", which is inviting group members to share something positive that has happened in their life recently and something negative that is weighing on their mind.

    b.   The group leader will provide the option for further discussion if group members would like to process.

II.   **Explicit Teaching**

    a.   Group leader will say: "Sometimes there are certain situations or things that can make us become anxious or make us feel more anxious than we already are. We call these triggers. Noticing our physical sensations, as discussed in one of our previous sessions, can help us recognize what our triggers are."

    b.   "Let's go over an example: If you were to get in a car accident, the next time you need to get in a car you might start to feel your heart race, palms sweat, body shake. These are warning signals that car rides might be a trigger for your anxiety. Another example might be if a certain subject in school is really hard for you, let's say its math for this example. When it's almost math time, you might start to feel those physical sensations in your body which tells you that you are anxious about math time."

III.   **Activity/Role Play**

    a.   Group leader will facilitate a discussion on the importance of recognizing

triggers: "why is it important to know what triggers your anxiety?"

b. Group members will be provided with a list of possible triggers. They will check-mark the triggers that apply to them.

c. Group leader will facilitate a discussion and invite group members to share their own triggers.

IV. **Wrap Up – Relaxation Exercise**

a. Group leader will facilitate a muscle relaxation exercise, squeeze the lemon, using the following script:

"First imagine you are holding a lemon in both hands. Now squeeze those lemons by squeezing your hands into fists–not too tight! Now count to 5 and then release your hands, dropping the lemons. Feel how relaxed your hands and arms feel."

(Osowski, 2020)

Session 6: Thoughts, Feelings and Actions

Goal: Students will be able to recognize how their thoughts, feelings and actions are all connected and affect each other.

I. **Introduction**

     a. The group leader will facilitate "Peaks and Pits", which is inviting group members to share something positive that has happened in their life recently and something negative that is weighing on their mind.

     b. The group leader will provide the option for further discussion if group members would like to process.

II. **Explicit Teaching**

     a. Group leader will say: "Today we are going to talk about our thoughts, feelings and actions."

     b. Group leader will show a poster of the CBT triangle and describe it: "Our thoughts affect how we feel and behave. Our feelings affect how we think and behave. Our actions affect how we think and feel. All 3 parts of the triangle are connected."

III. **Activity/Role Play**

     a. Group leader will lead by saying "let's practice using the CBT triangle with an example. We will start with a thought: 'I'm too dumb to learn math, I never understand it'. What might you be feeling because of that thought? What might you do because of that thought and how you are feeling?"

     b. Group leader will facilitate practice with the CBT triangle using real-life examples from group members: "Now let's try it with some of the thoughts,

feelings or actions you have had before."

IV.   **Wrap Up – Relaxation Exercise**

    a.   Group leader will facilitate a relaxation exercise, grounding, using the following

script:

"Look around and notice 5 things you can see, 4 things you can touch, 3 things

you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste." (Osowski, 2020)

Session 7: Role Play and Practice

Goal: Students will be able to apply what they have learned through role play exercises.

I. **Introduction**

    a. The group leader will facilitate "Peaks and Pits", which is inviting group members to share something positive that has happened in their life recently and something negative that is weighing on their mind.

    b. The group leader will provide the option for further discussion if group members would like to process.

II. **Explicit Teaching**

    a. Group leader will say: "We have learned a lot throughout the last 7 weeks together. Today we are going to use what we have learned to navigate different situations that may make you anxious. Remember that our thoughts, feelings and actions all connect and it's important to recognize our body's physical sensations because those can be warning signals that something is up, and we need to use a strategy."

III. **Activity/Role Play**

    a. Group leader will use the "What If" game (Sadurska, 2020) to practice using the CBT triangle and choosing helpful strategies instead of unhelpful strategies.

IV. **Wrap Up – Relaxation Exercise**

    a. Group leader will facilitate belly breathing. Group leader will instruct members to lie on their backs. Place one hand over their stomach. Breathe in for a count of 4, hold and breathe out. Repeat 3 times.

Session 8: Closing and Celebration

Goal: Students will be able to apply, or attempt to apply, the strategies taught throughout the last 8-weeks to situations in their daily lives.

   I. **Introduction**

   A. The group leader will facilitate "Peaks and Pits", which is inviting group members to share something positive that has happened in their life recently and something negative that is weighing on their mind.

   B. The group leader will provide the option for further discussion if group members would like to process.

   II. **Explicit Teaching**

   A. Group leader will review things discussed in previous sessions: physical sensations, feeling thermometer, triggers, CBT.

   B. Group leader will facilitate a discussion about each strategy practiced: bumble bee breaths, five finger breathing, body scan, squeeze the lemon, grounding, and belly breathing. Then, prompt group members to give examples of times they have used one or more of the strategies in the last 8 weeks.

   III. **Activity/Role Play**

   A. Group leader will facilitate a jigsaw activity: 4 pieces of chart paper will be hanging on the walls. Two with "school" written on them and two with "home" written on them. Group members will be split into two groups. Each group will have one poster for school and one for home to brainstorm strategies for coping with their anxiety at school and at home.

   B. Following the activity, group leaders will facilitate a discussion about the

information on the posters, relating it back to what was discussed in group sessions.

IV. **Wrap Up**

    A. Group leader will open a closing discussion, prompting group members to share any final thoughts or feelings.

    B. Group leader will invite group members to lean on each other for support and see group leaders for support.

At Home Practices

Parent/Caregiver Letter #1

Dear caretakers,

  I am excited to begin working with your student in a small group to develop helpful strategies and gain specific skills to cope with anxiety. As your student works through skills to cope with their anxiety, it is important that those who live and work with your student have an awareness and education about anxiety. In this letter, I will include some information that will provide you with some additional knowledge on anxiety. I will also be sending out two additional letters; one at the mid-way point in our group and one toward the end of our group to update you and provide more helpful information.

Important Things to Know About Anxiety

- Anxiety is a feeling of intense worry, stress, or fear (Child Mind Institute, 2023).
- Anxiety is one of the most common mental health disorders among children (McLoone et al., 2006).
- Some symptoms of anxiety include (Child Mind Institute, 2023):
  - Increase in fidgeting
  - Feeling tense/on edge
  - Tiredness
  - Difficulty concentrating
  - Increased feelings of anger
  - Difficulty sleeping

Sincerely,

(insert counselor name)

School Counselor

(insert school name)

(insert phone number/extension)

(insert email)

At Home Practices
Parent/Caregiver Letter #2

Dear caretakers,

I have enjoyed getting to know your student throughout our group sessions so far. They have been learning a lot and working really hard! As you know, I want to provide you with information to support your student at home. So far, we have worked on getting to know each other and building relationships, understanding what anxiety is, recognizing physical sensations with anxiety, and identifying small and big feelings.

How to Support Your Student and Their Anxiety

- Discuss what physical sensations your student has when they are feeling anxious (stomachache, heart racing, headache, etc.)
- Provide space in your home for your student to take a break when they are having feelings of anxiety
- Encourage your student to use the relaxations exercises that we have learned so far in our group sessions:
    - Bumblebee breaths
    - Nose breathing
    - Five-finger breathing
    - Body scan

Sincerely,
(insert counselor name)
School Counselor
(insert school name)
(insert phone number/extension)
(insert email)

At Home Practices

Parent/Caregiver Letter #3

Dear caretakers,

     We are almost coming to the end of our group sessions. I want to celebrate all the hard work that your student has put into our sessions each week. They have learned so much! In the last few sessions, we identified things that trigger feelings of anxiety, learned about the connection between thoughts, feelings, and actions, and used role play scenarios to practice coping skills.

How to Support Your Student and Their Anxiety

- Ask them about the triggers they identified: What are some things that cause you to feel anxious?
- Review the CBT Triangle with them - this triangle explains the connection between thoughts, feelings, and actions.
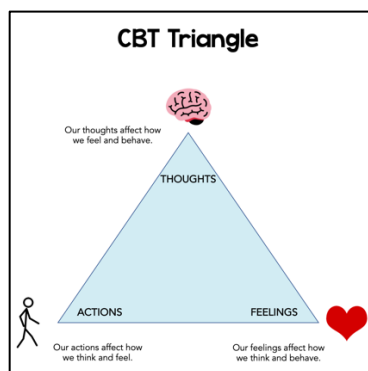
- Encourage your student to use the relaxations exercises that we have learned so far in our group sessions:
- See attached page for additional resources to help support your child

Sincerely,
(insert counselor name)
School Counselor
(insert school name)
(insert phone number/extension)
(insert email)

Additional Resources

Websites

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry –

https://www.aacap.org/aacap/Families_and_Youth/Resource_Centers/Anxiety_Disorder_

ResourRe_Center/Home.aspx

Anxiety Canada - https://www.anxietycanada.com/

Apps

Headspace for Kids - https://www.headspace.com/meditation/kids

Calm - https://www.calm.com/

Finch - https://finchcare.com/

Local Community Resources

In this section, insert local community resources that apply to your specific area/region

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Appendix

Appendix A: Session 1

    I.   Confidentiality Poster

    II.   Group Norms Template

Appendix B: Session 3

    I.   Physical Sensations Poster

    II.   Human Body Outline Worksheet

Appendix C: Session 4

    I.   Feeling Thermometer Poster

    II.   Feeling Thermometer Worksheet

Appendix D: Session 5

    I.   Triggers Worksheet

Appendix E: Session 6

    I.   CBT Poster

Appendix F: Session 7

    I.   "What If" Game (Sadurska, 2020)

Appendix A: Session 1

Confidentiality Contract

By writing my name below, I agree to keep everything that other kids say during this group

private and expect that other kids in the group will do the same.

Signed by,

on _____(date).

Appendix A: Session 1

Group Norms

The members of our group agree to:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

By writing my name below, I agree to follow the norms listed above expect that other kids in the

group will do the same.

Signed by,
on _____(date).

Types of Feelings

Emotional Feelings	Physical Feelings
Happy	Heart racing
Excited	Tingling
Proud	Itchy
Calm	Cold
Sad	Warm
Tired	Hot
Fear	Sweaty
Worried	Upset stomach
Disappointed	Goosebumps
Bored	Tense/Tight Muscles
Confused	Shaking
Annoyed	Headache
Surprised	
Mad	
Angry	
Upset	

Appendix B: Session 3

Name: _____   Date: _____

My Physical Sensations & Warning Signals
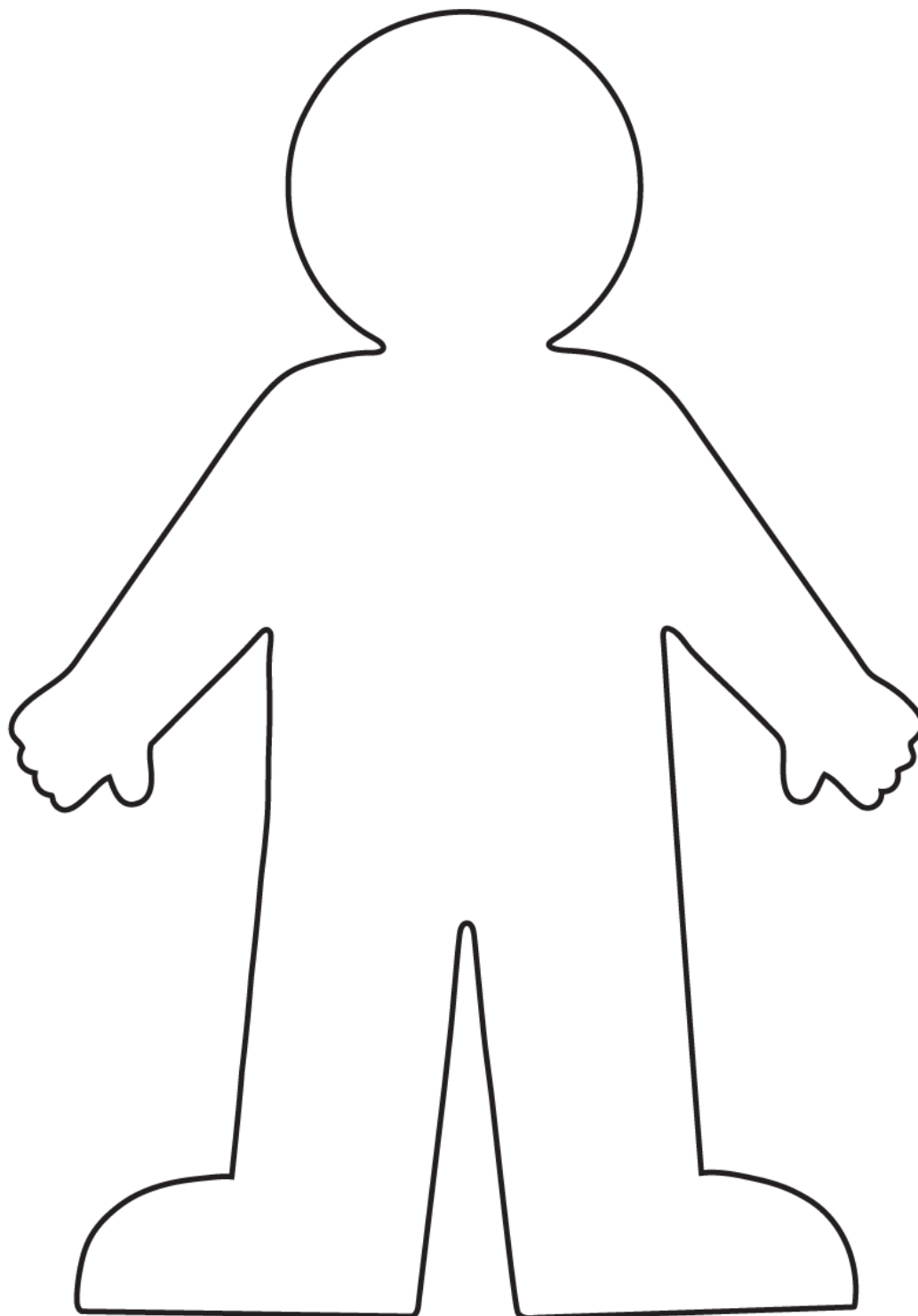
Appendix C: Session 4

The Feeling Thermometer

2

4

6

8

10
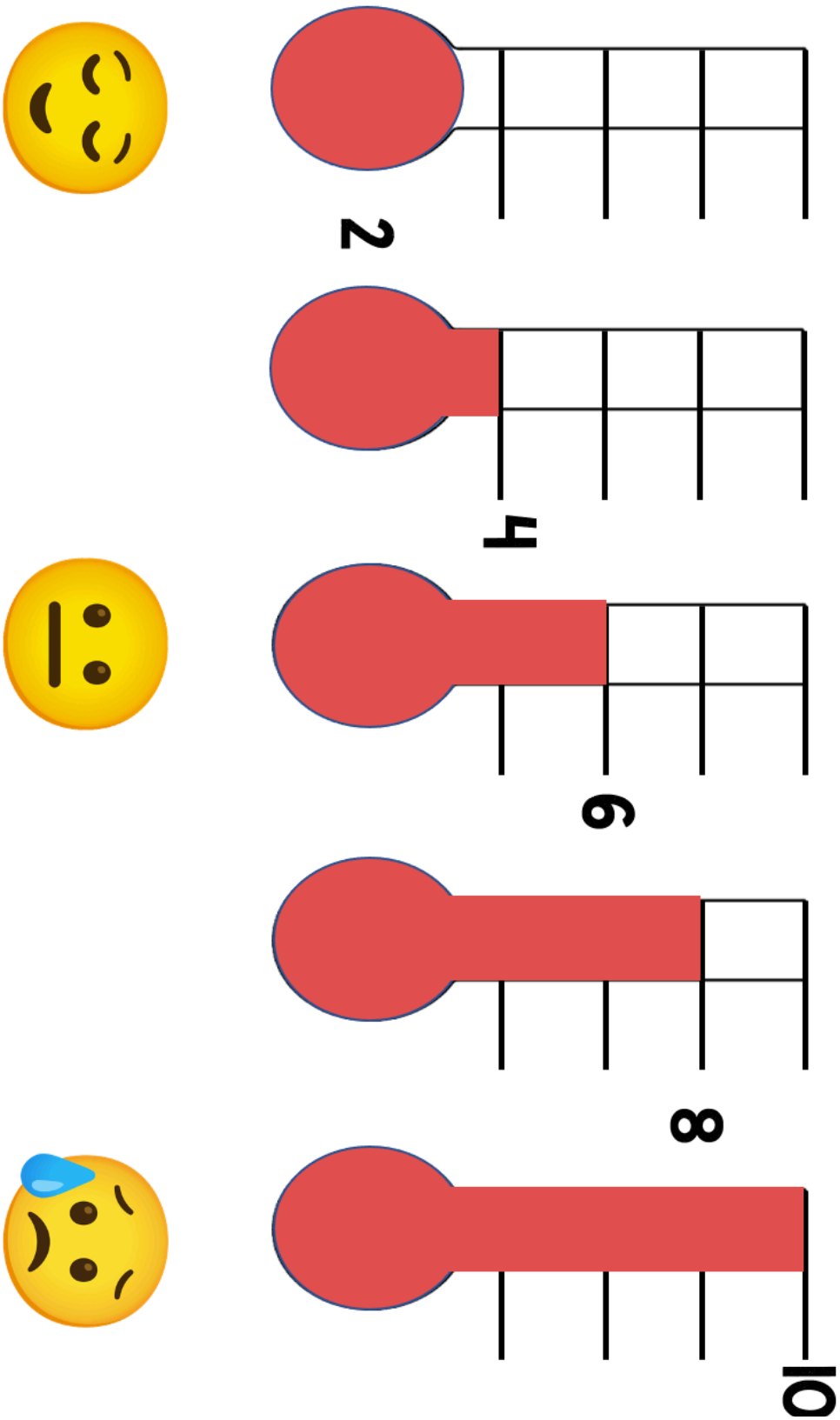
Appendix C: Session 4

Name: _____   Date: _____

My Feelings Thermometer

Directions: Write down a situation or thing for each level of anxiety on your feeling

thermometer.

10 _____

8 _____

6 _____

4 _____

2 _____
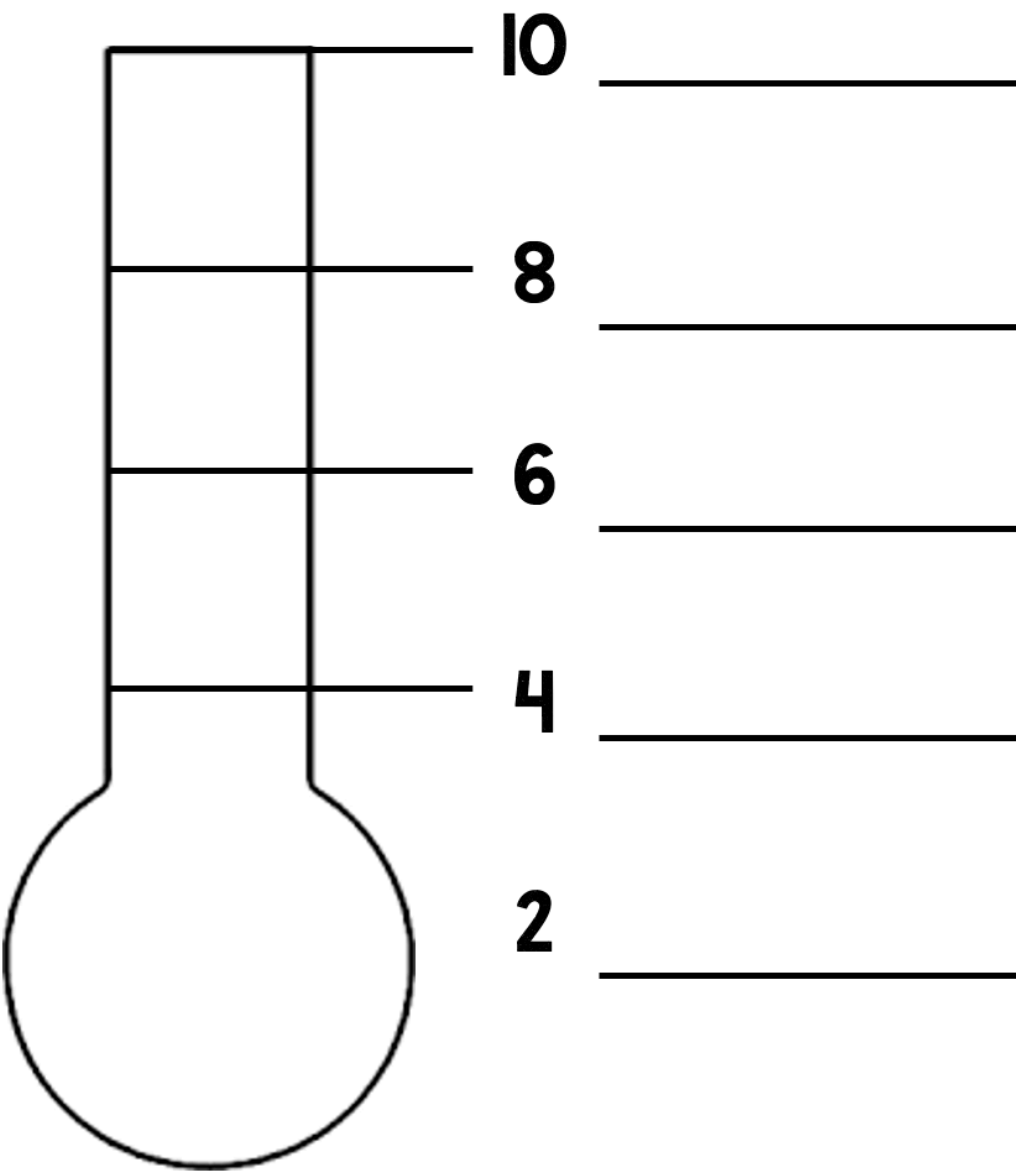
Appendix D: Session 5

Name: _____   Date: _____

Anxiety Triggers

School

_____   Having a lot to do and not knowing where to start

_____   Not understanding a problem or assignment

_____   People at school not including me

_____   Not feeling ready for something you have to do at school

_____   Making a mistake

_____   Waiting to see your grade

_____   Bullying or being made fun of

_____   Taking tests

_____   When it is _____(school subject) time

School, home or other places

_____   Being in large crowds

_____   Being around a certain person or certain group of people

_____   Having to do something in front of people

_____   Hearing a loud noise you didn't expect

_____   Seeing a certain type of animal _____

_____   Being away from parents of family

_____   Having to tell someone how you feel

_____   People or places that remind you of something scary

_____   Other: _____

Appendix E: Session 6

CBT Triangle

Our thoughts affect how
we feel and behave.

THOUGHTS

ACTIONS

FEELINGS

Our actions affect how
we think and feel.

Our feelings affect how
we think and behave.

Appendix F: Session 7

See following pages taken directly from "What If" Game (Sadurska, 2020)

WHAT IF? GAME BOARD

Help to build resilience with this resource. Click the picture.

Building Resilience
My Strengths and Talents

www.elsa-support.co.uk

ELSA Website

ELSA Facebook Page

ELSA Twitter

ELSA Facebook TA Group

ELSA Health and Well being group

ELSA Pinterest

ELSA Parent group

ELSA TPT Shop

Instagram: elsa_support

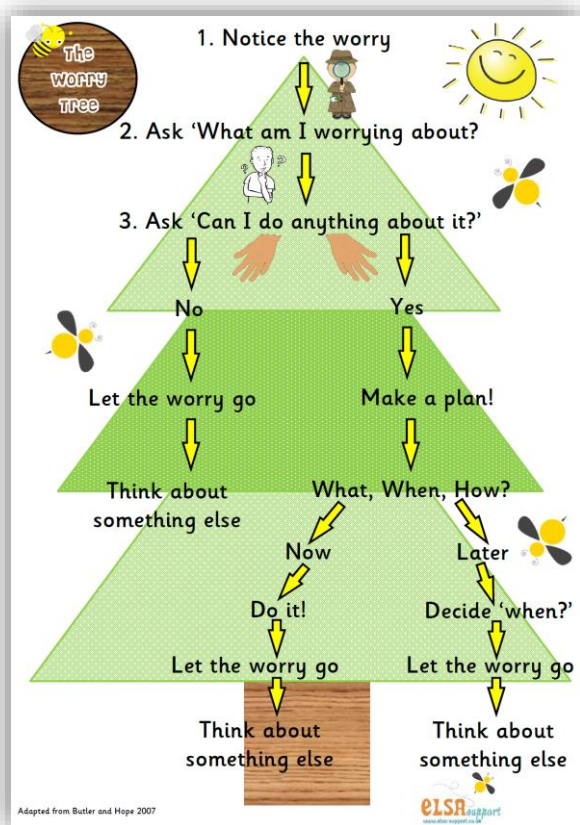Facebook ELSA Secret Group: Contact info@elsa-support.co.uk for your invitation
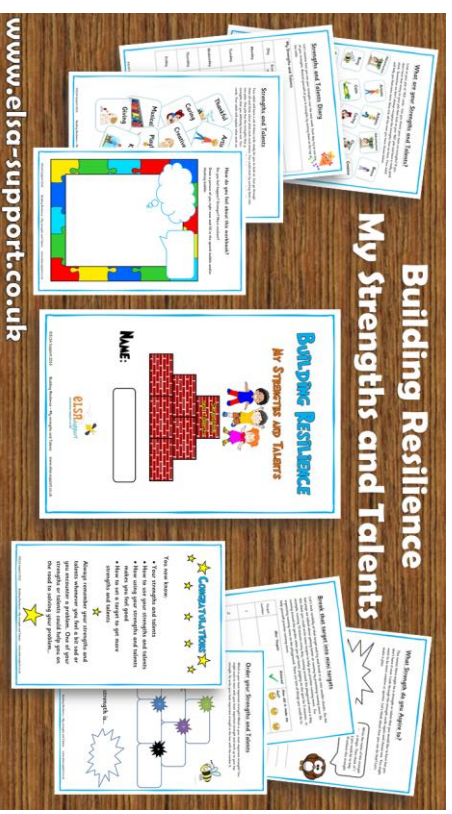
Year 6 'What if?' Transition Game Board

This can be used with the Year 6 'What if?' cards.

- Each player to have a coloured counter.

- Throw a die and the highest number goes first.

- Throw a die and move that number of places on the board. Either follow the instruction or if you land on a 'WORRIED FACE' you need to pick a 'WHAT IF?' card. Can you answer the question? If you can answer the question you keep the card. If you cannot answer the question then you must nominate someone else to answer. If they can answer they get the card. The person with the most cards is the winner when any one person reaches the finish.

WHAT IF?

Cards

Start	8
2	7 Move forwards 5 spaces
3 Miss a turn	6
4	5 Move forwards 3 spaces

Right column (top to bottom):

9 Move forwards 1 space

10

11 Move back 1 space

12

13 Return to start

14

15

16 Move forwards 2 spaces

Bottom row (right to left):

17 | 18 | 19 Move back 5 spaces | 20 | 21

Left column (top to bottom):

Finish

25

24

23 Move forwards 2 spaces

22

www.elsa-support.co.uk
eLSA support

WHAT IF?

TRANSITION WORRIES FOR YEAR 6

ELSA Website
ELSA Facebook Page
ELSA Twitter
ELSA Facebook TA Group
ELSA Pinterest
ELSA Parent group
ELSA Health and Well-being group
ELSA TPT STORE
Instagram: elsa_support

Facebook ELSA Secret Group: Contact info@elsa-support.co.uk for your invitation

www.elsa-support.co.uk

What if? Scenario cards – year 6

A huge thank you to the ELSA Facebook group who helped me with these questions. These are all common worries amongst year six children and have all been asked.

Ways to use them:

- Circle time- pick a card and everyone answers.
- One to one working on transition, ask a child to pick a card and discuss or you could just pick a few and discuss with the child.

Remind them of the WORRY TREE – click the image to take you to the website so you can download a copy.

The Worry Tree

1. Notice the worry
2. Ask 'What am I worrying about?
3. Ask 'Can I do anything about it?'

No   Yes

Let the worry go   Make a plan!

Think about something else   What, When, How?

Now   Later

Do it!   Decide 'when?'

Let the worry go   Let the worry go

Think about something else   Think about something else

Adapted from Butler and Hope 2007

There is also the 'TRANSITION LAPBOOK' which you might find helpful for working one to one or in small groups. Click the image...
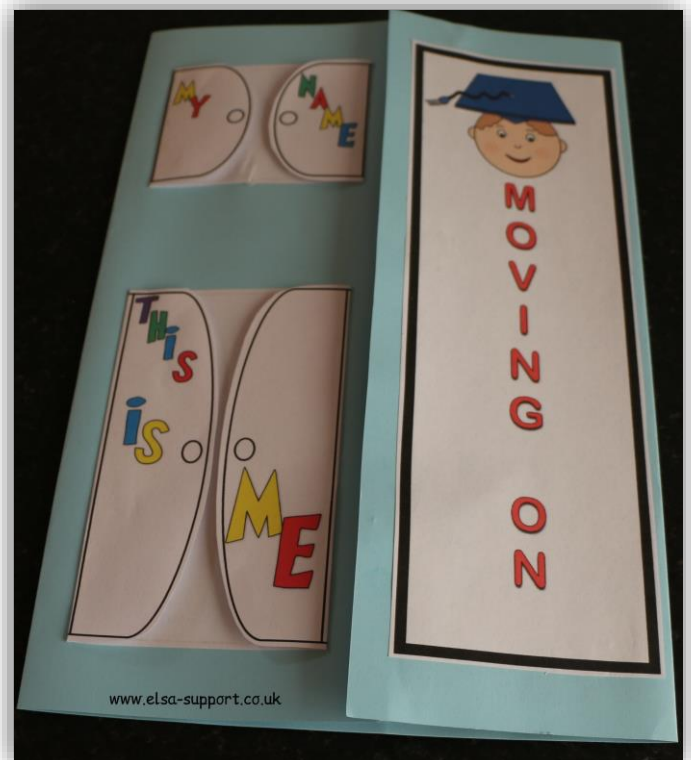
www.elsa-support.co.uk

What if...

I get bullied?

What if...

I forget my PE kit?

What if...

I am not in the same class as my friends?

What if...

I get lost?

What if...

I am late to school or to class?

What if...

No one likes me?

What if...

I get too much homework?

What if...

The work is too hard for me?

What if...

I can't get on the bus?

What if...

I forget how to tie my tie?

What if...

I am not allowed to go to the toilet?

What if...

I don't feel well?

What if...

I forget my dinner money?

What if...

I lose my dinner money?

What if...

I lose my bus pass/bus fare?

What if...

I need help with something personal?

What if...

I need help with friendships?

What if...

I can't afford to go on school trips?

What if...

I don't fit in?

What if...

I don't like the teacher?

What if...

I don't get on with the teacher?

What if...

The teacher doesn't like me?

What if...

I don't make any friends?

What if...

I am split up from my friends?

What if...

I can't remember what my homework is?

What if...

What if people can see over the toilet and see me?

What if...

I don't understand the work in class?

What if...

It takes me too long to get changed for PE?

What if...

I get a detention and I miss my bus?

What if...

My phone gets taken away because it goes off in class?

What if...

I lose my phone?

What if...

I don't know the rules?

What if...

What if I need help?

What if...

I need to talk to someone?

What if...

I get a really strict teacher?

What if...

I can't do the homework?

What if...

I can't find my uniform in the morning?

What if...

My uniform is dirty?

What if...

I get into a fight?

What if...

I don't like it?

What if...

I can't remember everyone's names?

What if...

My old friends don't like my new friends?

What if...

I don't have a computer at home?

What if...

I need the toilet during lesson times?

What if...

There are older kids in the toilets?

What if... I lose my planner?

What if... I can't remember where to go for my next lesson?

What if... I forget which way to go when walking home?

What if... I lose my locker key?

What if... I lose my house keys?

What if... I have to stay late for a club and I forgot to tell my mum and dad?

What if... I lose my computer log in/ password?

What if... I miss my brother or sister?

What if... What if my brother or sister misses me?

What if...
I forget to turn my phone onto silent?

What if...
I get cyberbullied?

What if...
My parents won't sign my planner?

What if...
I forgot to get my parents to sign my planner?

What if...
I can't remember the teacher's name?

What if...
I feel different because I have free school meals?

What if...
I feel different because my family are poor?

What if...
I am judged before people get to know me?

What if...
I feel overwhelmed and have a melt down?