

Let's talk about anxiety: lesson plan

Resource information



- **Age group:** 11 - 13
- **Timings:** 50 - 60 minutes
- **Key words:** anxiety, mental wellbeing, healthy habits, coping skills
- **Curriculum links:** Please see the curriculum guidance document for further information.

Resources



1. Let's talk about anxiety PowerPoint
2. Let's talk about anxiety animation
3. Let's talk about anxiety worksheet
4. Healthy coping skills cards

Materials



- Whiteboard and markers
- Paper or Index cards

Teacher guidance



All the content for delivering this lesson is available in the notes on the PowerPoint. It is also available below. You may prefer to print this document to assist with delivery.

Before the lesson, check that you are able to play the animation. You can access the animation by clicking on the image on slide 10 of the PowerPoint. Alternative links are available in the PowerPoint notes.

We also recommend that you fill out slide 29 with information about where students can find further support in your setting.

Distribute the Let's talk about anxiety worksheet at the beginning of the lesson.

Please note: this lesson plan uses the same animation as the assembly plan. If you have already used the assembly, you may wish to re-watch the animation and have a more in-depth discussion using the slides provided. You might also spend more time on the anxiety alarm scenarios and additional activities.

Learning outcomes



By the end of the lesson, students will know:

anxiety is a normal emotion

anxiety is a feeling of unease in response to threat or stress

different people may experience anxiety differently and in response to different stimuli

anxiety can serve a useful purpose because it helps us to be ready to deal with difficult or dangerous situations

anxiety can affect our bodies as well as our minds, e.g., sweating, heart-racing and butterflies in the stomach. These are part of a helpful biological response that gets us ready to deal with challenges

sometimes we feel anxious even though the threat level is low – this can feel bad or stop us doing things

there are strategies that can help when we feel overwhelmed by strong feelings like anxiety.

Students will be able to:

use a range of different words to describe similar feelings; e.g., fear, worry, nervousness, panic, excitement and explain how these differ

use strategies that help them to regulate strong feelings; e.g., breathing techniques or positive self-talk

choose coping strategies that could help people in different situations.

Ground rules

We recommend that you establish ground rules around respectful listening and confidentiality, as normally used in PSHE lessons.

For further guidance, please see the PSHE Association's guide to handling complex issues safely in the classroom.

If any concerns arise during the session about a student's safety or wellbeing, you should follow your school's safeguarding policy and procedures.



Lesson plan

Anxious feelings (10 - 15 mins)

Materials: Let's talk about anxiety worksheet

Slide 2: introduce the topic and show students the definition of anxiety from the PowerPoint: anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as fear or worry. It is one of the body's natural responses to stress.

Slide 3: explain that you are going to look at this statement in two parts. Firstly: anxiety is a feeling of unease, such as fear or worry.

Thinking about this definition, ask students for a couple of examples of when someone might feel anxious.

Slide 4: ask students to name some similar feelings (e.g., stressed, worried, scared, worked-up, panicky, nervous, uneasy, afraid, excited, terrified, bothered, concerned, distressed).

Give students two minutes to fill in their spider diagrams on their worksheets, and then gather their ideas to fill in the spider diagram on the PowerPoint.

Use these words to gather three to four example sentences from your students (e.g. "I'm really worried about my exam", "I'm super-stressed about my performance tomorrow"). Write these on the board.

Use these examples to help students reflect on the meanings and usages of the different feeling words. Make comparisons between the different feelings and situations.

Encourage students to reflect on the meaning and appropriateness of different words (e.g., the distinction between "I'm nervous about my presentation" and "I'm terrified of going to school").

Ask students: what's the difference between [word] and [word] (e.g. nervous and terrified)? How might it be different? Is one stronger than the other? When else might someone feel it?

Explain that naming anxious feelings accurately can help us to understand how we feel and think about how best to respond in an appropriate way.

Anxiety and the body (5 mins)

Slide 5: return to the definition of anxiety: it is one of the body's natural responses to stress.

Explain that anxiety is a normal and useful emotion. It helps to protect us from danger.

Slide 6: explain the fight, flight, freeze mechanism.

When your brain thinks you're in danger, it activates the fight-flight-freeze response to help protect you. Adrenaline and cortisol (the stress hormone) rush through your body and put it on high alert.

This means that the body is ready to fight, escape or freeze when it thinks that there's a threat. This response helps us to act without thinking and keep safe.

Ask students: can you think of some examples of when anxiety might protect us from danger? (e.g., when a fire alarm goes off, when crossing the road, when threatened by a dangerous animal).

Slide 7: introduce the anxiety curve.

Explain that some level of anxiety can also be helpful. Just as anxiety can help to protect us, some level of anxiety can help us to focus, deal with difficult situations and perform better.

Ask students: Can you think of times when some level of anxiety be helpful? (e.g., exams, sports, performances, presentations).

Slide 8: introduce the image of the anxiety alarm.

Explain that sometimes we might think that something is more dangerous than it is – or we might think there's a threat when there isn't one. This is when anxiety can be a problem. We can think of this as a 'false alarm'.

Explain the alarm metaphor to the class:

Anxiety is like an alarm that helps protect us from danger - but sometimes it can be too sensitive and go off when there's no real threat (e.g., an over-sensitive car alarm that goes off when the wind blows, or when someone walks past).

Slide 9: ask the class - what might be setting off the girl's anxiety alarm? What might be going on in her mind? How might it affect her body?

Explain that these responses are normal – and that there are some skills and techniques we can learn and practise to help manage anxious feelings.

Let's talk about anxiety (10 - 15 mins)

Slide 10: introduce the Let's talk about anxiety animation. Ask students to look out for the characters on the slide, and to think about the following as they watch:

- What are some of the situations that made them feel anxious?
- What things were helpful for them?

After you have watched the animation, give students one or two minutes to discuss these questions in pairs and make notes on their worksheet. Then use the slides to guide a whole class discussion of the content of the animation in more detail.

Slide 11: remind students of the fight-flight-freeze response. What did we find out about how anxiety can affect our bodies? (e.g. sweating, heart racing, butterflies in stomach, feeling dizzy, fidgety, etc.).

How might it affect our thoughts, feelings and actions? (e.g. negative thoughts, acting impulsively, avoiding difficult situations).

Slide 12: what kinds of thoughts might be going through this character's mind? (e.g. "I don't have enough time"; "I'm going to fail my exam"; "My mum will be mad if I don't finish my chores and do my homework").

What could they try to manage better? (e.g. ask for help; create a schedule; stick to a routine; make time for self-care).

Slide 13: what might this character be looking at on their phone? How might this affect them?

What could a healthy evening routine look like for them? (e.g. stop using phone 30 mins before bed; set phone to 'night mode'; try not to use laptop and phone in bed; have a regular bedtime; listen to relaxing music or read to wind down).

Slide 14: what do you think this character was worried about? How could they use their phone in a more positive way? (e.g. to contact friends and family; set limits on using certain apps; use apps to pursue their interests or learn something new, such as a language or skill).

Slide 15: what might this character be thinking or imagining? (e.g. "I don't know what I'm talking about"; "I'm not ready"; "Everyone will laugh at me"; "I'll go red").

Explain that one thing they might try is 'positive self-talk'. This is when we talk to ourselves in a kinder and more helpful way. (e.g., rather than thinking "There's no way I can do this," we might think "I've done it before, I'll try my best").

How could this character use positive self-talk to 'talk back' to her anxious thoughts?

Slide 16: what are some other skills and coping strategies that we can work on to help manage anxious feelings?

Healthy coping skills (10 mins)

Materials: healthy coping skills cards

Explain that you're going to learn some more skills that can help you to manage anxiety.

Slide 17: remind students of the earlier discussion of anxiety and the body.

How might breathing help to regulate our bodies? How might this affect our thoughts and feelings?

Slide 18: model the box breathing activity for the class:

- Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds.
- Hold your breath for 4 more seconds. Feel the air fill your lungs.
- Breathe out through your mouth for 4 seconds.
- Hold for 4 seconds.
- Repeat this several times.

Ask students:

- What effect did it have on your thoughts, feelings and body?
- How would you describe how you feel right now?

Slide 19: show the list of further coping skills on the board:

- box breathing
- thoughts in the sky
- five senses
- positive self-talk.

Explain that students are going to teach each other, practise and reflect on these different skills.

Distribute the healthy coping skills cards among the class. Divide the class into pairs. One student is the teacher and the other is the learner.

Slide 20: explain that each learner should imagine that they are one of the characters from the animation. Use one of the worries that the character has (e.g. "I've got too much to do", "I'll never be able to sleep tonight") and try the healthy coping skills to see if they can help.

Give the students two to three minutes to teach and practise one of the skills, before swapping roles and skills.

At the end of the exercise, ask students to reflect on the following:

- What effect did the different skills have on your thoughts, feelings, and body?
- When might someone use them? Are there times when it wouldn't be helpful or possible to use them?
- What other skills or techniques might someone use when they feel anxious?

Anxiety alarm – scenarios (10 mins)

Note: there are six scenarios for this activity in the PowerPoint. Depending on available time and the needs of your students, you may wish to focus on discussing two to three of these scenarios in detail.

Slide 21: remind students of the anxiety alarm metaphor. Explain that they are going to consider some different scenarios in which people feel anxious.

They should apply what they have learned to think about how the characters feel and how they might respond.

As they read the scenario, ask students to think about:

- What might have 'set off' their alarm?
- What might they be thinking and feeling?
- How might this affect their body and behaviour?
- What might they try to help?

Slide 22: give students two minutes to discuss this scenario in pairs, before coming together as a class to discuss.

During the discussion, encourage students to consider the practicality and effectiveness of different coping strategies in specific situations, while emphasising that different things will work for different people.

Slides 23 – 7: guide a discussion of the further scenarios with your class. Encourage students to make comparisons between the different characters and possible coping strategies.

Plenary - three things (5 mins)

Materials: Let's talk about anxiety worksheet; index cards.

Slide 28: ask students to reflect on what they've learned, and to complete the following prompts on their worksheets:

1. Something new I've learned about anxiety is...
2. Something I can use is...
3. Another thing I'd like to try is...

If appropriate, encourage students to write any questions they might have on a separate index card and to put it in your class listening box.

Slide 29: close the lesson by emphasising that anxiety is a normal emotion, and that it's important to try and find out what works for you when managing anxious feelings. Remind students that they have the healthy coping skills on their worksheets to refer to in future.

Remind students that if they're worried, they should speak to a trusted adult, and seek specialist help if it is interfering with their daily life or ability to do things they want to do (e.g. speak to their GP).

Remind students about the support available at school. Make yourself available to any students who want to speak further.

