

PALS

Social Skills Program

Playing and learning to socialise

Parent Information

Session 8

This week's skill:

Overcoming Fear and Anxiety



Today's world is very stressful. All children feel worried or scared at times and need to learn to cope with anxiety and worry. Feelings of anxiety or nervousness can result in children avoiding difficult situations which might be rewarding, such as asking to join a game or trying a new activity.

Fear and anxiety can also lead to excessive worry, and in more severe situations, can result in physical symptoms, such as stomach-aches, headaches, sleeping difficulties, and nervous habits like nail-biting.

What your child learnt this week

In this session, typical situations in which young children feel nervous were discussed, including telling news in front of a group, thunderstorms, and going to the doctor for an injection. Your child learnt two methods for reducing fear and anxiety:

1. Taking three slow, deep breaths to calm down.
2. Using positive self-talk — saying to yourself something that will make you feel better, such as 'It will be all right', 'It will all be over soon' and 'I'll be brave'.

The children also listened to a relaxation track and practiced the relaxation exercises. The relaxation script is attached.



Children may be anxious or nervous in many situations.



Supporting this skill at home

- You can model positive self-talk for children when you encounter difficult situations.
'Oh, we've got a puncture, but it's okay because I can fix it or call road service.'
'I don't like going to the dentist, but I'll calm down and take some deep breaths and I'll be all right.'
- Some children may consistently avoid situations because of anxiety or nervousness – fear of the surf and fear of dogs, for example. These children may need support and encouragement to help them calm down, reassure themselves and to gradually face the things that make them nervous. This way they learn that they can conquer their fear, and become more confident.
- If you notice that your child is anxious – during a thunderstorm or electricity blackout, at the doctor's surgery, for example – or being scared for any other reason, help your child practice the short relaxation exercise below.
- If your child has some symptoms of anxiety, such as disturbed sleep or social withdrawal, it may be a good idea to practice regular relaxation. This program includes a relaxation track which you may ask the teacher to copy for you. The track provided goes for approximately 11 minutes. Lie down on the floor with your child and go through the exercises once a day. Alternatively, you can use the attached relaxation script to read to your child or to make your own tape.

Children can use breathing exercises to help themselves relax when they're anxious.



Short relaxation exercise

1. Take three slow, deep breaths.
2. Stretch the arms and legs by pointing fingers out, toes down and holding arms and legs rigid for a count of ten.
3. Relax all muscles at once, letting them go completely limp.
4. Say to yourself something that will make you feel better, like 'It will be all right' or 'It will be over soon'.

You may also ask your child to imagine being somewhere he or she enjoys – at the pool or beach, for example.