

# Confident Parents Thriving Kids

## ANXIETY PROGRAM



Canadian Mental  
Health Association  
British Columbia  
Mental health for all

## Module 1: Anxiety is a false alarm

### Anxiety is a False Alarm

- **Anxiety is common and treatable**
- **Anxiety is the body's alarm system** (fight or flight)
  - It is helpful to experience anxiety during a real threat but sometimes there is no real threat and it is a false alarm
  - This alarm can be set off by the thought of facing a perceived stressful situation
  - Some worries and fears are a normal part of growing up
  - Some children's alarms are wired more sensitively and can be reset using structured practice
- **Anxiety is uncomfortable but not harmful**
- **Anxiety should be addressed** if it is getting in the way of your child's or family's functioning and happiness

### Giving Anxiety a Name

- **Giving anxiety a name means talking to your child as if it is something separate from them**
  - This can mean referring to anxiety in the third person or even naming it. For example, "The worry alarm is making it really hard to go to bed"
  - Parents should involve their child in this process
- **Reasons for separating the anxiety from your child:**
  - It makes it clear that your child is not their anxiety and anxiety is something that has temporarily taken hold
  - When you set limits for the anxiety, naming it puts you and your child on the same team
  - It helps your child recognize what is happening in their body and makes it easier to fight back

### Anxiety Goes Down on its Own

Three main parts to anxiety:

1. **Feelings** (The way our body reacts)
    - Heart racing
    - Tense muscles
    - Tummy aches
    - Increased breathing
    - Sweating
  2. **Thoughts** (The way we think)
    - "What if I can't do this?"
    - "What if my mom forgets to pick me up from school?"
  3. **Actions** (What we do)
    - Avoidance of feared situations
- **Anxiety goes down on its own when we stay in uncomfortable situations instead of avoiding them**

### Specific Anxiety Conditions

- **Separation anxiety:** Excessive fear of separation (or anticipated separation) from caregivers and loved ones
- **General Anxiety:** Excessive worry about many things such as health, doing well at school or natural disasters, and difficulty stopping or controlling the worry
- **Social worries:** Marked fear or anxiety about social situations in which the child could possibly be exposed to embarrassment or negative judgment from others
- **Specific Fears:** Significant fear or anxiety about a specific object or situation
- **OCD:** Comprised of obsessions and/or compulsions. Obsessions are repeated and unwanted thoughts, images, or urges that cause anxiety or distress. Compulsions are repeated behaviours to make an obsession or bad feeling go away.
- **Selective Mutism:** Consistent failure to speak in certain situations, despite speaking comfortably in other situations and having age-appropriate language skills