

# Confident Parents Thriving Kids

## ANXIETY PROGRAM



Canadian Mental  
Health Association  
British Columbia  
Mental health for all

### Content Summary for Families

Thank you for the time you have invested in the Confident Parents: Thriving Kids – Anxiety Program. We hope that you have gained some new skills to help you and your child manage their anxiety together. As you move forward, you can refer to this sheet when you need a reminder of key skills that you have learned.

#### Module 1: Understanding Anxiety

- Remember that anxiety can be a false alarm—uncomfortable, but not harmful.
- Remind your child that they are not their anxiety.
- Externalize anxiety when talking about it with your child. Choose a name for your child's anxiety.
- The body will calm down on its own if you stay in the situation, but avoidance reinforces anxiety.
- Help your child build their bravery muscles every day—do not provide excessive reassurance or allow them to avoid anxiety-provoking situations.

#### Module 2: Parent Management

- Use strategies for staying calm when your child is anxious. Settle yourself, take a deep breath, focus on small steps, distract and redirect. When you are calm, this signals to your child that there is no danger.
- Find a balance between validation (“This is tough”) and encouragement (“You are brave”). It's most effective if you find a common middle ground and you are consistent in how you respond to your child's anxiety.
- Pay attention to bravery. Notice and reinforce brave behaviours with rewards and lots of specific praise. What rewards motivate your child?
- Model bravery and let your child see you face your own fears—make bravery part of your family's lifestyle.
- Remember that anxious behaviours may get worse before they get better.
- Self-care is essential to building a healthy, resilient family. How can you model healthy coping for your child? Make time for yourself every week (even a little bit) to do something that ‘recharges your battery!’

#### Module 3: Accommodation

- When caregivers intervene to reduce their child's anxiety, it's called accommodation. It's a natural instinct, but it doesn't allow the child to develop coping skills or learn they can tolerate the discomfort of anxiety.
- Types of accommodation can include:
  - Changing family routines
  - Allowing the child to avoid situations
  - Providing excessive reassurance
- Take gradual steps to reduce accommodation. Choose something that you have control over, that you can practice regularly, that you are motivated to change, and that can be broken into smaller steps.
- When reducing accommodations, share the plan with the child, prepare yourself to respond calmly to a negative reaction, be consistent and firm, and reward the behaviours you want to see more of. Take time to celebrate successes as a family.

#### Module 4: Exposure

- Exposure allows your child to face their fears in a gradual and controlled manner. It allows them to learn that anxiety will naturally decrease when they stay in the anxiety-provoking situation.
- Bravery ladders break down facing feared situations into smaller steps. If possible, work with your child to choose the steps. As each step is completed (or heartily attempted) be sure to reward the child. Make the first step one that's guaranteed to be successful. If they are having trouble, choose a smaller, more achievable step.
- Rewards are key. They must be special, clear to the child, provided immediately and must not be taken away as punishment.